PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1992-93

COMPRISING PERIOD
6 July—16 July 1992

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 211**

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1992-93

House of Commons

Monday 6 July 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Appeals

1. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department proposes to take new initiatives to speed up the appeals procedure arrangements involving his Department.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): I understand from the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that several initiatives are under consideration or being piloted in conjunction with the Independent Tribunal Service to speed up the appeals procedure. In addition, the chief executive has set clear targets for the clearance of both locally and centrally prepared appeals.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that many people are suffering hardship as a result of waiting for appeals to be settled and that there is still too long a delay in dealing with appeals? Matters have not improved, so will he ensure that there is an improvement and that the same applies to independent appeals, because the situation is far from satisfactory?

Mr. Burt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and his remarks are well directed. I am disappointed with the present state of appeal delays, but the initiatives being brought in by the Benefits Agency are likely to have a considerable effect: the simplified appeals submission, pre-listing and the abbreviated notice of award so that successful applicants receive any benefit awarded much sooner are all designed to have an effect. In addition, Benefits Agency targets will be made public. I hope, therefore, that the hon. Gentleman and I will be able to monitor an improvement in appeals over the coming months and years.

Mr, Dunn: Does my hon. Friend agree that more appeals on disability benefits should be held locally and that, if they were, that would improve clearance times out of all recognition?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The move to locally held appeals is already going ahead and should also have some effect on waiting times.

Mr. Gerrard: Is the Minister aware that, because of delays in processing disability living allowances, as of two weeks ago not a single disability living allowance appeal had been heard? Does he really think that that is satisfactory?

Mr. Burt: The comments that I have made about improvements in appeals will also apply to disability appeals in future. The House will have an opportunity to say more about disability living appeals later this afternoon.

Attendance and Disablement Allowances

2. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to speed up the decision-making process in respect of attendance and disablement allowances.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): New arrangements were introduced in April to speed up decision making in attendance allowance and disability living allowance, principally

through self-assessment and enhanced computer processing. The changes were widely welcomed by outside organisations with which there was close consultation. We knew that introducing those changes would require a major effort, but an early surge in claims has led to backlogs. I regard that situation as unacceptable and firm action is being taken to accelerate the handling of cases.

Mr. Skinner: Why do not the Government admit that these delays are deliberate—that they are all about saving the Government money? The same applies to understaffing. Is the Minister aware that nearly every Labour Member has had complaints about lost papers? Is it not remarkable that the papers are somehow found when Members of Parliament get involved? It is time that the Government stopped this squalid manoeuvre and stopped penalising people who need the money. It is a different story when they come to collect income tax and the poll tax —they find the right computers then.

Mr. Scott: I am afraid that I have become immune to the ill-directed tirades of the hon. Gentleman over the years. He is manifestly wrong on several counts. First, there is no question of the Government saving money as a result of this; nor does any claimant lose money. If a payment is delayed, it will soon be backdated to the date of the claim. Far from saving money, this benefit has been introduced at a cost of about £250 million to give extra help to disabled people. Any suggestion to the contrary is quite scandalous.

Dr. Spink: Does my right hon. Friend agree that since 1979 the Government's spending on the disabled and long-term sick has increased by 173 per cent? Is that not evidence of the Government's commitment to help those people and is that not more than the Government of which the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was a member ever did?

Mr. Scott: Yes, indeed, and it is better than anything done by anyone who supports the Labour party. Those people know as well as I do that this Government's record in providing benefits for the long-term sick and disabled far outmatches anything achieved under previous Labour Governments.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that I spent the entire morning ringing the telephone number that he gives the public—not to Members of Parliament—to try to get through to query three separate cases that arose in my constituency at the weekend? If he believes that that is anything to be proud of, I am astonished and ashamed for him.

Mr. Scott: I wish to make a couple of points to the hon. Lady whom I respect greatly, as she is aware. First, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency is writing today to every hon. Member, setting out the steps that are being taken to reduce the delays. Enhanced use of telephone lines is being introduced so that agencies and the public can get a better service. Mr. Bichard's letter today to all hon. Members will include information about an extra 10 lines that will be specially dedicated so that Members of Parliament——

Mrs. Dunwoody: What about the public?

Mr. Scott: If the hon. Lady will listen, she will understand. Those numbers will be given today so that hon. Members can get special service for any particularly difficult cases.

Mr. Thurnham: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to see the excellent letter from Mr. Sam Gallop, the chairman of Opportunities for People with Disabilities, in which he praises the operation of the benefits inquiry line and states that he has always been treated with courtesy, friendliness, patience and effective concern? Will my right hon. Friend pass on the thanks of Mr. Gallop to the Benefits Agency?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Gallop was kind enough to copy his letter to me when he wrote expressing his satisfaction. That raises a slight doubt in my mind about the motivation of some of the approaches by the Opposition.

Mr. Meacher: Will the Minister stop being so complacent? Is he satisfied with the report by the National Audit Office a month ago which found that some of our 250,000 war pensioners have to wait two years for their claims to be processed, including a one-year wait for medical checks? Is he satisfied at the fact that the Department of Social Security now takes 50 per cent. longer to process claims than it took seven years ago and that the average wait is now eight to nine months? Is that the same Tory conquest of bureaucracy which means that, after 10 years of Toryism, each case moves at least 30 times between desks and spends four days in each in-tray? Would not the Secretary of State better spend his time not cutting benefits for young people but in cutting delays for pensioners?

Mr. Scott: Obviously, a considered response to the National Audit Office report will be made in due course. That is the procedure in those cases. My hon. and noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State is taking urgent steps to deal with war pension delays, which also were caused by a tremendous surge in claims. With regard to DLA, the subject of the question, we are now employing more than 400 extra staff to deal with the surge. Extensive overtime is being worked during the week and at weekends and 115 extra adjudication officers are being trained. We are also redeploying staff from other parts of the Benefits Agency to speed up claims to the maximum extent.

Cold Weather Payments

3. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether Her Majesty's Government propose to review the system for cold weather payments.

Mr. Burt: Following a review, substantial improvements were made to the cold weather payments scheme last winter, and these resulted in almost 4 million payments being made, at a cost of almost £24 million. The scheme is kept constantly under review and we are currently evaluating those changes.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that the scheme is targeted towards the most vulnerable in society, including pensioners and those with children under five. I am therefore very grateful to him for agreeing to keep the matter under review. Now, during the

hot weather, is the time to ensure that the scheme is in the right order and sensibly composed. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's commitment to that.

Mr. Burt: I thank my hon. Friend. I am aware of his long-standing interest in the scheme. We made a number of reforms to it last year. We believe that we have extended and modified the scheme so that it works much better than it used to—certainly better than it did before 1979—and the improvements will be kept constantly under review.

Mr. Wicks: Is the Minister aware that, next winter, between 20,000 and 40,000 more people will die than in the summer months? Is he aware that that means that we stand at the top of the European cold winter deaths league? Does he therefore agree that there are no grounds for complacency and that now is the time to think through the matter with other Departments so that we can stop the annual cull of our eldest and best each and every winter?

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman's point might have been put just as effectively without some of his emotive language. Sadly, there are many causes of death throughout the winter, and they are totally unconnected with cold weather. Obviously, that matter is a constant problem. The system is examined extensively to make sure that it works properly. No claim is necessary; the procedure is automatically triggered. We have also removed the capital requirement, which has made another 400,000 people eligible for help under the scheme. Those are the extensions and modifications that we have made. There is no complacency. The scheme is more extensive than it was before. Every time that I hear the Opposition whinge about it, I know that that is a collective gasp of guilt about a scheme that they had neither the wit to devise nor the money to sustain.

Mrs. Angela Knight: As so many people are eligible for cold weather payments and as last year's changes brought more into the scheme, does that not show the Government's commitment to ensuring that benefits are targeted towards the sick, the elderly and the disabled, so that those in need get the money that they require?

Mr. Burt: Targeting is important in such a scheme, but it is also essential to keep it under review as much as possible to make sure that money goes where it is needed. The Government are committed to doing that.

Youth Benefits

4. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new proposals he has to improve benefits for 16 and 17-year-olds.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): The Government believe that 16 and 17-year-olds should be encouraged to continue in education, obtain a job or undertake training rather than enter the benefits culture straight from school, although support is available for those who are unable to work or obtain a training place and those who are at risk of hardship.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Secretary of State also immune to the universal view of all independent bodies which report that the present exclusion of 16 and 17-year-olds from income support is cruel and unnecessary? Has he seen the evidence that was given to his own Social Security Committee which says that the problems of adolescents, the most vulnerable group of young people, are being added to by the system? How much longer will he persist with a system that is cynical, mean and cruel?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman spoils his case by gross overstatement. He should know that young people aged 16 or 17 are not excluded. Help is available if they are at risk of severe hardship. More than 85 per cent. of those who apply receive that help, and 90 per cent. receive a decision within 24 hours of making a request.

Mr. Rowe: My right hon. Friend will be aware that too many people are becoming dependent much too young and that that is widely recognised by social workers and others. However, there are also a small number of 16 and 17-year-olds for whom it is proving difficult to deliver the workplace guarantee. Will my right hon. Friend take special measures to ensure that they do not lose out?

Mr. Lilley: I recognise the importance of my hon. Friend's point, as does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, who is taking every possible measure to ensure that we fulfil the guarantee of a youth training place for young people of that age. The number of people waiting for such places is declining month by month, I am happy to say.

Mr. Meacher: Is the Secretary of State satisfied that the careers service knows of 50,000 young people who are registered for youth training but without a place who are denied income support, of whom, contrary to what he said, fewer than one third receive special hardship allowance, leaving more than 30,000 destitute, without money at all to survive on? Is it true, as has been reported, that the right hon. Gentleman now proposes that, for young people who go on youth training scheme courses, the £35 a week training allowance should be scrapped and replaced by the equivalent of child benefit of £9·65 a week for their parents?

Is not this vendetta against young people a huge disincentive to go on training courses? Is it not an insult to them, when the country desperately needs much better-trained young adults?

Mr. Lilley: Financial help should be available for everyone who does not have support from his or her family. As I said, 80 per cent. of those who apply for the severe hardship allowance receive it. The hon. Gentleman is talking about people who live at home, who, of course, have the support of their parents. Only if their parents are not able to help is additional support given.

I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman automatically looks to the benefits system in these circumstances. In 1978, the Labour Government supported only 7,000 training places. There are 300,000 such places under the Conservative Government. As for stories in the press about the public expenditure round, the hon. Gentleman may be sure that I and my Department do not talk to the press about the matter. We shall talk to the Chief Secretary when the moment arrives. The hon. Gentleman may be sure that there will be stories almost every Sunday between now and the autumn. He will believe them, even though the vast majority will turn out to be fallacious.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the vast majority of 16 and 17-year-olds either go on to training or into work and that there is a severe hardship

allowance for people who are unable to go to work or receive training? Such people receive income support and the Government will continue to provide support for people who are unable to obtain training or work.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. One of the Government's successes is the increase in the number of young people either staying on at school for extra education beyond the age at which schooling is compulsory or going on training courses. Only 40 per cent. did so under the Labour Government. The figure is now nearer 70 per cent. That is a vast improvement.

Pensions

5. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the pension for *(a)* a couple and *(b)* an individual in 1979; and what is this figure uprated in line with (i) inflation and (ii) with earnings.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Anne Widdecombe): The current rate of retirement pension, uprated in line with prices since 1979, is £54·15 for a single person and £86·70 for a couple. If uprated in line with earnings, the pension would now be about 29 per cent. higher. This would have cost the national insurance fund more than £40 billion since 1979, implying an extra £10·50 per week on the national insurance contributions paid currently by a man on average earnings and by his employer.

Mr. O'Brien: Does not the Minister's reply reveal that many old-age pensioners are at a disadvantage compared with other income groups? In view of her answer that pensioners are at a 29 per cent. disadvantage compared with the position under the Labour Government, is it not time that the Minister decided that pensioners were entitled to some further consideration? When does the Minister intend to do something about the pensioners, instead of using rhetoric about what it would cost the Government, given how much they spend on unemployment benefit?

Miss Widdecombe: If the hon. Gentleman is not receptive to rhetoric about what it would cost the Government, perhaps he is receptive to rhetoric about what we have done for the pensioners. Perhaps he is receptive to the fact that pensioners' incomes have increased by 34 per cent. since the Conservatives came to power whereas they rose by only 3 per cent. under the Labour Government. Perhaps he will reflect on the large increase in home ownership and consumer-durable ownership among pensioners and the fact that incomes from savings have doubled. That is what we have done for pensioners and it is worth more than the Labour party's rhetoric. That rhetoric lost it the last election and will continue to lose it elections so long as Labour Members make wild promises.

Mrs. Roe: Will my hon. Friend confirm that since 1989 income-related benefits for pensioners have increased by £700 million? Does she agree that that shows the Government's commitment to increasing benefits for those who are most in need?

Miss Widdecombe: It is an essential part of the Government's policy to target benefits, as far as possible, on those most in need, and that is why there have been substantial increases for those in residential and nursing homes and for those pensioners on income support. We shall continue to direct extra resources towards those in need while maintaining the value of the basic state pension.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister accept that although the Opposition are greatly concerned about the erosion of the pension, we are concerned also about the abolition of the pension for women aged 63 or less? We are reading press reports that say that the Government are considering increasing the retirement age for women to 65. Is that what the Government propose, or are they preparing the ground in order to back down so that the pension age for women goes up only to 63? Of the 3,000 representations that the Minister and her colleagues received on this matter, how many asked for an increase in the retirement age for women?

Miss Widdecombe: The trouble with the hon. Gentleman is that he believes not only his own propaganda but everything that he reads in the press. As he well knows, the Government have not reached any conclusion on how to equalise state pensions, beyond our firm commitment to do so. We issued a discussion document and, as he will be aware, the period for discussion has only just ended. That set out four main options and went well beyond the narrow range that the hon. Gentleman identified. In due course, we shall come to a decision and we shall announce it, in the proper way, to the House. Until then, it would be improper for anyone to speculate, and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman stops alarming prospective pensioners by speculating without reason.

Benefits (Itinerant People)

6. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements are made for itinerant people to claim social security benefits.

Mr. Lilley: Itinerant people who claim social security benefits are entitled to benefits under the same conditions as other people. Those who claim benefits for unemployment are required to be available for work with an employer and to seek such work actively.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he explain how it is that people who call themselves travellers, gipsies and didicois, or who are just a thundering nuisance, seem able to move around the country getting benefits wherever they stop, whereas my constituents are, quite rightly, required to report regularly to a social security office or to a jobcentre, where they have to show that they are actively applying for jobs so that they can receive benefits? Furthermore, if they take just a few days holiday with their families, they lose benefit.

Mr. Lilley: As I said to my hon. Friend, itinerants have to fulfil the same conditions as other people. If my hon. Friend or any hon. Member has evidence that they are not doing so, that would be a matter to follow up in the normal way.

Mrs. Fyfe: Would the Minister care to visit Centrepoint and talk to 16 and 17-year-olds who have travelled to London from towns and cities to the north and find themselves without a job and a home? They have to wait

a long time before receiving any help or cash income from the Government and in the meantime they live in cardboard boxes.

Mr. Lilley: Last week, I visited one of the benefit offices dealing with itinerant people and they recognised the improvements in the conditions that we have created for them.

Disabled People

7. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the impact of recent technological developments on disabled people.

Mr. Scott: Recent, current and future technological developments are making and will continue to make an increasing impact on lives of disabled people in this country. They will enable many disabled people to live independently, to have opportunities for education, employment and leisure. They will also play an important part in the detection, prevention and amelioration of disabling conditions.

Mrs. Gillan: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to welcome typetalk, the joint venture between British Telecom and the Royal National Institute for the Deaf that enables deaf people to talk to each other and to hearing people on the telephone? Will he confirm that the Department provides funds to the institute and supports projects such as typetalk?

Mr. Scott: I can confirm that, and it has been my privilege to have been involved with typetalk since its inception and to be present at the launch of the scheme just before the general election. It is beginning to do a marvellous job on behalf of deaf and hard-of-hearing people, not least by enabling them to have access to employment.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Is the Minister aware that disabled people in my constituency are complaining about the technological developments in the Benefits Agency that have altered the administration of their benefits? As a result many of them cannot afford to renew the MOT on their car, on which they depend for mobility. They face delays of six months and more in the administration of their benefits because of the new technological developments in the Benefits Agency.

Mr. Scott: That has nothing whatever to do with the introduction of new technology for the administration of benefits. The Benefits Agency is coping with twice as many claims for attendance allowance and disability living allowance as in the same period last year, and it is doing so successfully. If the hon. Lady knows of any particular cases where she believes that access to the motability scheme is affected by these delays, I hope that she will contact me immediately about them.

Mr. Alan Howarth: While I welcome my right hon. Friend's recognition of the important opportunities that new technological developments open up for disabled people, what plans does he have—in consultation with his colleagues at the Departments of Employment and for Education—to improve the availability of expert advice and counselling for individual disabled people, so that a judgment can be made about what technology would be of most help to them personally, and the availability of expert purchasing to ensure that the money goes further and more disabled people can enjoy the benefits of new technology?

Mr. Scott: As my hon. Friend will know, a number of Government Departments and other agencies fund new technology to help disabled people. I should like to see more co-ordination and a more seamless-garment approach to the advice available to them and to its accessibility. The Department of Employment already spends about £300 million a year on enabling disabled people to obtain employment or on maintaining them in employment. That is immensely important. Certainly, the national disability information project, which is a pilot scheme now and is likely to go national in the not-too-distant future, will greatly enhance the power of disabled people to make choices about the use of technology for their own needs.

Courage Brewery Pension Fund

8. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the Courage Brewery's pension funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: I have had no representations regarding the Courage Brewery's pension funds.

Mrs. Mahon: Well, I have—from many of my constituents who were worried when they read about the Harlin write-down. Is it not true that the regulatory system relies entirely on the honesty of the trustees and that if they prove not to be honest, the whole system collapses? When will the Secretary of State introduce regulations that give guarantees and security to pensioners? Is it not time that the Government took responsibility for some of the farces in the past?

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Lady is questioning the honesty of any of the trustees, I hope that she will do so publicly. I do not know of any reason to do so. The Transport and General Workers Union has made a complaint and it is being investigated by the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, whose responsibility that is. It will recommend whatever action it deems appropriate. I understand that the pension fund is in a healthy state and recently enhanced the benefits that it offers to its pensioners. Elected representatives from the membership sit on the committee of management, which has day-to-day control of the fund's administration. An investment sub-committee had been set up to scrutinise investment policies and an independent trustee to head that sub-committee has been appointed. Obviously, if the hon. Lady has any evidence that she want to submit to the regulatory authorities, she should do so.

Mr. Lidington: Does my right hon. Friend agree that considerable reassurances could be given both to Courage Brewery pensioners and to members of other occupational pension schemes, not least the many hundreds of Maxwell pensioners in my constituency, if the Securities and Investments Board were now to publish its report on the Maxwell scandal or, at the very least, those aspects of it which could be made public without prejudicing criminal proceedings? In that way, hon. Members on both sides of the House can know what went wrong with the regulatory

arrangements, and we and our constituents can have an informed debate about what needs to be done to put things right.

Mr. Lilley: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. The Securities and Investments Board has said that it wishes to publish as much as possible, subject only to the legal advice that it receives on the risks of prejudicing a fair trial. Obviously, the Government concur with that.

Share Fishermen

9. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals the Contributions Agency has to safeguard the special position of share fishermen paying their special contribution when unemployed under days at sea limitations.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to change the special arrangements which have been made for share fishermen.

Mr. Mitchell: That answer is appalling. Does the Minister not accept that, as the Government are about to impose a limit on the number of days that fishing vessels can put to sea, fishermen who pay the special share fishermen's stamp will be unable to collect the benefit to which they are entitled and unable to exist unless some special exemption is made for them in the new situation? They will be vulnerable and trapped between a Government decision that they cannot carry on with the job and another Government decision that they cannot collect benefit because of the weekly earnings rule.

Miss Widdecombe: The payment of a special contribution has been introduced specifically to protect share fishermen, to make sure that they become eligible for unemployment benefit. Qualifying for two weeks or more for unemployment benefit will cover the additional costs, since the vessels of the majority of share fishermen are laid up for more than two weeks. Our arrangements are fair and equitable.

Pensioners

10. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on targeting help towards particularly needy pensioner groups.

Mr. Lilley: Since 1988 we have increased annual benefits for pensioners on income support by some £700 million over and above inflation—not least for the pensioners of Basildon.

Mr. Amess: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that many senior citizens in Basildon have benefited from the extra Government help, which is over and above the normal upratings? Does he agree that that clearly demonstrates the Government's commitment to helping vulnerable pensioners and that the inflationary policies of Opposition socialist parties would crucify senior citizens?

Mr. Lilley: As always, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Under this Government pensioners' income has risen by about 34 per cent. in real terms. That is five times as fast as the meagre increase that they enjoyed under a Labour Government when incomes from savings were cut because of inflation. They remember that.

Mr. McAllion: One needy group of pensioners are those with disabilities. While the Benefits Agency customer charter trumpets claimants' rights to a more accessible service, pensioners who apply for disability living allowance have first to fill in a form with two sections and 12 different parts, totalling 34 pages. How can that credibly be described as a more accessible service? Is not the real purpose of these bureaucratic black holes to ensure that the minimum number of claimants can find their way through them so that the Government can save on their social security budget?

Mr. Lilley: That is certainly not the intention, and that is clear from our record which shows a substantial increase in the number of disabled people to whom we have given help. Our introduction of the system of self-assessment rather a requirement for a medical certificate shows that we were anxious to extend benefits to all disabled people in need. It is also clear that a significant proportion of the £700 million increased entitlement for elderly people to which I referred is going to the disabled. There was an increase in April and there will be a further increase in October. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not have the grace to recognise and welcome that.

Mr. David Shaw: What is my right hon. Friend's Department doing to debunk the Labour myth that pensions were tied to earnings throughout the five years from 1974 to 1979? Does my right hon. Friend recall, and will he ensure that it is publicised, that at one stage the Labour Secretary of State changed the date on which pensions were calculated from a November base to an April base, some seven months——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going wide of the Minister's responsibility on this question. The Minister will please answer the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Lilley: My Department would like to perpetuate the tenure of office of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), as he was a member of the Labour Government in the Department of Social Security at the time. He is a standing monument to that Government, who not only broke the earnings link to which Labour Members now refer as though it were inviolate, but failed to pay the Christmas bonus. The hon. Gentleman was there to tell the tale.

Mr. Bradley: Does not the Secretary of State realise that one of the most vulnerable groups of elderly people is the over-80s? Is it not an insult to them that the additional benefit that they receive is a meagre 25p a week—less than the amount needed to buy a loaf of bread? Will he immediately review the increase for the over-80s to ensure that they receive a retirement pension that enables them to lead a happy, healthy and secure retirement?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that over-80s on income support received an extra increase of £1 for single people and £1·50 for couples in April. This is to be followed by a £2 and £3 increase in October, and is geared and targeted to those most in need. I understand that the Opposition Front-Bench team is thinking of doing away with the universal retirement pension and targeting it instead. We would be interested to know how they intend to carry out that policy.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office

31. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a further statement on the work of the Serious Fraud Office in 1992.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): The current caseload of the Serious Fraud Office is 59 cases, of which 28 are being tried or are awaiting trial, 13 are awaiting committal or transfer and 18 are under investigation.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Maxwell scandal among the 59 or are the Government not interested in them, like Peter Walker and other fat cats, who made money out of the Mirror group pensioners? Is it not a scandal that an ex-Tory Minister who graced the Front Bench picked up £440,000 and a Mercedes and, instead of asking him to give the money back to the pensioners, the Prime Minister has given him a job and a peerage? What a scandal!

The Attorney-General: To answer the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, he may not have noticed—but I think that everyone else in the House has—that the Maxwell case is under investigation, arrests were made recently and the investigation continues. On the second part of his question, the hon. Gentleman is free to scatter allegations in the House, but I think that his constituents and those who come from the good working-class stock of which he prides himself, would prefer the careful and impartial investigation of the Serious Fraud Office to the approach that he has taken in asking his question.

Mr. John Moris: Is the Attorney-General aware of the concern that has recently been expressed, particularly by the Bar, on the method, timing and publicity given to some arrests involving the SFO? Is it necessary frequently to arrest in the early hours of the morning, with press and television in attendance? In order to ensure that our procedures, from the moment of arrest, are seen to be fair, will the Attorney-General consult the Director of Public Prosecutions, the director of the Serious Fraud Office and his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to consider whether it would be appropriate to issue guidelines to minimise concern and ensure that both the public interest and the rights of the individual are fully protected?

The Attorney-General: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will probably have seen my recent written answer to him dealing with the matter. One understands and shares the desire not to inflict unnecessary humiliation on any potential defendant. However, such matters are operational matters for the police, and the versatile critics might well ask themselves what they would say if a potential defendant, having been accorded a particular privilege, were then unable to be arrested.

Cases (Referral)

32. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on his practice in referring cases to the Court of Appeal for possible increase of sentences.

The Attorney-General: Since 1 February 1989, when this power came into effect, my predecessor and I have applied for leave to refer 86 sentences to the Court of Appeal, including five to the Court of Appeal of Northern Ireland. Ten were later withdrawn in the light of futher information, but of the 61 so far reviewed, 48 have resulted in substantially increased sentences.

Mr. Dickens: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that to retain public confidence the sentence must fit the crime and should provide the victim with some comfort? Does he further agree that the sentence should contain an element of retribution, punishment and deterrence? If all those are seen to be in place, the public are satisfied—but in so many instances they feel that judges pass sentences that do not fit the crime.

The Attorney-General: I entirely agree that in sentencing, not only must there be an opportunity for over-severe sentences to be reduced by the Court of Appeal but that public confidence requires that where a sentence is unduly lenient, the court should have an oppportunity to fix a more appropriate and, where necessary, more severe sentence.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Attorney-General accept that in a case that I referred to him in which the relatives of a man prosecuted for serious sexual abuse over many years made the dramatic and courageous decision to appear in court, they were deeply disappointed that the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not choose to appeal against the sentence of probation? As the Attorney-General knows, that sentence allowed the convicted man to be seen by his last victim—a 12-year-old—wandering around a local town. The relatives felt deeply betrayed because the Government did not ensure that a sentence was imposed that would ensure that that man was kept well away from the area where he committed his vicious crimes.

The Attorney-General: I am aware of the details of the case that the hon. Gentleman referred to me. Such cases are not easy. It is essential that the considerable power to refer a sentence as unduly lenient should be exercised by the Law Officers after careful examination of the facts and in the light of the principles of sentencing, which are carefully laid down by the Court of Appeal.

Sedition

33. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Attorney-General how many current cases relating to possible prosecutions for sedition are being considered by the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): None.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the laws of sedition that remain on the statute book cover threats below the level of treason, where the interests of the state are at risk? Does he agree also that they could apply to, and be used in bringing prosecutions against, republicans in the newspaper world who seek to undermine state institutions—including of course the monarchy?

The Solicitor-General: Although the material to which my hon. Friend refers is highly offensive to many, it must be remembered that an essential element in sedition is the intention to incite violence for the purpose of disturbing constituted authority. The attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has not so far been drawn to any material that falls into that category.

Serious Fraud Office

34. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Attorney-General how many requests have been received within the last year from other EC countries for assistance from the Serious Fraud Office.

The Solicitor-General: While the Serious Fraud Office has received no specific requests for assistance from European Community countries in the last year, it has excellent working relationships with the overseas authorities with which it comes into contact. In the last year, co-operation and assistance have been given by countries including France, Switzerland, the United States of America, Channel Islands, and Isle of Man.

Mr. Trimble: I am disappointed that the Solicitor-General's list does not include the Republic of Ireland because, as he knows, there have been a number of serious financial scandals there in recent months. The Garda makes no secret of the fact that its resources are not sufficient to deal with them. I refer in particular to the Goodman scandal concerning export credit insurance for beef, which the current Minister for Industry and Commerce, Mr. O'Malley, said resulted from Goodman's unusually close relationship with the Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds. The ramifications of that case extend to Northern Ireland, because it appears that export credit insurance was given for large consignments of beef that originated in Northern Ireland. In the light of that, would it not be appropriate for the Serious Fraud Office to play a more active role in examining the ramifications of those scandals?

The Solicitor-General: I have recently returned from Northern Ireland. The Serious Fraud Office is always anxious to help when it can, but its powers under section 2 of the Act are limited to cases in which it is investigating a fraud in our jurisdiction; it cannot act as an agent for a foreign country in regard to a fraud within a jurisdiction of that country. We need a United Kingdom foundation before the SFO can act.

Crown Prosecution Service

35. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Attorney-General what improvements are being made to the Crown prosecution service; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The principal current initiatives within the Crown prosecution service centre on continued improvement in the recruitment of lawyers, and in quality of service through the implementation of national operational practice—that is, national standards for casework management.

Mr. Duncan: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Crown prosecution service employs enough staff to ensure that the perpetrators of a crime are brought to book swiftly and effectively?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I am pleased to confirm that recruitment in the Crown prosecution service has continued in a very satisfactory way. The numbers recruited during the past 12 months include an extra 200 lawyers, bringing the total complement of lawyers now in post to 2,017.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Population Growth

40. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the Overseas Development Administration is making to examining the link between environment and population growth; and to what extent the strategies in the Rio declaration present an opportunity for expanding current activities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): The Overseas Development Agency has recently initiated a programme of research into the links between environment and population. The Rio declaration and programme of action confirmed the need for a better understanding of these relationships. We will continue to look for opportunities to develop our activities in this area.

Mr. Worthington: Action, rather than research, is needed. "Agenda 21" states clearly that a surging world population, linked to unsustainable consumption patterns, led to the present threat to the earth. We know that the support provided by family planning organisations in laying down voluntary principles has worked; we also know that, in 20 years, the average size of families in the developing countries has fallen from six to four. Is it not time that we allowed choice to the countless millions of women who are currently denied an opportunity to choose the size of their families?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I believe that we need further research as well as action. We have committed substantial resources to research—both World Health Organisation research, to which we have contributed £2·75 million, and our own research, to which we give £200,000 a year. We are also bringing about considerable action: we hope to launch new projects in Kenya, Ghana and Zimbabwe this year alone, and we have quadrupled the funds for such action over the past 10 years or so.

Mr. David Nicholson: Perhaps unusually, I support what was said by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). Does my hon. Friend recognise that there is widespread Conservative support for the placing of greater emphasis on population policy in the Government's development programmes? Is he aware that, in recent years, the Government have established a fine record in that regard? Will my hon. Friend and his colleagues, however, put pressure on large and wealthy nations—notably the United States—to fund international bodies that are interested in population and environmental issues?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I agree with the general thrust of my hon. Friend's question. At present, we are taking particular action in regard to the European Community. We are pressing the European Commission with a view to encouraging the Community to provide more support for population programmes, and we intend to move a motion to that effect at a meeting of the Development Council in November, which I hope to attend.

Earth Summit

41. **Dr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in implementing the initiatives agreed at the Earth summit to help developing countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Work is under way on a number of fronts. The European Community Lisbon Council endorsed proposals by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for action to work towards a replenishment of the global environment facility, and aid to help developing countries implement "Agenda 21".

Dr. Strang: Does the Minister acknowledge that the substantial extra resources for "Agenda 21" goals that were promised in the Prime Minister's Rio speech were in addition to the £100 million pledged for the global environment facility? Bearing in mind that, under the present Government, official development assistance has fallen from 0·51 to 0·32 per cent. of gross domestic product, will the Minister tell us how much new money will be made available to fulfil the Prime Minister's pledge?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are talking of funding spread over many years. I cannot possibly answer a question such as that. However, I can confirm that the funding that has been promised for the replenishment of the global environmental facility is distinct from any funding to implement "Agenda 21". I am certain that in all these areas there will, as has happened in the past, be substantial funding to this aid.

Africa (Non-governmental Organisations)

42. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support is being given to non-governmental organisations working in African countries suffering from drought and famine.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: British bilateral aid channelled through non-governmental organisations to drought and famine affected countries in Africa since September 1990 stands at £87·83 million.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the performance of British charities in Africa is far more effective than the performance of any other European charities? Does not that reflect the excellent co-operation between the Government and non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam and the World Development Movement?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes. Substantial funding is provided by both the non-governmental organisations and the Government's Overseas Development Administration. We are the leading European donor to both South Africa and the Horn of Africa. We are also the leading European donor in southern Africa and the third largest donor there.

Mr. Simon Hughes: May I say how valuable and vital is the aid from both this country and the European Community and from the non-governmental organisations, but is the Minister aware that if we are to prevent the drought in southern Africa from becoming a famine, with millions of deaths, the remaining third of the pledges that were asked for by the United Nations needs to be honoured? Moreover, further contributions are needed. Countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe also need debt relief. Efforts should be made towards that end this week in Munich.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes, we are increasing our funding in response to the crisis as it develops. The hon. Gentleman is aware that the director of Oxfam returned recently from a visit to Africa. In addition, my right hon. and noble Friend Lady Chalker announced on 30 June an increase of £10 million for drought relief in southern Africa.

Mrs. Clwyd: Why has there been no statement in the House by the Government on the crisis in sub-Saharan Africa? How can the 40 million people at risk possibly survive if there is a 60 per cent. shortfall in pledges of aid and if the international relief effort fails through lack of funds? Will the Minister ensure that the blockages at European Community level are removed and sorted out rapidly? Will he also ensure that there are no further delays in transporting food from the regions into the villages, where people are dying daily before our eyes?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We cannot possibly be responsible for the failings of other countries, but can I assert what the British Government are doing? Since January 1992, we have given £48 million worth of humanitarian aid to southern Africa and £33 million worth of humanitarian aid to the Horn of Africa. In other words, since January of this year, we have provided nearly £80 million worth of aid to those areas.

Somaliland

43. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards meeting the urgent need for humanitarian aid and development aid to the republic of Somaliland.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We want to help all Somalis in need. Since January 1991, we have provided £11·6 million worth of humanitarian assistance to Somalia, including our share of European Community aid.

Mr. Michael: While I appreciate the importance of the aid that is being given, does the Minister accept that stability is necessary if there is to be a reconstruction of the economy of Somaliland and if the thousands who have had to flee to refugee camps in Ethiopia and elsewhere are to be able to return home and society restored in that part of the country? Does the Minister accept that the people of the republic of Somaliland look not only to the international community and the United Nations but particularly to the United Kingdom to help them to restore stability?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have given nearly £2 million worth of aid to the north of the country in question. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Stability is a necessary prerequisite before substantial rehabilitation help can be given. All rehabilitation depends upon an improvement in security. We have been pressing the United Nations to step up its efforts in northern Somalia towards that end and have emphasised precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Population Growth

44. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implementation of the principles outlined in "Agenda 21" relating to world population growth.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: "Agenda 21" emphasises the importance of measures to strengthen family planning services and of further research into the links betweeen population and environment at global and local levels.

Mr. Robathan: As my hon. Friend has said, during the British presidency of the EC we intend to propose a resolution to the development council in November. In March, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote that he wishes to encourage European consensus on population programmes and to urge greater support from European donor agencies. What detailed progress has been made in dealing with this matter and the resolution at the development council meeting?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are working at a diplomatic and official level. The fruits of that work will appear at the development council in the autumn. As my hon. Friend will be aware, we have given great priority to this matter domestically; our "children by choice not chance" initiative was launched only last year.

Dentists (Ballot)

3.31 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the decision by dentists, in a ballot, to withdraw in whole or in part from NHS service.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): We have already made it clear that, whatever the result of the ballot, we will take the necessary steps to safeguard NHS dental services.

I regret the results of the ballot. In recent years, there have been considerable improvements in dental care. There has been a 43 per cent. real terms increase in spending on general dental services since 1979. I hope that dentists will not jeopardise this progress. I hope that no patient is deterred from seeking dental care by this action. Patients currently have, rightly, high expectations and respect for their dentists. I hope that they will have no cause to change that over the coming weeks.

Dentists are independent contractors. They will now have to consider carefully their next steps.

Dentists' pay is decided on the basies of recommendations by the independent review body. This year, we agreed to the recommendation that they should receive an 8·5 per cent. pay increase in full. To achieve the £35,800 recommended by the review body would have required a fee reduction of 23 per cent. We decided that a 7 per cent. fee reduction, with the introduction of prior approval for costly treatments, was a fair and reasonable way forward. This will give dentists an average income of about £41,000 this year. At the same time, we increased their allowance for expenses by 11·6 per cent. to more than £47,000, so that they will, on average, receive about £88,000, including expenses.

Patients will find it surprising that a profession which was prepared to accept £35,800 is now threatening to take action when we intend to pay them well over £40,000—substantially more than the review body intended.

All are agreed that the present system of remuneration needs a fundamental review; I have asked the Minister for Health to take this forward. Detailed arrangements will be announced shortly. We must find a system that is fair to dentists, fair to patients, and fair to the NHS. We are monitoring the situation through the family health service authorities to ensure that NHS dental services remain available. We have reminded them of their powers to seek to employ salaried dentists if necessary.

Meanwhile, I hope that the House will agree that the fundamental review offers a far more constructive way forward than action to withdraw NHS services from NHS patients.

Mr. Cook: The Secretary of State expressed the hope that the current dispute would not affect patients. Are we to understand from her reply that, apart from that hope, Ministers intend to do nothing in the face of a decision by 80 per cent. of dentists to accept no more NHS patients?

Do not Ministers recognise that the current crisis is a direct result of their policy of increasing charges to patients while cutting fees to dentists? As the Secretary of State appears to think that dentists are better paid than ever before, will she explain to the House why they are leaving the NHS in larger numbers than ever before?

I agree with the Secretary of State on one point. After the chaos created by the current contract, we urgently need a new system of dental remuneration, but how does she hope to get dentists to agree to a new contract if, on Wednesday, she proceeds with a cut in fees that breaks the existing contract? If she will not help dentists, will she at least help their patients? What is she going to do to guarantee the right of new NHS patients to dentistry on the NHS?

The Secretary of State mentioned salaried dentists. Is she aware that last week we were told that there are precisely nine salaried dentists in the whole of England outside London? How far does she think it is reasonable for a new patient to travel in search of a salaried dentist?

May I remind the Secretary of State that before polling day we were assured that the NHS would not be privatised —*[Interruption.]* What other word would Conservative Members prefer us to use now that more and more dental patients are being told that they must go private? Will the Secretary of State now admit the truth—that all those promises about the privatisation of the NHS were as hollow as all the claims about economic recovery?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can assure the House that we are monitoring the situation carefully and that there are no known cases where it has not been possible to secure an NHS dentist. FHSs are empowered to seek to employ a salaried dentist, and so far we have no reports of it not being possibile to find an NHS dentist.

The BDA said that it may take some months before the picture becomes exactly clear. I very much hope that it will co-operate with the fundamental review and will think long and hard before taking steps that will jeopardise the system of dentistry in this country which has, after all, delivered unprecedented results in the quality of dental care.

We have never had so many people participating in dental care in this country—30 million patients are signed up; there has been a 29 per cent. increase in the number of dentists; and 12 per cent. of family health service authorities now employ salaried dentists. We have made it clear that, although we wish to be fair and reasonable to dentists, we must also safeguard the interests of patients and of the NHS. I do not think that it bodes well that the Labour party seeks to support a professional group which is seeking to secure not only £5,000 over and above the 8·5 per cent. increase recommended by the review body. If I were one of the lower paid workers in the NHS, I would not have great confidence in the Labour party.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House a little more about the timing and nature of the fundamental review to which she referred? Does not she think that it is highly irresponsible of professionals to take the action that they have at this particular stage when there is a real prospect of the problems of dental remuneration being solved by the review to which she referred?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend. I hope that dentists will think long and hard before taking steps in relation to the future reduction at a moment when we all agree that we must find a better way of remunerating dentists. It may be a system that has stood the test of time for many years, but the time has now come when we need

[Mrs. Bottomley]

a system that inspires more confidence in dentists and in the NHS and is better for patients. There are a number of obvious difficulties. The BDA said that it was

"looking for a positive sign from ministers that there is a future in NHS dentistry."

There is a future in NHS dentistry. I believe that the fundamental review, the arrangements of which we hope to announce shortly, will make that future very clear.

Ms. Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Does the Secretary of State agree that NHS dentistry is in crisis because dentists are being penalised for making a success of a contract that they did not want in the first place? Now that dentists are baring their teeth, is not it about time that the Secretary of State swallowed her pride and ensured that dentists get their just deserts, that the nation's health does not suffer and that the nation's dental health does not go into terminal decay?

Mrs. Bottomley: NHS dentistry has never been more effective, with 30 million patients signed up for continuing care. The hon. Lady is correct in saying that the dental contract was a success. More work has been undertaken as a result. That is precisely why the dentists were given 8·5 per cent. by the review body when the nurses and the doctors were given 5·8 per cent. and 5·3 per cent. We are proposing that, in addition to the 8·5 per cent., the dentists should keep £5,000. I think that that is a fair and reasonable way forward for dentists.

Sir Paul Beresford (Croydon, Central): May I, as a Member of Parliament as well as a dentist, ask the Secretary of State whether she agrees that we should be asking the British Dental Association to respond to this House? The BDA should be using its professional standing to look for changes within the global sum, as the argument with dentists as a profession concerns not so much the global sum as the way in which it is distributed.

Mrs. Bottomley: I very much hope that we shall be able to work closely with the BDA in taking forward the fundamental review. As my hon. Friend knows only too well, the system of dental remuneration is based on an average income, which applies across the country, and the average expenses required to deliver that average income. A number of practical and sensible proposals are coming forward, from the BDA and others, about how we might more appropriately develop a system of remuneration which is more fair to dentists, fair to the taxpayer, and fair to the NHS. I very much hope that the BDA will settle for this year's fair and reasonable arrangements and work constructively for the future.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Does not the Secretary of State realise that her idea that there should be a fundamental review rings very hollow against what seems to be a fundamental dictatorship, given that she has indicated that she will go ahead with her plans irrespective of the democratically expressed views of the BDA? Does not she realise that, in seeking to have the national health service supported by salaried dentists, she is creating in many rural communities, particularly in the highlands, the north-east of Scotland and the islands, a situation in which people will have to travel many miles to find a dentist? She has alienated people who wish to continue within the health service. Will she agree to postpone her decision on Wednesday to allow a review and a discussion to take place?

Mrs. Bottomley: In order to deliver the income of £35,800 recommended by the review body—a reasonable income by any standard—we should have introduced a fee reduction of 23 per cent. A 7 per cent. reduction, together with the introduction of prior approval, seems fair and reasonable. The employment of salaried dentists should not be a first option. I very much hope that dentists will think long and hard before taking steps that would jeopardise NHS patients. But if they do take such steps, we shall have a duty to safeguard the interests of NHS patients, and we shall not hesitate to seek the employment of salaried dentists.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Will my right hon. Friend warn the dentists robustly and clearly that two groups will be hit by today's ballot? The first group is those dentists withdrawing from the national health service who will suffer particularly in terms of their professional integrity. The second is the large group of poor people who are not poor enough to be on income support and, thereby, qualify for free treatment. These people regard it as quite outrageous that a group of professionals—who are supported by the Labour party—who have just had an increase of 8 per cent. granted by their pay review body and had their fees increased by 11 per cent., should leave the poor in the lurch.

Mrs. Bottomley: As ever, my hon. Friend makes his points very well indeed. This year, with the 11·6 per cent. increase in expenses, dentists will take home an average of £88,000 gross. That is a very sizeable amount of money, and every dentist should think long and hard, from his own point of view as well as in the interests of his NHS patients, before taking such a step.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Are there any circumstances in which the Secretary of State would preside over the creeping privatisation of dentistry?

Mrs. Bottomley: I have made it clear that I am committed to NHS dental services. That is why I shall not hesitate to encourage the employment of salaried dentists when the need arises. I think, however, that there are great strengths, and that there has been great progress, in NHS dental services. Since the Labour party was last in power, there has been a 43 per cent. increase in spending on dental services. There are more dentists, and more patients are treated now.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): Does the Secretary of State accept that at a meeting with 12 dentists last Saturday two points came across—first, they all wanted the continuance of a first-class national health service dental system; secondly, whereas they were perfectly happy with the gross income, they had misgivings about the sampling in the first quarter of the year only, which led to their net income not being truly representative of their own experience?

Mrs. Bottomley: Some aspects of my hon. Friend's remarks should be discussed in the fundamental review. As for the average income and average expenses of the average dentist, the right place for the dentists to discuss them was at the dental rates study group. It was a great error on the part of the dentists to refuse to attend the

meeting of that group; it is, after all, precisely the setting at which there is a rigorous deployment of the figures. They did not arise.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): Will the right hon. Lady reconsider her over-optimistic comments about the health of national health service dentistry in this country? Will she recognise the extent to which dentists are withdrawing from offering a service to people under the health service and are continuing to threaten to do so? Will she think about the number of poor communities—for instance, the Ferrier estate in my constituency, where the only dentist operating has made it clear that he cannot afford to continue to operate—I have given the Secretary of State evidence of that—if she proceeds with her proposals? Will she think again, and think about the interests of the health of this country and its poor people instead of pursuing her dogmatic adherence to the Government's position?

Mrs. Bottomley: Dentists have always been independent contractors who could be selective about the patients whom they took on. Concerns about that should perhaps rightly be the subject of the fundamental review. Substantial resources go into NHS dental services. Last year, 30 per cent. of dentists earned more than £100,000, and the hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that 40 dentists earned more than £200,000—*[Interruption.]*—as someone rightly says, with their expenses as well. If the hon. Gentleman suggests that there should be greater variation in the deployment of remuneration in the various regions, I accept that point; it should rightly be taken forward in the fundamental review.

Mrs. Judith Chaplin (Newbury): Does my right hon. Friend agree that dentists' costs vary enormously and that that should be a key element in the fundamental review about which she speaks?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend makes precisely the point that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) addressed from a different angle. There has never been a time, however, when dentists' remuneration incorporated those variations. My hon. Friend the Minister for Health and I take the view that this should be part of the fundamental review. When discussing the dental contract, we agreed to remunerate business rates for dentists more directly. That was a step forward.

As for expenses, it is fair to say that an 11·6 per cent. increase in expenses, up to £47,000—that is what we are introducing—is generous on any count. We hope that we can discuss these matters further. On the last three occasions when dentists thought that their expenses had been under-recorded it turned out on examination that we had overestimated them for each year in question.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must now make progress.

Points of Order

3.48 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As we are now members of the European Community, would it be in order for the House to summon the French Prime Minister and Transport Minister to the Bar of the House to answer for the devastation that has been caused to my constituents and those of other Members by the French lorry drivers' strike?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a point of order for me. That is a question that he must put to his Government and not to the Chair.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order about which I have given you, Madam Speaker, and the Secretary of State for Education notice. I want to refer to the date of publication of the proposed White Paper on education.

In the debate on the Queen's Speech, the Secretary of State said that the White Paper would

"be brought before the House in due course."—*[Official Report* 12 May 1992; Vol. 207, c. 587.]

However, in the closing minutes of the debate on special needs education on Friday, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools refused, in reply to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong), to promise that the White Paper would be brought before the House before the House went into recess. We have since learnt from the newspapers that the Government plan to publish it in late July, after we have gone into recess.

I have had the Journal Office check the precedents. No Government in the past 18 years have issued a policy White Paper in late July after the House has risen for the recess. On only one occasion—in 1983—has a White Paper been published in August. It has not happened since.

In your ruling on the complaint of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) on 9 June, Madam Speaker, you made it clear that you were alive to the need to protect the rules of the House and its conventions and courtesies. In view of that, may I invite you to rule that, if the White Paper is published after the House has risen for the recess in late July or August, it would show gross contempt for hon. Members and that it would be a breach of long-established practice and of the clear undertaking given to the House by the Secretary of State only eight weeks ago to publish the White Paper "in due course"?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman did me the courtesy of giving me some idea of the point of order that he wished to raise. I know, as he has said, that he has carried out a great deal of research into the matter. As he is aware from his researches, it is not a matter for me. As he is also aware, under Standing Order No. 137, Ministers can present Command Papers to the House during recesses. As the hon. Gentleman said——

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not get ready for another point of order.

[Madam Speaker]

The hon. Gentleman is aware that Ministers present Command Papers from time to time. As he knows full well, as Speaker, I have no authority or powers to prevent them from doing that during recesses.

Mr. Straw: I am aware of what you say, Madam Speaker. However, in your ruling on 9 June in respect of the complaint of my hon. Friend the Member for Hillsborough about whether hon. Members can intervene in constituency cases arising in other constituencies, you made it clear that, although it was not a matter for the rules of the House—something you regretted—you deprecated the practice and, with respect, you were right to do so. As no Government over the past 18 years have published a White Paper just after the House has gone into recess, thus showing such gross contempt for the House, I invite you to deprecate the practice and to ensure, so far as you have influence, that Ministers do not act with such contempt for the House.

Madam Speaker: I saw the material relating to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. As he is aware, I have not yet seen the White Paper which the Government propose to publish. As he knows, I have no discretionary powers in the matter. It is not a question of common courtesy to me. Standing Order No. 137 allows Ministers to publish White Papers during parliamentary recesses. I have no authority to stop them doing that.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I had a conversation a couple of hours ago with the Lord Chancellor's Office about a matter which affects the established rights and practices of hon. Members. It has been the practice of the Lord Chancellor's Office to release the figures about mortgage repossessions from all courts in the country, initially by telephone contact by a Member of the House. That practice was changed a couple of years ago so that a letter is now required, and I accepted that. However, I understand from a report in *The Sunday Telegraph* yesterday that it is the intention not to release the information in that way, but to release it, at best, quarterly in accordance with the Lord Chancellor's decision.

The practice is particularly important because hon. Members have raised the issue through the Lord Chancellor's Office and, if necessary, directly with the courts in their areas. One could phone the court in the area in which one was interested to get the figures. If that practice is to be stopped as well, hon. Members will either have to phone all the courts in the country or give up the practice altogether. If we phoned all the courts in the country, it would be good news for British Telecom but bad news for British democracy.

When a major attempt is made to change the established practices of the House in a way which restricts hon. Members' ability to obtain information, it is vital that Ministers make a statement to the House and not just slip the matter through in that way. I know that the way in which others and I have used the procedure is a matter of political embarrassment to the Government—I make no apology for that—but the matter concerns all hon. Members' right to obtain information in the way that we always have done, and I ask for that to be continued or, if it is not to be continued, for a Minister from the relevant law office to make a statement to the House before the Government make the proposed change.

Madam Speaker: I have had no request from any Minister to make a statement, but the hon. Gentleman will know that that is not a matter for me and that, over the next few days, he may exercise his imagination and ingenuity and find several occasions on which he may raise the matter with the Government, who have responsibility for it.

Ms. Angela Eagle (Wallasey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As I made my way to Wallasey at the weekend, I perused *The Spectator*, and discovered that the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) had commented on almost 10 per cent. of hon. Members—that is, the female Members. He said that we are

"not desert island material"

and that we look as though we are

"from the fifth Kiev Stalinist machine gun parade."

He also referred to you, Madam Speaker, and perhaps you would like to look up the reference for your own interest. Is it in order for someone who seems to reside in a permanent state of sartorial inelegance and who is not my idea of a desert island dream boy to make such comments about 10 per cent. of the membership of the House?

Madam Speaker: I take it that the hon. Lady has informed the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) that she would raise the matter. *[Interruption.]* Order. There are some periodicals that I do not read, and that is one of them, although the article has been related to me. If the hon. Lady wishes to take the matter further, perhaps she will write to me about it. There are procedures that I must look at, but the hon. Lady must put her request in writing, as she probably knows.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.),

That the draft Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

Industry

Madam Speaker: There is great interest in this debate, so will hon. Members please voluntarily restrict their comments so that I may call as many hon. Members as possible?

Also, I inform the House that I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.57 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the continuing impact of the recession which has caused the longest period of continuously falling output since 1945 and affected every region in the economy; condemns the record level of business failures and house repossessions, the serious decline in manufacturing investment, and the unacceptably high level of unemployment, which has risen for 24 months; regrets that repeated Government promises of swift recovery have not yielded the promised results; and calls upon the Government to adopt modern industrial policies which reduce unemployment, promote investment, tackle Britain's major training and skills crisis and enable the regions to play their full part in the economy.

First, the motion calls for special investment measures and a new industrial policy for Britain; secondly, it makes the case for action to assist hard-pressed regions with a new regional policy for the country; and, thirdly, it calls for urgent action on training and jobs so that we can bring to an end rising unemployment, and the fear of rising unemployment, which is the single biggest barrier to confidence and recovery.

Since the election, business failures have risen by about 15,000, the worst recorded figure in our history; house sales are 20 per cent. down on last year; and repossessions are still at record level. Even the Government's own Insolvency Service, the only part of the Department of Trade and Industry's budget that seems to be expanding, is predicting that insolvencies will increase from 21,000 two years ago to 35,000 this year, a 60 per cent. increase; and unemployment has tragically and disgracefully continued its rise for 24 consecutive months—up over two years by 30 per cent. in the north, by 40 per cent. in the north-west, by 90 per cent. in the midlands, by 120 per cent. in the south, and by 150 per cent. in the south-east.

It is clear not only that the recession is still with us but that the promised recovery has not arrived. Despite all claims to the contrary, business bankruptcies and redundancies are rising as fast as ever. The continuing inaction and complacency of the Government in the circumstances is not only unjustifiable but inexcusable. It is a gross betrayal of the urgent needs of Britain.

We have suffered two full years of recession in which total output has fallen by 4 per cent.; employment by 5 per cent.; manufacturing by 8 per cent.; construction by 13 per cent.; business investment by 14 per cent.; and manufacturing investment by an astonishing 28 per cent. That is unparalleled in the rest of western Europe or the G7 countries.

The tragedy for Britain is that there is not only no end to the recession but no Government strategy to bring it to an end. There is not one new special initiative to boost investment or training, to cut closures or to bring about recovery—no recovery and no plan for recovery; nothing in the manifesto, nothing in the Queen's Speech, nothing in the weeks since and, of course, nothing in the reshuffling of desks at the Department of Trade and Industry, which was an apology for a British industrial strategy when the Secretary of State announced it on Friday.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): The long list that the hon. Gentleman gives us is all very well, but before he goes any further perhaps he could pinpoint for the House what policies in the Labour manifesto at the general election would have done anything for British industry. Will he bear in mind that, of 200 top industrialists who were interviewed just before the general election, 86 per cent. said that the return of a Labour Government would be a disaster for British industry? If I may give the hon. Gentleman a bit of advice, he should concentrate on what Labour would do.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman feels the need to ask the Opposition what policies should be pursued to bring us out of recession. Is it not the case that in the hon. Gentleman's constituency unemployment has risen by 73 per cent. in the past two years? Would he not do better to argue with his colleagues in the Government about action that must be taken on unemployment?

The Prime Minister is at the G7 conference in Germany today. Is it not a disgrace, after all that he has said about Britain leading Europe and Britain being the economic miracle country in Europe, that Britain is bottom of the league of the major countries for growth not only for 1991 but, according to all forecasts, for 1992? We have been bottom of the league for demand for two years running. We are bottom of the league for business investment and employment growth. We have been seventh out of seven in the G7 for two years running, and we are now 12th out of 12 in the European Community.

We have the lowest growth forecast for this year, the worst fall in employment, and the poorest business investment record. We are the only country to face the harsher conditions of the internal market with less investment this year than last year and less investment last year than the year before. That is a remarkable achievement with which to commemorate our European presidency.

When they should call for co-ordinated interest rate cuts across Europe, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer strut the world stage with solutions for everyone else's problems but their own and a policy for every economy but ours. No wonder they do not want to talk about unemployment in the EC or the G7 countries. In Europe, the Prime Minister sits profoundly at the top of every table while, as a result of his policies, Britain sits sadly at the bottom of every league.

If anything sums up the Government's failure to take action to deal with the recession that they created, it is their callous attitude to those whom they have made unemployed. There is rising unemployment in every region. We have the fastest rising unemployment over two years of any country in Europe. There is an ever-growing number of casualties and victims of the Government's policies. Not only men and women in their 50s but those in their 40s fear that they will never work again. Young couples are jobless and homeless.

[Mr. Brown]

Not only are thousands of young people denied their first job, but this summer they are likely to be denied their first training place. The Government have not only cut training and training places but betrayed even their promises of temporary placements for the unemployed. Employment Action was launched in a blaze of publicity last spring. The Government promised 30,000 places as early as the end of March. Now there is a mere 19,000 places. So in some constituencies, such as those represented by my hon. Friends, approaching 10,000, and in some more than 10,000, men and women are unemployed, and the best that the Government can do is offer an average of 30 temporary placements for those whom they have made unemployed. This is not employment action but unemployment inaction, and it is a callous disregard of those whom the Government have made unemployed.

As we know from newspaper reports yesterday, the Government's response seems to be not to reduce unemployment but to consider reducing unemployment benefit. Just as the length of unemployment increases, the Government are considering reducing the time that benefit is available. It is not the unemployed who are to blame for letting down the Government but the Government who are to blame for letting down the unemployed. I want an assurance from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that the Government will use the power of Government and the public spending round to attack the recession rather than to attack the unemployed.

This is the Government and the Prime Minister who told us that they would create opportunities for all, yet, as unemployment, the biggest single destroyer of opportunity, has risen by 1 million, as 50,000 businesses have closed, and as homes have been repossessed, they have done virtually nothing. This is the Prime Minister who promised during the general election campaign that he would create a classless society, a nation at ease with itself.

While thousands of people feel under threat of losing part of their £43 unemployment benefit, privatised utility executive directors, such as those in Thames Water, are allowed to award themselves huge salary rises followed by huge boardroom perks and to push up water prices by 14 per cent. at the expense of consumers and are given licence to make excess profits. Does the Prime Minister criticise them, or legislate against them? No, his response is confined to accepting gratefully from Thames Water, on behalf of the Conservative party, a cheque for £50,000 for the election campaign. When the Government do nothing about recession profiteering while the Conservative party benefits from it, the electorate will not forget and the Conservative party will pay a heavy price one day.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): How much would the hon. Gentleman be happy to add to the costs of British industry by accepting the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for introducing the question of the social chapter because that will allow the Secretary of State to put on record his support for the social charter. I meet around the country thousands of people who are worried about the Government's failure to take seriously their responsibilities for social policy within the Community. I hope that the Secretary of State will continue to remind the Cabinet that the principle of the social chapter is acceptable not only to him but, according to every opinion poll, to the vast majority of the British people.

In the face of all this, the recession and unemployment, let us recall the promises that the Government have given so freely. They have promised not just that the recession would never happen, that it would be short-lived and shallow, that it would be over by last summer, last autumn, or last Christmas—the Prime Minister gave an interview on 1 January in which he said that the recovery had started as he spoke—but, just before the election and in search of power, that recovery would follow the election victory just as day followed night. During the campaign, the Prime Minister said:

"Britain is ready to move forward when others are sliding backwards. All that Britain is waiting for to achieve recovery is the confidence a Conservative Government will bring".

He also said:

"Vote Conservative on Thursday and the recovery will continue on Friday."

Three months have now passed. What is industry saying about these promises? According to McAlpine Ewart Hill, one of the Tories' election backers, these are

"The most difficult trading conditions this company can recall."

Sir Anthony Pilkington said:

"I've not met a single industrialist who sees any sign of upturn."

The Burton Group said:

"The only pick up is not in consumer demand but in conversation about consumer demand."

The Prime Minister who promised recovery last spring, last autumn, last Christmas and at the beginning of the year and was so explicit in his promises during the election campaign is responsible for a manifesto built on a fiction and has been guilty of misleading the country.

What of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose comments were few and far between during the election campaign? Budget purdah, when the Budget was kept under wraps before Budget day, was followed by the election purdah when the Chancellor was kept under wraps. In one of his rare public utterances, he said:

"The vital key to unlock recovery is . . . the confidence that only a Conservative Government can bring."

The Trade Minister, not to be outdone, his comments in the campaign, as ever, never knowingly understated, made a speech entitled, "Prosperity through the 90s". One of his remarks, not lost on nearly 1,000 British Aerospace workers who have lost their jobs and 40,000 whose jobs are under threat, was:

"I say to all those people in our aerospace industries 'You can trust the Tories' . . . the only kick-start that will work will be the confidence created by the election of a Conservative Government on 9th April."

What has that kick-start been? Sixty thousand more job losses? Fifteen thousand businesses gone under? More repossessions?

Indeed, yesterday, when *The Sunday Times* abandoned what it calls its green shoots of spring economic optimism index, it was because just about the only signs of recovery that it could find and report on in its columns over the past few weeks were Moss Brothers saying that dinner suit hire was rising at its Regent street and Covent Garden branches, and the Tea Council saying that Britons were drinking an average of five more cups of tea a year. No doubt the economy will boom when we see more people sitting around in hired dinner suits drinking more tea.

Even *The Sun* tells the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

"For God's sake, wake up Norman. The economy is crumbling around you and yet you still do nothing."

We have a Conservative party on which even *The Sun* is setting. The central promise of the election campaign that the recovery would follow victory is in tatters. It is a trust betrayed and a cruel deception now being unmasked. The truth is that the only recovery that interested Tory Members was the recovery of power, and the only unemployment that concerned them was fear of their own.

Let us be clear about the sheer extent of the betrayal of promises. Before the election we were told that investment would rise by 1¼ per cent., but it is now falling; that domestic demand would rise by 3 per cent., but it is stagnating; that consumer expenditure would rise by 2½ per cent., but it is barely recovering; that GDP would rise by 2¼ per cent., but every day it is revised downwards; and that the balance of payments would rise to £6·5 billion, which was bad enough, but it is now running at a deficit level that is 50 per cent. higher.

From those difficulties that our economy faces in the short and long term it is clear that the promised recovery through confidence has not arrived, that every excuse given for inactivity—that confidence would be triggered by Conservative victory—has been exposed as a mirage, and that the Government now have absolutely no justification for inaction over the recession.

The Government must act in two ways immediately. First, we shall not swiftly bring the recession to an end unless we bring an end to the fear of rising unemployment, which is preventing people from spending, investing and moving home. That requires emergency action with a jobs programme for every region. Secondly, as the widening figures for the trade deficit already show, it is other countries' industries, not ours, that are likely to benefit from any recovery. To ensure lasting recovery for Britain we must have new investment in machinery, technology, skills and the regions as part of a new industrial policy for Britain.

Faced with all these problems—a recession, a trade deficit and Britain bottom of the league—what has been happening in Government since 9 April? What has been achieved by the Trade Minister? His first action at the Department of Trade and Industry was not the much-needed change of policy, but the wholly unnecessary change of title—calling himself President. What has been achieved as the President approaches the end of his first 100 days? The President should have known the difficulties that he might have from the right of his party when he heard of the election night party of Baroness Thatcher and her right-wing friends. Although much of the media attention was focused on Mr. Patten, now the member for the comparatively safe seat of Hong Kong, East, even then it was the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) who was being targeted by the right. Here is the first-hand account of *The Daily Telegraph* correspondent. He was at the party and later wrote:

"It is not true to say the right wing cheered when the left wing chairman of the Tory party was defeated . . . I was there. In fact, Mrs. Thatcher was quick to express her sympathy for Mr. Patten . . . when Mr. Heseltine made an appearance on the TV she did though put her hand over the screen."

That gesture is at once symbolic and, as it turns out, prophetic. He has become President—but President of what? President of a Board of Trade which never meets, which has no active members, which must somehow spearhead a bold new industrial strategy for a new century and a new millenium, but which last met on 13 December 1850. The Board of Trade was wound up years ago, and there is no one there to notice should the President decide, on impulse and no doubt on a matter of principle, to walk out. The right hon. Gentleman is not so much the emperor with no clothes as the President with no board and far too little trade.

What of the right hon. Gentleman's ministerial colleagues, who are all on the Treasury Bench, all the President's men—or are they? The Under-Secretary of State for Technology is from the No Turning Back group and, unlike the President, he believes that regional policy is a phoney activity of Government. Perhaps he is there to keep a watchful eye on the President. The new Minister responsible for competition is also from the No Turning Back group and, unlike the President, he believes that Britain should not be in the exchange rate mechanism and that Britain should be the free port of Europe. Perhaps he is there to report back to the Prime Minister. This is the first time it has been thought necessary to impose on a Cabinet Minister not just one minder but two. As the President would have put it in one of his great speeches in the election campaign, "Thatcherites to the left of him, Thatcherites to the right of him, Thatcherites everywhere."

Let us stand back and look at the right hon. Gentleman's plans for the Department of Trade and Industry and at his books, "Where There's a Will" and "The Challenge of Europe". Calling himself President was not the limit of his ambitions. As President he would create not only an English development agency, introduce a public test for takeovers in a new law, and a new European company statute, transform research and development with a tax credit, but formulate an industrial strategy that would sweep across Whitehall, encompassing every Minister.

The right hon. Gentleman also had ambitions for his colleagues. The Secretary of State for Employment would be told to introduce a new training law, a tax or levy; the Secretary of State for Education would be told to have a new skills investment programme; the Secretary of State for Transport would have to have a new transport review; and in the book the Foreign Secretary was told:

"Some of the work of the Foreign Office is unsatisfactory . . ."

and changes would have to be made. Of course, the Prime Minister would have to sign the social charter. The whole of Government was to be reshaped in the image of the right hon. Gentleman's presidency. There were policies for every Department and roles for the President, not just as chairman of the National Economic Development Council in place of the Chancellor, because through the new industrial policy committee of the Cabinet,

"the president . . . should have the power base of a new cabinet committee on which he would take the chair . . . and on which other Cabinet Ministers . . . would sit."

One of the "inevitable roles" of the committee would be to decide for or against major projects, such as the channel tunnel and power stations, and it would control education and even taxation policy, which sounds a bit like the Chancellor's job.

What would be the Chancellor's role in this great new strategy? The book says:

"If the DTI is to increase its influence the Treasury will see this as a threat and so it should. Somehow we have to shift the balance. We must oppose the Treasury's never ending round of book keeping."

[Mr. Brown]

I am sorry that there is no one here from the Treasury to hear this while the Chancellor is away. The book continues:

"How often the Treasury can fail to see the big defect in its conduct . . . The weakness in Government is that there is not sufficient challenge to Treasury judgments which may frustrate the strategic . . . objectives of the Government and the work of the DTI."

What has happened to this great design, this ground plan, this master strategy? The 100 days of the President started with his determination to expand the National Economic Development Council with him in control. But they have ended, not with the President taking the chair from the Chancellor, but with the straightforward abolition of the NEDC by the Chancellor himself. In those 100 days the President's big achievement has been to make even the Chancellor look decisive and powerful. The 100 days began with his plan for the power base of a new industry committee. What has happened? The committee that started as the President's base from which to control the rest of the Government is to be chaired by Lord Wakeham, whose remit is undoubtedly to keep a close eye on the President. What started as the President's plan for an expansion of his power has become a means by which the Presidents is kept under control.

What of the Foreign Office? The 100 days were preceded by the statement:

"The present role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is unsatisfactory . . . a changed role would naturally require considerable changes in the training of diplomats".

The 100 days have now ended with him saying exactly the opposite. I quote from his speech on 1 June:

"Let me say it here, the Foreign Office has developed an experience and a sophistication in the promotion of our national enterprise that is now world class."

It is not so much a case of the 100 days that changed the Foreign Office as the 100 days that changed the views of the President.

The same is true of training. The 100 days which were preceded by the demand for compulsory action, with a levy or tax on training, have ended with him praising the voluntary approach. The 100 days were preceded by the demand for action, with research tax credit, the English development agency, and investment in seed corn research. Undoubtedly, the need for new money has ended with the President in retreat, saying that he needs no more money —the first time that a spending Minister has conceded his case even before the spending round has begun.

How do we sum up the President's first 100 days? After seven years of Kennedy-style build up and campaigning for the presidency and three months of Camelot hype, I can tell him what has happened. As President Kennedy would have put it, "Ask not what you can do for the Cabinet; ask what the Cabinet has done to you." The City responsibilities of the DTI have gone to the Chancellor, who is almost 10 years younger. The film responsibilities for the DTI have gone to the rising star, the Secretary of State for National Heritage. Public spending directions are now at the behest of the youngest Cabinet Minister, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. As President Kennedy would have put it, "The torch has passed to a new generation."

The President is able to call himself what he wants, talk to whoever he chooses, hire any advertising agency he fancies. He has full powers and unlimited responsibilities to reorganise the desks within his Department, but he cannot begin to contemplate the implementation of a genuine industrial strategy for Britain. Perhaps next week there will be an announcement on the dramatic reshuffle of the office furniture, and the week after that sweeping new recommendations on the colour of the curtains. But when there are no new measures on research, manufacturing, technology and exports, his is absolute power over a Department that is unfortunately becoming absolutely powerless.

The Minister—the President—who spent years in exile working out his plans, who promised so much, who stormed the country with his new ideas for an industrial strategy, who was the darling of the Conservative associations, the hero of a thousand Conservative party lunches, the interventionist tiger of the rubber chicken circuit has been brought low, reduced to trophy status. The tiger that was once the king of the jungle is now just the fireside rug—decorative and ostentatious, but essentially there to be walked all over.

My concern is not so much for the personal fate of the President, but for the fate of industrial policy. We face massive technological, demographic, industrial, training and environmental challenges in an increasingly global economy. There is an urgent need for our industrial strategy to have the backing not just of the President but of the Government. It must, first, encourage long-term investment to bridge what the President has called the investment gap. Secondly, it must boost training and technology to reverse the deterioration and erosion of our position. Thirdly, it must back exports to end the position where, as the President has said, our attitude to the trade deficit has been simplistic. Fourthly, it must ensure that our regional economies play a full part in balanced, sustainable growth in this country.

We are faced with huge regional imbalances and growth rates in our regions which, over the next few years, are predicted to be a third or less than half those of the most prosperous regions of Europe. The Secretary of State has promised action, but there was nothing in the manifesto and nothing since, and cuts are taking place in the Government's regional investment budget. Regional selective assistance is to fall by 6 per cent. this year. Is it not vital that the Prime Minister and the Government listen to the views coming from the regions? Is it not vital that they do not use the review of regional aid maps to cut regional support? Also vital is detailed consideration of the creation of the long-sought English development agencies, and of work to strengthen those that already exist in Scotland and Wales. The President himself admitted a crisis in research and development funding, that the gap between ourselves and our competitors is widening, and that he proposed measures that have not yet been implemented. At the same time, support for technology has been cut this year, and nothing in the Queen's Speech reverses that.

I want from this debate a guarantee that the Government will carefully consider the reports from the House of Lords and from their own scientific advisers that specifically make the case for information technology, and the creation of a new research tax credit and country-wide technology transfer network to ensure that we do not move out of the current recession with an even weaker technology base.

Training also is recognised to be in crisis. The President spoke of Britain's lamentable training record and patchy part-time education, one of the poorest performances in

science up to the age of 14, and alarming weaknesses in mathematics among teenagers. He said also that the youth training scheme is not an adequate building block. The right hon. Gentleman proposes changes in training legislation. Will he use his influence to bring training cuts to a halt so that our country will cease to be the only one in Europe whose training budgets are being cut? Will he promise to push for a new training policy so that skill levels can be improved?

We know from the British Exporters Association that United Kingdom jobs are being exported because of lack of assistance, and that workplace redundancies are occurring because of the Government's cuts in export support. In Opposition, the right hon. Gentleman spoke of the importance of tackling the trade deficit. He said that it was not of incidental importance, self-correcting, or easily financed.

I want the Government to outline measures to support British exports, end privatisation, and support regionally based export services that will lead to Britain winning new markets in Europe and elsewhere. I want a Government strategy for manufacturing, investment, training, technology, and our regions that measures up to the challenges of the future.

We need a Government who will act in the public interest to end the recession, tackle the trade deficit and secure lasting recovery, preside over an investment decade for the British economy, and with the ambition to make our work force the best trained and educated in Europe. We need a Government who will take measures now to reduce unemployment, tackle poverty, and eliminate low pay. We need a Government who will confront the challenges that face our country in an increasingly international economy.

We have instead a Government who, three months after an election victory, have no strategy for recovery other than to talk about it, no plan for unemployment other than further to penalise the unemployed, no policy for helping industry other than cutting its budget, and who are so complacent and arrogant that they do not even pretend to care about the misery caused by bankruptcies, closures, and unemployment in every region.

We have a Government who are creating not a classless society but a heartless society. It will be the job of the Labour Opposition to attack Conservative failure, to expose the broken promises, and to point the way to a better future.

4.28 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'recognises the essential need to maintain British competitiveness by containing inflation and improving productivity; and believes that the long term needs of British industry are best served by the control of public expenditure, competitive tax rates, deregulation, and an incentive economy.'.

Three essential matters ought to preoccupy the House in any debate on recession in industry. The first, to which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) referred at length, is not in dispute—the existence of the recession itself. The second is the nature of the practical options available to the Government to combat the difficult situation. The third is the world context in which our economy operates.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East regurgitated a range of facts about the recession. I might argue with one or two of the pieces of evidence that he produced, but I certainly do not take issue with his claim that we are in a recession—the most difficult recession that we have experienced since the war. I am prepared to recognise at once the strain that that places on companies and employees, including those who, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, have lost their jobs or fear that they will lose them. We all understand that as constituency Members of Parliament and it is understood by every member of the Government. Such issues are drawn to our attention constantly, and rightly so.

Although I do not take issue with the hon. Gentleman over the existence of a recession, I consider the naivety with which he presented his case that it was largely a United Kingdom phenomenon more suited to the politics of opposition than to any serious analysis of the real problems that face our economy. We heard virtually nothing of the fact that across the trading world, and among economies broadly comparable with ours, very similar Governments face very similar problems. The United States, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand are all experiencing a degree of recession. Beyond peradventure, there has been a world turndown.

The hon. Gentleman did not say how he expected the British economy to buck the present economic situation, or how a whole range of developments could take place in this country, given that the bulk of our export trade is with markets that are themselves in difficult circumstances. He seem oblivious to the fact that the leaders of the Group of Seven countries, who are meeting today, are acutely conscious that growth was lower last year than in any year since 1982. The catalogue of problems that he described are a consequence of that.

The hon. Gentleman said that particular problems were associated with our position, but he entirely failed to add that one of the reasons for that was the high rate of growth enjoyed by our economy in the 1980s. He also failed to point out that unemployment has risen in most European countries and that in Japan, for example, industrial production has fallen by more than 5 per cent. over the past year, compared with only 0·5 per cent. in our economy.

When I begin to analyse the options available to the Government, the division between the hon. Gentleman and myself becomes acute. At its simplest, the Government's task is not to find more ways of spending money; it is to find a way of helping the British economy to become more competitive. That task is never-ending and our competitors are not resting in the process: there is a constant change of circumstances, and a continual quest for further competitiveness, in the competing economies with which we must do business.

I make no apology for saying that I intend my Department to continue to examine the factors in the British economy in regard to which we can and should do better. That strikes me as the proper purpose of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Does the Secretary of State recall the promise that was made to thousands of young school leavers? Every one of

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

them was guaranteed a training place, but they are still desperate to obtain such places. Will the right hon. Gentleman apologise to them?

Mr. Heseltine: I am fully aware of the commitment to provide young people with, originally, places on the youth training scheme, and I am also fully aware that it was the Labour party that resisted those proposals—partly because they offended the trade unions, which felt that they would present a rival alternative to their own training procedures. That is the clearest example of the way in which, over the past decade, the fundamental issue of how to improve training in the public sector has been addressed by the Conservative party and resisted by Labour.

A major characteristic of the Labour party is its response to our efforts to address the fundamental issues involved in a lack of competitiveness. Whenever we have tried to address those issues, the Labour party has resisted our attempts, on behalf of the forces of the producer-led trade unions that it represents. That has been the tradition of the past decade.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): The intake of apprentices in the electrical contracting industry has gone down from 3,000 a couple of years ago to 1,000, and the number is falling. The unions and the employers are co-operating, but they find that they get very little Government co-operation.

Mr. Heseltine: I do not accept for one minute that they do not get Government co-operation. There has been more focus on Government-led training over the past decade than in any other decade since the war. That is the experience of all those who have any understanding of what is going on.

I intend to make sure that my Department improves the quality of our dialogue with the different sectors of the industries that we sponsor. Equally, I am preoccupied with ensuring that the services that we provide are delivered as effectively as we can provide them—close to those people who are responsible for running our companies at the trading level and at the local level.

We have no choice but constantly to search for ways in which the Government can properly assist and advise the companies on which our wealth-creating process depends. I repeat, however, that a persistent characteristic of the Labour party is always to resist changes that are designed to pursue competitiveness.

To take the most significant of them all, the battle against inflation: inflation fell from nearly 11 per cent. in 1990 to 4·3 per cent. in May 1992, yet the Labour party resisted at every turn the steps that were necessary to get inflation under control. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) asks me who was responsible for the inflation. He forgets that inflation had been running at 27 per cent. under a Labour Government, with all the devastating uncertainties that apparently the Labour party wants to forget. We have faced the unpalatable truths about a competitive economy and pursued what we believe to be the right means of achieving it.

When the Conservative Government lowered the levels of direct taxation to provide an incentive economy, the Labour party voted consistently against that process and campaigned, mercifully unsuccessfully, in the general election to reverse it. We reduced corporation tax from 52 per cent. to 33 per cent. The moment that we did it the party that was prepared to see corporation tax at 52 per cent. switched its ground dramatically in order to argue that we should go back to the industrial tax allowance procedures, even at the low level of taxes that we had introduced.

I fully understand the arguments of all those people who say that we should give more export credit. That was the point that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East wanted to make. He believes that we should provide more aid and trade provision support. He ignores the fact that inevitably a judgment of what we can afford has to be made by the Government. The hon. Gentleman never told the House that in the case of past debts, incurred under export credit, we are currently asking the British taxpayer to pick up a bill of £400 million a year because many of the risks have proved to be well-founded. In those circumstances, the Government must make a decision.

I have every sympathy with those companies that face competition from companies backed by other Governments. They see tantalising contracts within their grasp, provided that the Government will back the risk. We do so on a significant scale, but there is a limit to what we can do, and there will always be such a limit. In the end, we may be unable to reach the judgment that all companies would like.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Does the Secretary of State accept that what he has just said is a serious smokescreen? He has not touched at all on the major issues that face industry and business—interest rates. That is the greatest problem facing companies in my town of Wolverhampton and throughout the west midlands. There have been 2,000 bankruptcies in the past six months. Tell us about high interest rates.

Mr. Heseltine: I am most grateful to the hon. Member. Interest rates have fallen from 15 per cent. in September 1990 to 10 per cent. now, thereby cutting industry's costs by £6 billion a year. The Labour party, which thinks that inflation can be fought without taking difficult decisions, has no credible alternative to deal with that vital part of our industrial strategy.

If we are to debate genuinely the harsh facts of industrial competitiveness—the House must realise that whether we debate those facts or not is secondary to the fact that the world outside understands what they are—we must realise that Britain's inflation is still higher than that of our principal competitors. In the United States, inflation is about 3 per cent. but in Japan it is less than 2·5 per cent. Nothing that we do or say in the House will prevent a wider audience from weighing the facts of our wage settlements with those of our competitors.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, with his catalogue of generalisations and fictional policies, diverts the attention of the country from the reality that last year our manufacturing earnings grew by about 8 per cent., compared with 6 per cent. in Germany, 4 per cent. in Japan and only 3 per cent. in the United States. There are no policies whereby any domestic Government can prevent the conversion of those statistics into lost jobs, lost competitiveness and higher unemployment. The longer the Labour party goes on talking as though there were, the more the consequences will be felt by people who listen to them and are deluded by the escapism that it peddles.

In our drive to continue the increased performance of our industry, we have, yes, increasingly privatised a growing sector of our economy. I accept that the Labour party thinks that we are wrong. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said today that we were wrong to privatise the nationalised industries. He wanted to keep control of the industrial sector in London, whereas we have transferred it to the regions. He wanted to keep tax at 98p in the pound so that he and his colleagues could spend the money that we believe the wealth-creating sector can better spend at its discretion. That is what socialism was about.

When Labour Members talk of privatisation, do they ever realise that when a great raft of industries were nationalised they were not allowed to trade overseas or to move into export markets? That is what socialism meant —trade union-dominated committees, power vested in London, no competitiveness, vast subsidies and a raft of the British economy neutered out of the trading economy.

We have been prepared to face down the Opposition and to carry through those policies of privatisation. What has been the outcome? Throughout the world, are Government after Government or country after country following the advice of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East? Are they listening to him? Are they harking back to the great days of Britain's industrial supremacy under the previous Labour Government?

Show me a Government who want to go back to what the Labour Government were doing. The Malaysian Government identified 147 privatisation candidates in 1990 alone, with 37 due for sale in the next two years. Poland—perhaps the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East harks back to the system that the Poles are trying to overthrow—plans to transfer 200 companies. Plans are well advanced in Singapore for the privatisation of its telecommunications network.

The same can be seen throughout the world. Hungary is in the second stage of its privatisation programme, with 300 companies on the list. The Mexican Government have reduced their holding in their telecommunications business to less than 10 per cent. The Greek Government are planning to sell 49 per cent. of Olympic Airways before the end of the year. The Bundestag has voted to privatise air traffic control and the German Finance Minister has confirmed that Deutsche Telekom is a prime candidate for privatisation. Who was right, and what conceivable advantage would there be for the British economy to revert to the practices which have been discredited here and which everyone overseas is abandoning?

All we have left is an ever-dwindling gathering of yesterday's zealots, competing to recycle yesterday's ideas. What is the purpose of the competition? What is the only target that Labour Members really understand? It is to win a place on the national executive committee of the Labour party or to grab the top slots in the parliamentary party. None of my colleagues would give house room to those targets, but Labour Members are obsessed with them.

I absolve Labour Members from any form of doctrinal obsessionism. Nothing is sacred in the battle that they are fighting among themselves. Three months ago, the Labour party had a manifesto and was at war with the Tory Government. Today, to the best of my knowledge, the manifesto is still there but the Labour party is at war with itself. Everyone now knows that we persuaded the country that Labour's manifesto was wrong and ill-conceived.

That was no mean electoral achievement. But none of us realised at the time just how great an intellectual achievement it was. It took time to realise that we had also persuaded large parts of the Labour party that the manifesto was wrong and ill-conceived. I found it extraordinarily difficult to keep up with Labour Members. Take my old friend, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). We followed each other in and out of television and radio stations during the campaign. In every programme, he waxed more lyrical about Labour's policies for the 1990s. I had no idea how closely he was listening to me until I read shortly after the election what he had told readers of *New Statesman and Society*. He said:

"Our endorsement of Tory macroeconomic policy and acceptance that it should aim for no more than monetary stability meant that we were unable to offer . . . a convincing route to full employment or economic recovery . . . all we had to say [to those on middle incomes] was that we intended to tax them more severely."

The hon. Member for Dagenham was uncharacteristically slow in trying to gather back the departing middle classes compared with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who was determined to play his own inestimable role in frightening them off for good:

"there is a good case for public ownership . . . which I am happy to accept."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1992; Vol. 207, c. 388.]

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is as happy, but nothing more clearly reveals the divide that opened up in the Labour party after the election. We all knew it before the election, the country discovered it during the election and now Labour Members are beginning to understand it for themselves.

Against the background of that internecine battle for Labour's soul, we today heard the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East trying to invent a new industrial strategy. What is the only creative aspect of his new industrial strategy? It is to get himself made shadow Chancellor. I wish him well. He will certainly enjoy a great deal more loyal and consistent support from Conservative Members than he will ever receive from Labour Members. When the hon. Gentleman becomes shadow Chancellor, he will be forced to consider the third set of issues which confront Government on an international scale. The first is to reconcile the public expenditure pressures of recession with our membership of the exchange rate mechanism, with all the disciplines that that imposes.

I have already referred to our relatively uncompetitive inflation figures. I assume that the hon. Gentleman is not one of those who are arguing to ease counter-inflationary pressures by transferring the strain to the pound. There is nothing new in that approach, except that this time it would mean realigning the pound for the first time within the ERM. That is not a new argument; it is only a reproduction of the old argument about J-curves which the siren voices have advanced many times since the war. The problem for us was that every time we let the pound take the strain, we encouraged domestic inflation to erode any temporary competitive advantage that we achieved; thus the incipient decline in competitiveness continued. The Government have set their face against that course.

The second international issue which would confront the new shadow Chancellor is arguably the most significant of all. The Uruguay round of the general agreement on tariffs and trade has been under way for six

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years. Its successful conclusion could deliver nearly $200 billion a year in extra world trade. The outcome could lead to a bigger increase in help to the developing world, central Europe and the former Soviet Union than any conceivable aid programmes ever could. The investment that it could provide would far exceed in environmental benefits anything agreed at the recent Rio conference.

There should not therefore be the slightest doubt about our commitment to success in bringing a satisfactory conclusion to the GATT round. In fact, there are the makings of a deal. In particular, there is an opportunity —indeed, I would go further and say that there is a responsibility—for the European Community and the Commission to resolve the internal divisions over agriculture, which are the single greatest impediment to a successful conclusion of the GATT round.

As shadow Chancellor, the hon. Gentleman would also wish to contemplate the completion of the single market under the British presidency. It was a Briton, the noble Lord Cockfield, who in 1985 forced Europe to abandon its customary rhetoric and to focus its attention on a detailed agenda. We shall see most of that specific agenda and a great deal else completed by the end of the year.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of that achievement or the consequences for our trading companies. Two thirds of our overseas trade is now with Europe. There is an overriding national priority to ensure that no controversy over the Maastricht treaty clouds the judgment of the smallest company about the inevitability of the single market.

It was 1986 and the Single European Act which set in stone our trading patterns for the foreseeable future. There are opportunities but no entitlements. Indeed, the Government's policy is constantly to widen those opportunities. Thus we strongly support Commission proposals to allow access by EC-based undertakings into other member states' oil and gas supply industries. The third aviation liberalisation package is another good example, leading to direct benefits to consumers and operators. It is here that some of the most exciting developments for our economy are taking place.

I was appalled by the hon. Gentleman's misrepresentations of the relative strengths of the British economy. He talks as though there were no signs of recovery and as though everything were going wrong. It just so happens that, without selecting anything other than today's news, I found on my desk the figures for sales of commercial vehicles, which show an increase of 5·16 per cent. on a year ago. New car registrations are up 4·4 per cent. on June 1991, so there are significant examples of recovery beginning to emerge.

This morning I happened to read an account in *The Times* which made it clear that other European companies such as Volkswagen and Mercedes Benz scour British component manufacturers so that they can enjoy the benefits caused by the entry into our market of three big Japanese companies and the improved productivity that has followed.

It is against that background that I invite the House to consider whether the increased productivity and increased performance of our work force, companies and managers are not the real world in which we must make a judgment. I ask the House to consider whether the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is more likely to bring a dispassionate account of performance of our economy than, say, a rather more perceptive observer such as Jacques Delors, who has described—*[Interruption.]* The House is likely to recognise that the President of the European Commission, who describes our economy as

"a paradise for Japanese investment",

is more likely to be telling the truth than the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. We must then consider why Jacques Delors made that judgment.

Between 1988 and 1991 we attracted nine times more inward investment than Germany, five times more than Italy and three times more than France. The House will want to judge whether that is God-given or whether it is because there is in this country an opportunity to trade successfully on a scale not available in the rest of the Community.

The House will also perceive another significant change about which we heard nothing from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, which is the performance of British exports. For the first time since the end of the second world war, Britain's share of world trade has stabilised and even improved slightly. *[Laughter.]* It is not surprising that the first reaction of members of Labour's Front Bench is to laugh. Are they laughing at the fact that it has stabilised and improved, or are they laughing in shame at their record in government when it constantly declined?

Mr. Brown: Will the President of the Board of Trade simply confirm that Britain's share of world trade rose under the previous Labour Government and has declined under this Government?

Mr. Heseltine: I shall not confirm that because it is not the case. Since the 1950s, Britain's share of world trade declined consistently, and the first significant reversal of that happened towards the end of the 1980s. I am fully aware of our economy's propensity to import and of the open access of our distribution system, but I am equally aware of other impressive statistics which give grounds for optimism.

Exported goods account for more than 18 per cent. of our GDP, compared to 9·6 per cent. for Japan and 7·1 per cent. for the United States. It is therefore unthinkable to argue that we are not capable of winning world markets, because we do so with a larger proportion of our GDP than almost any other equivalent economy in the world. In the three months to May 1992, British experts—*[Interruption.]*—were 5 per cent. higher than a year earlier, despite the most difficult trading circumstances in the world economy for some years.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has one overriding problem. He knows full well that in practice there are no short-term fixes or quick gimmicks to affect the course of a nation's economy, but the difficulty of being a spokesman for the Opposition is that one must give the impression that there are. Let me take the most frequently touted solution of them all which encapsulates the whole case that he made today. Broadly, the solution was that, somehow, if I were to ask my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for some dramatic increase in my Department's expenditure, which I will not do, and if my right hon. Friend were to agree, which he would not do, I should be able to fix it: jobs would flow, cash registers would ring, the nation, miraculously, would

be back to work. It is a delusion. I should merely be recycling the taxes that someone else has to pay, or keeping interest rates higher than they would otherwise be.

As the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said, it is perfectly true that my Department's budget, at £1·4 billion, is a fraction of what it was in 1979. But what was the Department in 1979? I do not seem to remember that it was some great power-house of technological advance, driving the foreigners out of the marketplaces of the world. Oh, no, it was something very different, something that the Labour party understands—indeed, thrives on: losses, slush funds and industrial incontinence. In 1979-80 the Labour party spent, at today's prices, £3 billion propping up nationalised industries. That is why the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry was larger. British Steel required £1·5 billion, British Shipbuilders £0·6 billion, and so it went on. I have to confess that we are still, this year, spending £1 million, and we shall try to do better. But we do not have the slightest intention of asking my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to go back to the horrendous subsidies that were characteristic of the Labour party.

It is very easy for the Opposition to talk of the white heat of technology. That was the label on the door. The closest they got to white heat was the roasting they received from the International Monetary Fund. One cannot make an economy efficient by subsidising inefficiency. Any institution can produce at a cost, but the point of production is to sell. I should have thought that the Labour party, with its new-found commitment to the wilder extremes of salesmanship, would realise that orchestrating large-scale extravaganzas is of limited appeal. But it never learns. Only three months ago, we saw, in Sheffield, the rally that was designed to herald the end of the lonely years—red roses, even redder faces, the limos, the charas, the razzamatazz. That was to be the night of which a future generation of young socialists would cry, "Where were you, daddy, on the night of the great rally?" More to the point, where are they now? I invite my right hon. and hon. colleagues to support us in making it clear that they are on the Opposition Benches and that is where they will stay.

5.1 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): I am grateful to have been called so early in the debate. I am conscious that many hon. Members on both sides wish to speak, so my remarks will be brief.

All of us who heard the Secretary of State will see this as a sad occasion—sad for him personally, and sad for the state of debate in the House of Commons. Over the years the right hon. Gentleman has tried to take industrial policy seriously, so it is sad that he should be reduced to the sort of speech to which we have just had to listen. What we have before us is nothing but a muted Tarzan riding a paper tiger, a President without powers, in charge of a Department without power. That is not exactly the agenda that the right hon. Gentleman set for himself, and I think that he will take it from me that many Opposition Members seriously expected from him more than he has been able to deliver. However, we understand the reasons. The right hon. Gentlman has been humiliated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and ignored by his Prime Minister—the two people on the Government Benches who owe more than anyone else to the right hon. Gentleman for their elevated positions. Were it not for his pyrrhic victory and then his quixotic charge for the leadership of the party, they certainly would not be where they are today. What we have is a Secretary of State who had a very clear blueprint of what he wanted to do once he got to the very Ministry on which he had for so long set his sights if he could not get the leadership.

What was wrong with that blueprint? What was wrong with the idea of redressing the balance within Cabinet, within the machinery of Government, in favour of industry and against the Treasury? What would have been wrong with having an industrial sub-committee of the Cabinet of which the Secretary of State, whoever he was, was the chairman, and the Chancellor a member? Those were very good ideas—to be found in the right hon. Gentleman's book, which many of us have read—and many of us in the Opposition would have liked to incorporate them into our policies had we won the election. The only thing wrong with them is that the right hon. Gentleman has been unable, in power, to implement them, and the country and the Government are the poorer. They were good ideas.

What was wrong with the idea of an enhanced NEDC, now reduced to a rump to be located in the Department of Trade and Industry? The one change—a magnificent organisational change—that the right hon. Gentleman has made is that we are back to the sponsoring departments of his Ministry. It is a good idea, but if there is no money with which to sponsor, even that idea is not worth having. There is no point in trying to make a virtue out of the vice that the right hon. Gentleman has inherited—a Department devoid of funds. The right hon. Gentleman knows that the change whereby all the vital funding from our own Department was switched to European funding was matched nowhere in Europe. In the rest of Europe national funding was carried on in tandem with European funding. Indeed, it was used to promote those companies that were anxious to get into BRITE—basic research in industrial technology in Europe—for electronics and other projects. Britain, alone, under the last Prime Minister, thought fit to slash all the subsidies. It cut to the quick the promotional, constructive funding that had been very successful under SEFIS—the small engineering firms investment scheme—product development programmes in the early Tory years.

So it was with no pleasure that I listened to the right hon. Gentleman's pathetic speech this afternoon. In the past, we have been entertained, we have been chastised, and we have seen him at his best. Today we saw him at his very worst. If it were only a personal tragedy it would not matter so much, but it is a national tragedy, about which hon. Members throughout the House will have to think very clearly as we enter a four-year Parliament. It seems to me—and this question or charge, however it is seen, is put forward very seriously—that the Government, in effect, have decided that they really do not mind if the recession is unduly prolonged. They do not mind if they do not take action that they know that they should take now.

They ought to risk a reduction in interest rates, but they fear that if the recovery were to get under way too quickly they might have to face a second election with the economic cycle out of kilter with the political-electoral cycle. That would be a very serious charge, but I put it to the Secretary of State as a serious question because it seems to me that there is deliberate inaction. What we are seeing is unnecessary postponement of interest rate

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reductions. The Government wish to delay the pick-up, which will come, so that it coincides with the next electoral cycle. I can find no other reason. This is something about which the Government will have to come clean with the House and the country.

I want to take this opportunity to put two other issues to the President. The first concerns the European fighter aircraft. This is one of the crises that occur in a Government's lifetime. In my opinion, it is a crisis of very serious proportions and of potentially very serious repercussions for the British aerospace industry. The withdrawal of Germany from EFA is a mortal blow to that programme in its present status. The murmurings from Spain that we have heard—the right hon. Gentleman will know far more about them we do—confirm that. Here we have a classic example of the balance of power in Government about to be played out in precisely the way the Secretary of State foresaw in his book.

The international scene has dramatically changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the removal of the threat from the former Communist bloc, but is the decision to be driven by the Treasury or will it be taken by a Cabinet that is fully informed of industrial interests and in which those interests are fully defended? The right hon. Gentleman has lost out in all his battles so far: this is one battle that he must not lose.

We shall understand if certain aspects of the EFA programme have to be modified to take account of the new defence situation—that will be unravelled as the debate starts. But we cannot accept the idea of the right hon. Gentleman losing this battle and the programme collapsing.

My second point concerns the use of the Department's funds for the manufacturing sector. There are many initiatives which the President could take. I have already mentioned the small engineering firms investment incentive. It was highly successful, as were product grants. They could be reintroduced by the sponsoring Department and used in conjunction with companies' approaches to European funding for this country. Unless Europeans know that our own sponsoring Department is behind a programme, we are unlikely to get our fair share of the funds that become available.

It occurs to me that I should declare an interest, as chairman of a publicly quoted company—Transfer Technology Group plc. At the sharp end we are increasingly aware that the United Kingdom Government are the only Government of a major industrialised country in Europe not supporting their own manufacturing industries. That will not do; the challenge that remains for the Secretary of State—if he survives in his position or feels that he can live with himself masochistically as he endures the humiliation to which I have already referred—is: can he bring our Department of Trade and Industry in line with other such departments in Europe, in line with best practice, and in support of British industry?

The Secretary of State must be honest with himself and accept that if he cannot do that—he has failed to do so in the first 100 days—he will have no option but to take the honourable step, as he did once before, we hope with greater consideration on this occasion, and resign.

5.11 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I declare an interest as a director of Glynwed International plc, J. Bibby and Sons plc and Charterrail Ltd., all of which are directly involved with British industry.

It was a delight to listen to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. It was a vintage performance and it was a privilege not to have to go to a party conference and engage in a standing ovation to hear such a speech—it was brought to us here and I thank my right hon. Friend for that.

I follow up my compliment by saying how much I appreciated my right hon. Friend's emphasis on the Government's growing success in respect of inflation and productivity. My right hon. Friend knows, as all Conservatives know, that the Government's economic fortunes are intimately connected with all their fortunes. The problems, from dentistry to Maastricht, will be enveloped in a sombre veil if they are played out against the experiences of economic underperformance. I very much hope that my right hon. Friend's optimism in this respect is well-founded.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend will understand if I speak candidly about how I see the prospects for the economy. I am delighted that we have moved away from the ministerial optimism that seemed to prevail for a while shortly after the election, when one felt that the spectre of Herbert Hoover and his presidential slogan "prosperity around the corner" was still apparent. Nobody feels that that applies now.

There is bound to be some anxiety about why measures are not being taken to remedy what is clearly the most protracted recession since the war. The things that inspire caution in the Treasury are fear that measures may be ill-timed and not reversible and fear that they will have consequent inflationary implications. I understand that judgment, but it needs a little further consideration.

Of course there are powerful inhibiting factors. The first concerns public spending. It cannot be adjusted as though it were a contra-cyclical element in economic management. Broadly speaking, we have tried to proceed with Budgets that run over a period and are not subject to short-term change. I am prepared to bet that the present public spending round will confirm that judgment. I have reason to believe that it will produce spending ahead of last year's and that it will reflect underlying and undeniable social demands for spending on education and health and other parts of social expenditure—albeit exacerbated by the recession.

The second aspect of the economy in which there is little room to manoeuvre is revenue. There was a time when it was fashionable to think in terms of being able to use it as a short-term weapon of economic management. We had the regulator to deal with indirect taxation. That has now lapsed—it is no longer formally available and it is certainly out of fashion, and all who lived through that experience will understand why.

The problem is much wider. We have it on the authority of the Prime Minister that value added tax is not to be altered or widened and that its rates are not to be increased, so a major area of indirect taxation has been, to some extent, insulated, making economic manoeuvring more difficult.

The pressures in respect of income tax are that it should be rigorously contained, so the Tory pattern of taxation

does not admit of much manoeuvre. We are confronted with high borrowing and, as the recession unwinds much more slowly than we should have liked, borrowing levels will persist. That is not very agreeable. I do not allocate blame, but I believe that this type of analysis has to be made in a House of Commons debate of this character so that we may judge as dispassionately as possible what the best course of action is.

Although a policy of masterly inaction may have some merit, I do not believe that the politics of the situation will admit of it—nor would the economic situation. That is why I turn to what I know is distressing for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade: the final element in the economic equation, interest rates. The bank base rate of 10 per cent., giving a real interest rate of 5·7 per cent., seems profoundly high for an economy in the state of ours—output is static and Ernst and Young's Item Club in *The Times* of today prophesies that in the year ahead the economy will contract by 0·6 per cent.

No one could argue that there is much pressure on capacity: I would argue the reverse. There is clear evidence of spare capacity in the economy. Against that background, what would happen to inflation if there were a cut in interest rates? That is a calm and unemotional question. It is not an objective question, because it contains a political judgment. What would such a cut do for personal savings? Would it trigger a credit boom? One can only give an instinctive and highly judgmental answer. However, all the evidence points to the fact that there is great caution in respect of consumption. People are rebuilding their savings. I do not believe that they are poised ready for an expansion in credit reminiscent of a decade ago.

What effect would such a cut have on the corporate side? Would it set off a great expansion of corporate investment? I do not believe that that is the case. The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) has experience of industry and he would echo my judgment. The serious devastating problems in the corporate sector involve costs. The tangible gain from the change that I am advocating is that it would provide some relaxation on the costs of the corporate sector and on industry more than any other aspect of our total economic activity because credit plays a rather greater role in that respect.

I am advocating a modest change and step. However, I believe that it would be welcome and would be highly relevant in trying to develop the policies prosecuted by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. If, at the end of the day, we are told that such a change cannot be made, not because of inflationary considerations, which I have tried to address, but because of exchange rate considerations, I must state that, having established a fixed exchange rate around which we dance as if it were a totem, we will re-create for ourselves the difficulties of the 1960s which hon. Members will recall. The Labour Government were crucified by the way in which they had to pay regard to a fixed exchange rate.

I began by referring to a rather austere American, Mr. Herbert Hoover. To maintain the transatlantic link, I shall conclude by quoting a very exotic American, Mr. William Jennings Bryan. He became considerably agitated about economic guidelines in the great debate about gold and said,

"Man was not born to be crucified on a cross of gold."

If the argument for interest rates suggests some real action for members of society infinitely more hard pressed than any hon. Member, they will wonder what world the Front-Bench spokesmen occupy when so little was said about the problem of interest rates bearing upon the whole range of industry.

It is not just the privilege of Front Benchers, committed to the exchange rate mechanism, to decide that those matters are not available for wider discussion because of the implications that the whole thing is so horrific and horrendous, fundamental and revolutionary that it cannot be addressed. A system of fixed exchange rates on a Community basis is the apex of centralism. If we are moving towards a more relaxed view so that decisions can be taken more at the periphery—towards, dare I say it, subsidiarity—the argument for this country being master of its own exchange rate in partnership with its sister Europeans is valid. I hope that my few words will eventually, in their subversive way, convince even my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade of that.

5.23 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): It is always a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) who turned what was becoming a debate about one President into a debate about several Presidents. He introduced an analysis with which, in large measure, I do not disagree—apart, that is, from its conclusion. I agree with the need for flexibility of manoeuvre and with the paramouncy of considering interest rates as an element of that. However, we should not do that in the structural ways that the right hon. Gentleman described.

The areas where there is no disagreement in the debate are interesting. There is now no disagreement between the Government and Opposition parties' Front Benches about the extraordinary, unique and difficult situation. The Government accepted the analysis set out in the Opposition motion. The Government broke ranks with the Labour party only in arguing about what should be done, although I do not believe that they argued very effectively about that. However, there appears to be no internal or external dissent about the extent of the recession, its depth and the fact that it is the worst since the war. We all have to accept the difficulties that we face.

It is also accepted that there are no short-term fixes. No one now imagines that things will be different in a matter of weeks or months. It is noticeable that, in his most recent pronouncements, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is no longer talking about turning corners in the next six months. He is now talking in much longer time scales than that.

The Chancellor made a much more realistic analysis last month. He said:

"In two or three years' time, I believe that people will look back and see that it was during this critical period that the right decisions were taken."

We can argue whether the right decisions are being taken, but there is no argument that it will take two or three years before there is recovery and that this is the critical time.

What is the agenda? What are the possible ways out of the recession? The newspapers have today confirmed the depths to which we have sunk. We are at the bottom of the league in comparison with our G7 partners meeting in Munich today. In comparison to the other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, it is clear that no one is going to have a lower growth rate than ours, which is forecast at zero for this year.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

The tragedy is that the President of the Board of Trade ruled out many things. He reminded us of some things that will happen automatically. However, his speech appeared to be one for the Tory party conference, as the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North said. It was not a speech to encourage industry. The President of the Board of Trade said nothing to make people outside this place believe that the Government have a strategy to carry us forward. It is a wait-and-see policy, and a wait-and-see policy is no policy at all.

The President of the Board of Trade said that we must continue down the road of privatisation. That has competitive benefits and is now increasingly accepted around the world, as he rightly said. He said also that we must follow a low inflation road. It is right that we should keep inflation as low as possible. He also said that we must keep wage increases down and that is right. There can be no dissent about that. He ruled out devaluation and I accept that because that is not the way forward.

The President of the Board of Trade also highlighted the importance of the GATT round. That is fundamentally important and I wish the Government and the Prime Minister well in their attempts to remove the blocks that are preventing the GATT agreements being reached which would liberate world trade to our benefit and, as the right hon. Gentleman rightly said, to the benefit of the developing world as well.

I also agree with the analysis by the President of the Board of Trade that the single market, which will come into force at the end of the year, will provide more opportunities. However, that is happening anyway. It is not the result of Government policy since the general election. It was signed, sealed and delivered by the noble Baroness Thatcher in 1986.

So far, so good, but that is still not new policy. We heard no new policy to address what remained the unspoken issue on the Tory Benches before the general election. If there are to be more than 3 million unemployed sooner rather than later and if the figure is to rise steadily not just next year, but until the next general election, we must ask whether that is a price worth paying. My colleagues and I do not believe that it is. We believe that by reducing unemployment by taking various targeted measures, we will simultaneously restore the dignity of work and the economic capacity of the country to produce, export and earn and therefore save the money that is much more wasted by paying people not to work at all. There are small signs that some things might be improving, but I do not think that we can read much into them. We have to accept that the position is indeed at its worst, and that we have to find some remedies to make it better.

I shall show with one or two examples from this capital city of ours how dire the position now is. Insolvencies in the capital city are already considerably up in the first six months of this year compared with all of last year. There are parts of our capital city—my constituency is one—with more than 20 per cent. unemployment. One in three males in inner urban working areas such as mine now are out of work, at a time when all the other indicators of economic progress are unhelpful.

I have been talking to secondary school head teachers in my constituency. The most frightening statistic that I have heard since the general election is that, as presently analysed, of secondary school leavers this year, fewer than 3 per cent. are going into jobs and only about 2 per cent. so far are going into training. I have no idea whether that is a common pattern, but, if that is the economic base upon which we are planning to build our recovery, there is something fundamentally wrong indeed.

What can be done? We do not believe that it is particularly productive to examine things that could have been done some years ago but have not; we have to look at what could be done now. The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North referred to the exchange rate mechanism as the apex of centralism.

We believe that it is possible to have a package of measures which provides the room to manoeuvre that the right hon. Gentleman rightly says is necessary but without breaking ranks entirely, as the right hon. Gentleman would argue—perhaps not surprisingly, given his views in the past. If we left the exchange rate mechanism, the danger is that the pound would plummet, interest rates would potentially go up to support the pound, or the pound would fall so much that the consequences for inflation would be bad. There are severe risks with that extreme solution, and I know that the Secretary of State and the Government have not accepted it either.

Alternatively, if we reversed our policy of opting out of EMU, if we moved sterling into the narrow bands, and if we gave the Bank of England independent control over interest rates, interest rates would not only be likely to come down to give us the competitiveness that we need and industry the boost of additional resources that it currently does not have, but it would bolster the credibility of anti-inflation policy at the same time. It is interesting that the London Business School has recently come around to that view as well. It would then be as part of a package that interest rates would be cut, but it would not be as part of a political fix mechanism, which always undermines the credibility of such an action.

Another important matter relates to the other side of the coin. The public spending round is coming up. I argue as strongly as I can to the Government that to be unnecessarily tough in the public expenditure round will be the worst of all possible worlds. Our social infrastructure desperately needs the extra investment for which spending Departments are bidding. It desperately needs investment in training, education, public transport, housing and so on. More public expenditure, not less, is needed. We therefore have to allow that money to be spent, but not at the expense of either seeking to put up taxes, which would be the wrong way forward, or of giving ourselves further difficulties of another sort. We have to make sure that we do that in a way that gives us the long-term recovery that everybody has said that we need.

I end my remarks by saying why we should not cut public expenditure at this most crucial moment, when we are trying to get out of our deep economic hole. Our national debt is at an historically low level, relatively to others and absolutely in terms of its level in the past. Even if we ran a deficit for the first half of the 1990s, we would still be unlikely to reach the average of our competitors in Europe. There is no good economic reason at the moment for seeking to reduce our national debt if the alternative is to put money back into the economy, which in turn will help us to build and compete our way out of recession.

Even with the more realistic non-Treasury growth forecasts for the next few years, we should be able, without

great difficulty, to meet the public finance side of the Maastricht convergence criteria. We should keep that as an objective of Government economic policy.

Private sector savings are high. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there will be personal reluctance to spend that money. I do not think that there will be a consumer boom. People have learnt the lessons of the 1980s and will hang on to their finances for retirement or for later investment. Spending is more likely in the corporate sector than in the private sector. But it will not be difficult, because of the high level of private sector savings, to finance the PSBR over the next year. If savings are high, if there is no financing problem, current and forecast levels of PSBR will not lead to pressure on interest rates. Therefore, if the Government drop their unrealistic target of balancing the budget over the medium term in favour of a savings target, we could have a credible package of non-inflationary fiscal policies which would allow the public and private sectors to collaborate in getting us out of the recession that we all want to end as soon as possible.

We accept that there will be a long haul and that constraints will be imposed on us by the international economic framework, but we do not accept that the Government can do nothing new to put forward a package to the country and show us a way out of the recession at home. The speech by the President of the Board of Trade contained no indication of new thinking nor of any commitment by the Government to reduce unemployment or seriously end the recession. The Government's position is not a policy to end the recession; it is an abdication of responsibility by a Government who have a responsibility to do something about it.

5.36 pm

Mr. Warren Hawksley (Halesowen and Stourbridge): I shall respect the wishes of Madam Speaker, who has called for hon. Members to be brief, as many hon. Members wish to speak. As a retread, I have an advantage in paying tribute to my predecessor, Sir John Stokes, in that I have seen him in the House. During his years in the House he commanded great respect from all hon. Members. In the constituency he increased his majority, which is something that we all hope to do. He began by winning the former Labour seat of Oldbury and Halesowen in 1970, and by the time he fought his last election in 1987—admittedly with some help from the boundary commission—he had built a majority of more than 13,000. Hon. Members can appreciate how popular he was with the electorate.

It is probably in the House and in the country at large that Sir John was even more respected. He was one of the characters of the period. There are fewer characters in the House than there used to be, and he was certainly one of them. I like the description that I read of him as

"a traditional right-winger and superpatriot."

That just about covers his expertise on many issues, although I rather liked the comment of Andrew Alexander, who described him as

"the most amiable of hangers."

Having last year been chairman of the national campaign for capital punishment, I feel that, to a certain extent, I am following in his footsteps, and that is a great pleasure.

History could have been changed if, in 1937, by the time Sir John was already president of the monarchist society, he had been slightly more successful in the election for the presidency of the Oxford University Conservative Association. He lost that election by seven votes. The person who won is now the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). How history might have changed had Sir John won that battle many years ago.

I rather like to describe my constituency, similarly to my previous constituency of The Wrekin, as very mixed. It has many commuters. It has old and new industries. It is typical of many west midlands constituencies. It was interesting to read Sir John's maiden speech in 1970, in which he made two particular points about his constituency as he saw it. The first was the need for further reconstruction. The second was the problem of roads. I regret to say that 22 years on, despite the actions of successive Governments, my constituency still has the same needs.

Until last May we had a Labour council. It refused even to tackle the problems created on the roads by the Merryhill shopping centre—one of the largest in Europe. The council was not prepared to provide the necessary infrastructure and put decent roads into the area. Within weeks of the Conservative council taking office, the plans to build new roads had been resurrected and put into the transport programme which will be sent to the Minister shortly.

The council has now also encouraged a bid for City Challenge. We are one of the candidates to be considered by the Department of the Environment shortly. Now that we have a prudent Conservative authority, it should be successful in that bid. The money would be the pump priming that the Government should provide. I do not believe that the Government should necessarily have responsibility for putting large sums of money into the economy.

The Opposition motion drags up all the ills that it could possibly find in the economy. But it fails to consider one of the most important aspects of the recession—that it is not home made. How do the Opposition explain the fact that socialist Governments elsewhere are suffering from the recession? They do not try to do so.

The problems of the economy were demonstrated by the comments of one of my constituents whom I met just before the election. He is in heavy industry and exports 60 per cent. of his products around the world. He has been exporting for about 40 years. He said that this was the first recession in which all his markets were down at the same time. Previously, if the British market did not do well, one of his export markets, either Europe, Australasia or the far east, was still fairly successful. This time he found for the first time that none of his markets was providing a demand for his items.

The west midlands has suffered more than most areas during the present recession. We have the fastest rising level of unemployment. Our output has fallen more than that of other regions. But we have some advantages. Our labour costs are lower than in many other areas—70 per cent. lower than in Germany. Our production costs are 20 per cent. lower than those in Germany.

You may ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I want for my constituency from the Government and the Department of Trade and Industry. I do not want them to throw money at the problem. I do not believe that that would help. They should ensure that we control inflation and maintain our greatly improved industrial relations. The Opposition would have us believe that industrial relations have improved by accident. But that is not the case. Last year

[Mr. Warren Hawksley]

we lost the fewest working days through strikes since records began over 100 years ago. That has happened not by accident but as a result of Government policies since we have been in office.

On Friday my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade proposed a revamp of the Department of Trade and Industry. He was right to offer services to more people. People need expertise, advice and help and it should be easily available. After I lost my seat in The Wrekin five years ago I set up a hotel with my wife and continue to run it with her. We experienced the problems of commerce and of running a business. That helped me considerably in the period that I was out of the House.

We developed a derelict ruin into a hotel and restaurant which within two years got into the "Good Food Guide". We needed Government help and we received it in two ways. It was pump-priming help. We were entitled to enterprise allowance. That was one method of helping us over the initial few weeks and months. The second form of help was from the Welsh tourist board. We received section 4 help, which unfortunately is not available in England. I know that people in tourism hope that consideration will be given to reintroducing that help as a pump-priming exercise in England. It can and should be means tested and given to those who have the greatest need for it. That is the way in which the Government could give more help.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) rightly pinpointed interest rates. As one who borrowed to set up a business, I know that the current level of interest rates, although considerably lower than it has been, discourages the development of industry and in particular small and middle-sized companies. We must not let the European exchange rate mechanism stop us from doing what we believe is best for British industry.

It is no coincidence that within weeks of the general election result people started to believe that confidence and enthusiasm were returning to industry. That happened because the alternative frightened industry. The feeling that things were beginning to get better was highlighted in the west midlands not only by engineering employers, whose business trends were the most encouraging since November 1989, but in the west midlands business survey carried out by the Wolverhampton Business school in conjunction with the Warwick Business school and Price Waterhouse. It received encouraging responses. However, both the survey and the report from the engineering employers said that it was early days and that expectations might be clouded by the euphoria caused by the Conservative Government being returned in the general election.

I wish to highlight a few points from the west midlands business survey. The survey was completed in May 1992. The forecasts that firms made for the next six months were, indeed, the best that they had made for sime time: 66 per cent. expected sales to increase; 33 per cent. expected employment to increase; 66 per cent. believed that general business conditions in the west midlands would improve.

I notice that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) is not in his place. He interrupted earlier to make a comment about interest rates. It was interesting that a report by a body in Wolverhampton said:

> "Continuing the low rate of inflation has taken over from lower interest rates as the most important factor leading to improvements in general business prospects".

That is important. That is why the Government are right to move slowly. If the Government became involved and did too much there would be a great danger that the economy would move forward too fast. It has overheated before. A slow movement out of recession would be more desirable than the Government forcing a faster movement.

I look forward to supporting the Government's amendment tonight and voting against the Labour party's motion, which offers no hope for Britain and should be rejected.

5.48 pm

Mr. Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): I have two things in common with the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley). This is my maiden speech and, like the hon. Gentleman who said that he met somebody who worked in heavy industry, five weeks ago, I also met somebody who had a job. I do not intend to answer the points made by the President of the Board of Trade, but when he slipped up and spoke of experts, instead of exports, going up by 5 per cent. I thought that that could only be receivers and bailiffs.

I begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Patrick Ground QC, about whom I heard nothing but good from the electorate during the election campaign. His party should be grateful to him because he fought Feltham and Heston three times before winning it in 1983 and he doubled his majority in 1987. It was no fault of his that he lost it this time. He is a most honourable and likeable man. I should like also to refer to his predecessor, Russell Kerr, many of whose colleagues are still Members of Parliament. Russell was known for his sense of fun and his dedication to his principles and ideals. He will never be forgotten.

This is not the first time that I have worked in Whitehall. I felt nostalgic when I came here in April because I first came here in 1960 at the invitation of Her Majesty the Queen as I was serving in the armed forces. I must have been more important than I am now because I got a desk and an office on my first day. I shared it with seven others, but it had three windows looking out on Whitehall and two into a yard on Horseguards. Two soldiers on horses guarded me every day. My career has gradually slipped away since those days, but the compensation is that I have been told that now that I am a Member of Parliament I cannot go any lower—unless I cross the Floor of the House.

This debate is a suitable one in which to make my maiden speech because, like many working people, I have been affected by the economic and industrial policy. No doubt some hon. Members would like to know how it is that somebody who was born in Lewisham in south-east London and who has lived near Heathrow for 30 years should speak with such an obviously Middlesbrough accent. The answer goes back 70 years. My mother, who started work at 14, found, at the age of 16, that there was no work for her. She was forced to come to London where she worked as a servant for many years. She told me many times about the difficulties of coping with personal problems so far away from family and close friends. In one of those crises, she took me, aged three weeks, back to Middlesbrough. I am proud to have spent my childhood, school days and the beginning of my working life on Teesside. That was one generation.

When I finished my Army service in 1963, I also found that, in order to get satisfactory work, I had to stay in the south. I worked in Brentford and settled in Feltham. That is two generations. People may say that things must be better today, but if one wants to see the third generation, one has only to go into the pubs in the west end and listen to the accents on both sides of the bar. One will hear Geordies, Scots, the Welsh—people from all the regions in the United Kingdom. They are here because they cannot get jobs in their home towns. They are the lucky ones. If one goes a short distance further, down Kingsway and the Strand and the Embankment, one will see hundreds who have no jobs, no homes, no hope, no future. I do not know what sort of country we are and what sort of House it is that allows that to happen.

The regions are used to high unemployment, but the ratio of jobs to the unemployed in Feltham and Heston is now worse than it is in Newcastle, Sunderland, Middlesbrough and even Jarrow. Youth unemployment in Feltham increased by 145 per cent. last year. Unemployment has gone up by almost 200 per cent. in the past two years. Unemployment in London is higher than the national average for the first time. I do not know what will be done to put that right.

When I first worked in Brentford in 1963, on what was known as the Golden Mile, west London had a flourishing engineering industry, renowned throughout the country. When Trico finally moves away from Brentford in a few months' time, there will be not one major manufacturer left on that Golden Mile. Watneys in Isleworth closed its gates last Friday and called time for the last time. That is gone—a place where fathers and sons worked together, with grandfathers before them. In Heston, Fairey Engineering, one of the premier high-tech companies, closed its gates a few months ago, leaving a highly skilled work force searching for jobs in a non-existent manufacturing centre. In Feltham, the Hecta engineering training centre which once had 250 people passing through at the same time now has only 40 and its future is in great jeopardy. Something must be done.

Of course we want international trade and are pleased by the number of international headquarters buildings in Hounslow, attracted there by Heathrow airport. The people to whom I talk want to have again the pride of being able to buy British goods in British shops. We must do something about that. I do not know what has happened in the past 10 years. I do not know what the policies are, nor what action will get the manufacturing industries producing again. I do not know where the investment incentives are to assist our manufacturing companies to modernise and lay down new plant and equipment.

Feltham is proud of Heathrow airport and the jobs that it brings, but we pay a heavy price in pollution, noise, traffic jams and one of the highest accident rates in the country. Sadly, the people of Feltham and Heston are telling me that they do not mind about the noise at Heathrow, they want all the expansion that is possible so that they can have jobs and keep their houses. Let me make it clear to those in the pleasant areas of Barnes, Putney, Richmond, Twickenham and Chiswick that they will have to do something about the recession or, while they may not suffer in their pockets, they may soon be suffering in their ears.

It is clear from what I am saying that we need a partnership between industry and Government. We need long-term planning and, in the air transport industry, international planning. We do not want a planning application for the expansion of Heathrow to be put in as soon as the furore over the last one has died down. There must be long-term planning.

The British people have seen enough of this free-for-all. Yes, we want efficiency, and we understand that it is necessary to have competition which forces management to greater cost cutting and efficiency. This can be achieved whilst at the same time retaining sensible public control over major decisions to ensure responsible environmental policies. I do not advocate interference on a day-to-day or even week-to-week basis with management. However, the public are beginning to demand they be involved in making decisions in such mammoth organisations. It is possible to compete in the hot house of free enterprise while still being democratic.

Worker co-operatives throughout the country survive, sometimes perhaps with difficulty, in competition with private firms. That happens not just at the small end of industry; look, for example, at the Co-operative movement. It has a turnover exceeding £10 billion, more than 133,000 staff and policies of healthy food, responsible animal farming and ethical investment. Competitive edge and democracy go hand in hand. Compare that with Thames Water, which operates with no competition, no democracy and no choice for the public. It has only high salary increases for those at the top, high price increases for the users, and, at £50,000, a large sum for the Conservative party. The British expect and deserve much better than that.

5.58 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): Thank you for calling me to make my maiden speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before doing so, I must pay tribute to the maiden speech by the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen). It demonstrated a wit and eloquence that I hope that we shall hear often in the House. I hope that his broad experience is available in the House on many future occasions so that we can benefit from it.

I know that it is customary for one to refer in a maiden speech to the traditions of one's constituency and to one's predecessors. As a new Member of Parliament for a new seat in a new town, I am struggling somewhat on predecessors, history and tradition.

The part of Buckinghamshire in which Milton Keynes, South-West lies has had many varied and distinguished Members of Parliament over the centuries, ranging from Disraeli to Robert Maxwell. Milton Keynes itself, however, has had only one Member of Parliament and that was Bill Benyon. I know from my work in the constituency of the high regard in which he was held. Both in the House and among local people he was seen as an example of what a good constituency Member of Parliament should be. No case or no problem was too small for him. During my time as a prospective parliamentary candidate and since, I have met many people who have been helped or who know somebody who has been helped by him. Over the years I shall aspire to maintaining his record.

The Milton Keynes constituency does not have a great deal of history. The ancient road of Watling street runs directly through it and many armies on the march have traversed that road. Indeed, it is believed that Boadicea

[Mr. Barry Legg]

was defeated by Suetonius within the environs of my constituency. My constituency may be able to lay claim to having had the biggest bloodbath in British history.

Although the history and traditions of the constituency are somewhat light, I have the advantage of representing a constituency that is a microcosm of Britain today. The employment and industrial structures of Milton Keynes closely mirror the national employment and industrial structures. More than 70 per cent. of employment is in the service industries. That should be borne in mind when we listen, as we often do, to Opposition proposals that centre on subsidies and assistance to manufacturing industry only. A large number of small businesses exist in my constituency. More than 65 per cent. of all businesses are small with 20 or fewer employees. During the past 13 years, those businesses have grown and done extremely well because of the Government's measures to help small businesses grow and to provide employment.

I have good news for the House this evening: during the past few months, unemployment in Milton Keynes has been falling. Previously, as in most parts of the country, the level rose, but to nowhere near the level in the early 1980s. Throughout the 1980s, Milton Keynes and many towns and cities like it developed a stronger, much better balanced economy. As a result, unemployment is falling; in Milton Keynes, it is below the regional and national averages.

Many overseas companies have invested in Milton Keynes, often from the traditional areas of the United States, Germany and France. However, some of the newer overseas businesses are coming from areas such as South Korea. That shows where there is strength in the global economy: in the Pacific rim and the co-called dragon economies. Growth rates are much higher there than anywhere in western Europe.

Earlier in the debate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) gave us growth rates in western Europe and described how Britain's rates ranged against them. During the past 10 years, growth rates have been low in Germany and strong in the far east. We must ask ourselves why that is the case. The answers are straightforward. Those far east economies are highly deregulated and have low levels of taxation. No far east economy is trying to impose a social chapter, to reduce the working week to 48 hours or to seek a four-week minimum holiday period; nor is it believed that the already excellent levels of economic growth can be improved by a single currency.

The years of the German economic miracle have gone. Recent economic developments there mean that we shall not see a resurgence in growth such as Germany experienced in the 1950s and 1960s. The level of social provision has increased and a minimum wage has been imposed in the eastern part of Germany as part of the process of unification. Because of that, and because of the inaccurate conversion of the east German currency to equal the west German currency, we will see low levels of growth in Germany throughout the 1990s. That will have adverse consequences for the rest of western Europe.

Britain can learn from some aspects of the German economy, especially from the control of inflation. I greatly admire the way in which the Bundesbank has consistently controlled inflation. When its president, Professor Schlesinger, visited this country last year and spoke to the London chamber of commerce on 21 June, he set out how Germany had managed to keep its inflation low during the previous 20 years. His recipe was setting and adhering to broad monetary targets. That is what produced low inflation in Germany.

In 1986 and 1987, broad monetary indicators here, in the form of sterling M4, were growing at 15 per cent. At that time, conventional opinions, by the Treasury and the Bank of England, were that the figure had little meaning and was a side-effect of financial deregulation. However, some economists warned that 15 per cent. monetary expansion meant that we were getting into serious economic difficulties, with rising inflation and an overheated economy. In retrospect, we can all see that they got it absolutely right.

Monetary aggregates are now growing at their slowest rate since the 1950s. Broad money, sterling M4, is growing at 5 per cent. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), I believe that the present risks in the British economy are all on the down side and that we are more likely to face further deflation than further inflation unless we take significant action to ease monetary policy.

Public expenditure is the other area in which our economic policies may be somewhat out of balance. It is some time since the Treasury has forecast the likely levels of the public sector borrowing requirement and public expenditure, but the independent private sector is producing many forecasts which are extremely worrying. They show, for example, that the PSBR for 1993-94 may be of the order of £40 billion. That would be well beyond any convergence criteria laid down in the Maastricht treaty. Our borrowing requirement would be some 6 to 7 per cent. of GDP.

I welcome the Government's commitment in their amendment to firm control of public expenditure. Public expenditure provision for 1993-94 allows for an 8 per cent. increase. If we are to believe newspaper reports that there are bids on the table to add a further £15 billion to £16 billion to that already ample provision, Ministers will face a great deal of work during the recess to bring that side of our economy back into balance. I wish them well in their efforts.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) did not seem to be at all concerned about an expanding PSBR and thought that it could continue to expand because of the small national debt. I doubt that that is the case, especially when our financial policies provide for full funding of that deficit. Expanding the borrowing requirement further will not stimulate the economy.

All Conservative Members are committed to firm control of public expenditure and low taxation. Those have been the central principles of Government since 1979, and our policy of low taxation was one of the central reasons for a Conservative Government being returned for a fourth term. I hope that we shall continue vigorously to pursue our policies and to control public expenditure as firmly as possible. I hope that we shall maintain our commitment to low taxation, because that will deliver economic growth to the private sector and ensure that the Government are re-elected for a fifth term.

6.10 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): It is a privilege to follow three maiden speeches. In accordance with custom, I am pleased to congratulate all three hon. Members on their fluency. I am also pleased that the tradition of completely anodyne and bland maiden speeches seems to be dying. None of the three hon. Members was afraid to make telling and hard-hitting points, and I welcome that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen) endeared himself to me by his complimentary reference to Russell Kerr. Many hon. Members and many people in the Labour movement remember the good work carried out for us by Russell and Anne Kerr. I was taken by not only my hon. Friend's wit, which has already been commented upon, but the coherence of his vision of what the House should be about. I welcome him and look forward to hearing many more of his speeches.

Obviously, I have much less in common with Conservative Members. However, in common with the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley), I had to make a second maiden speech. It is a bit strange to make a speech as what might be called an experienced maiden, which is something of a contradiction in terms. The hon. Gentleman's analysis of the west midlands was interesting. He spoke about the terrible fall in the economic standing of the area and described what he called an advantage, low wages. Whether low wages are an advantage depends of one's point of view, and many of the hon. Gentleman's constituents would not think it much of an advantage.

I have not often visited the constituency of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) although I pass through it all too often on my way to the House. The hon. Gentleman spoke about Boadicea. That reminded me that I once went to Milton Keynes to address what might be called a counter-meeting, a fringe meeting at the opening by Mrs. Thatcher of an impressive shopping centre. One of the aims of the counter-meeting was to draw attention to the deficiencies of the ambulance service in the area. I hope that there is now a better service to match the handsome shopping centre.

The President of the Board of Trade engaged in a peculiar exercise in logic when he admitted that we were in a recession but that it was not our fault because the whole world was in recession. Later, he took us on a world tour to prove that the rest of the world was following the same policies as those of his Government. He said that the whole world was in a mess but as the rest of the world was doing what this Government were doing, the Government would continue to do it. That is not a very impressive exhibition of logic, because if the rest of the world is in a mess by doing what we are doing, we should be searching for something else to do. I should like to suggest one or two options.

I am not surprised at the President of the Board of Trade's admission that we are in recession, because in the past six months more than 236 businesses have collapsed every working day. The gap between north and south is increasing, with all the consequences for social cohesion. The GDP gap per head in the north-west compared with the south-east, excluding Greater London, rose from 10·3 per cent. in 1979 to 19·8 per cent. in 1990. There is zero growth in manufacturing. There is a high savings rate, not because people are happy with their lot and have no wish to spend but because they fear for the future. Retail sales are flat, not least because of the high savings rate. The CBI estimates that there was a fall in investment of 19·5 per cent. between 1989 and 1992. It is not surprising that the President of the Board of Trade had no alternative but to admit that we were in recession.

It is not only Labour Members who think that the Government have some responsibility for the recession. Roger Humber, the director of the House Builders Federation, says in the federation's latest journal:

> "The economy is overhung by high . . . interest rates . . . an exchange rate fixed by ERM against the D-Mark which few can now find credible, . . . Despite this, the Chancellor tells us there is no prospect of cuts in interest rates nor of any devaluation within ERM to facilitate such cuts.
>
> And yet, more and more voices are being raised asking what is being achieved by such policies. We approach three million unemployed. Retail spending is not rising . . . Industry will not invest when faced with these interest rates and, in any event, the banks now won't and can't lend, as their liquidity is seriously threatened by the collapse of Olympia and York, . . . It is difficult, therefore, to see what current policies are achieving, when they will lead to success or what the measure of that success will be."

The director of the House Builders Federation is absolutely right. The spectrum of opinion that he represents shows that not only Labour Members are worried and fearful about the situation into which the Government are getting us.

I come from and represent Preston but do not need to deliver a "come to sunny Preston" speech because this is not my maiden speech. However, every time I speak in the House I remember my constituency and try to represent it. We in Preston are alarmed about several matters. We are alarmed about the situation facing British Aerospace. We are alarmed about the European fighter aircraft. I believe that money spent on defence should be spent in this country to save jobs in this country, and should be spent on defensive defence. I put a fighter aircraft in that category and I want the EFA to be supported.

It is a disgrace, however, that we in this country depend to such an extent on the narrow technological base of the defence industry. We depend on it not only in my district but in the country at large. The Germans can consider what they should do about the EFA in the light of all the circumstances, as they see them, because they operate from a much wider manufacturing base than we do. We depend so much on one sort of industry that we are constantly in danger.

Although I support the EFA project, I do not believe that, in the long term, it is sensible to earn one's living by depending on the arms industry and arms exports. I worry about that, and believe that it is the Government's responsibility as well as that of British Aerospace to widen this country's technological base. We should have been talking about diversification in the arms sector a long time ago.

Nevertheless, Preston still has other industries. GEC makes trains, at least when there are any trains to make, which is not very often. We have heard much from the Government about how it would be wrong to throw public money about. However, they throw public money about when they fail to act to reduce the need to pay unemployment benefit. That is a waste of public money which could be better utilised helping to provide jobs for those who need them.

The Government huff, puff, bluff and fudge around the Jubilee line, the prospects for which have been damaged by what has happened at Canary Wharf. They should have

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pump-primed with £40 million to extend the Jubilee line, to create 3,000 construction jobs in London and a great many jobs in manufacturing elsewhere. I hope that jobs will be created in Preston when trains are needed for the extended line. However, instead of doing that, the Government prefer to engage in a game of bluff with the private sector and do not care that people will be laid off instead of engaged in constructive work on a project that is all set to begin.

I would be more impressed by the Government's attitude towards the recession if they showed any sign of forming a coherent approach to industrial, economic and financial policy to enable people to be usefully employed. Such a policy would be perfectly possible. A Government who say that they can do nothing, and claim that it is a world disease, should not have run for office. If they can do nothing, what are they doing in government?

The President of the Board of Trade said that industry should become more competitive. That is an insult to many of our working and skilled people, and to some managements. GEC gained a Queen's award for exports, has splendid quality control systems and produces a good range of products, second to none. It needs a shop window, and orders to be placed in this country by London Transport and British Rail. Without those factors, Government talk of international competitiveness is merely so much hot air.

I am not impressed by the sort of society that the Government are building. I can give an illustration to show the way in which the Government and their privatisation polices are taking us. I have recently learnt that North West Water in my constituency, which has paid massive increases to its top officers, is trying to make customers pay their bills. That is fine—I think that people should pay their bills. But, if a customer is not on the telephone and cannot be telephoned directly, one of the techniques used by North West Water to try to contact its customer is to telephone his or her neighbours. That shows the sort of society in which we live.

Water supplies are being disconnected and neighbours are being telephoned by North West Water in efforts to chivvy customers into paying their bills. I believe that most, if not all, of the customers will not pay, not because they do not want their water supply disconnected but because they cannot pay. They cannot pay because our society is becoming increasingly impoverished.

The amendment tabled by the Prime Minister mentions the long term. In the long term we are all dead and, at the rate the Government are going, so is the British economy.

6.27 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): It is with great pleasure that, in this my maiden speech, I follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), whose views I have long held in great regard. It is also a pleasure to follow my hon. Friends the Members for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) and for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) and the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen), all of whom made excellent maiden speeches and made my task considerably more difficult.

As this is the first time that I have spoken in the Chamber it is only right that my first act should be to pay tribute to my predecessor, Lord Wakeham. For 17 years John Wakeham represented, first, the constituency of Maldon and Rochford, and then my constituency of Colchester, South and Maldon. He did so with enormous distinction in a way that won him friends throughout the area. I have lost count of the number of people who have come up to me in the past year and told me that I have a hard act to follow. But I have never doubted that they were absolutely right.

In this place, John Wakeham was perhaps better known for his role in Government. He is one of that dwindling band who joined the Government in May 1979 and has remained a member of it ever since. In that time, he has held an enormous variety of positions, but he will be best remembered for his time as Chief Whip when he set a standard against which all his successors are likely to be judged. He once described himself as the Minister for stopping the Government doing silly things. It is a cause of great pleasure to my constituents and all Government supporters that he is still in the Cabinet and still fulfilling that role.

In 1984 John Wakeham suffered severe injuries in the bombing of the Grand hotel at Brighton, which also caused the death of his first wife. I am sure that no one in the House who witnessed it will forget the moment when a few months later he walked back into the Chamber unaided. I remember listening to that event on the radio, and in particular the reception that he was given by hon. Members. It was a tribute to his remarkable courage—a courage that he has displayed every day since that terrible event.

I should also like to mention some of my other predecessors. Before 1983, the Colchester part of my constituency was ably represented by Sir Antony Buck and, before him, by Lord Alport, to both of whom my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) paid deserved tribute. Previous Members of Parliament for Maldon include Brian Harrison, who now lives in Australia but is still a regular visitor to the district. It was also once represented by Tom Driberg, who will be remembered as one of the more colourful Members of Parliament. Earlier still the constituency was represented by Mr. Quintin Dick, who is said to have spent more than any other hon. Member on bribery at parliamentary elections. I shall not follow his example, even if we do receive increased allowances for our office expenses.

My constituency stretches from the southern part of Colchester to take in the whole of the Maldon district. It is an area rich in history. Colchester was the first Roman capital of England and is Britain's oldest recorded town. At the end of the Dengie peninsula, at Bradwell, is the chapel of St. Peter-on-the-Wall—one of the first Christian churches in England. It is just a short distance from Bradwell power station—the first Magnox nuclear power station to be built in Britain.

Maldon itself was made a royal borough in 1171, and almost 200 years earlier was the subject of repeated assaults by invading Danes. The battle of Maldon in 991, in which the great Saxon leader Bryhtnoth was slain, inspired a famous Anglo-Saxon poem. Last year, the battle was re-enacted as part of the millennium celebrations. The House will be glad to learn that my constituents now regard the Danes in a much friendlier light.

The recession has hit my constituents hard. The Colchester Lathe Company has announced its intention to cease production, light industrial companies throughout

Essex have shed labour, and retailers, small business men, and the construction industry continue to suffer from lack of demand.

Confidence among Essex business men remains low. I am frequently asked what are the Government doing to bring about an upturn. I have always replied that it is not in the Government's power to conjure up recovery. Only business can create lasting jobs, and it is the Government's duty to create the right climate in which enterprise can flourish.

Having spent almost three years as special adviser to three of my right hon. Friend's predecessors as President of the Board of Trade, I read with interest his proposals to reorganise the Department of Trade and Industry. I welcome in particular his efforts to improve communications between that Department and industry and to reduce further the regulatory burdens on business.

However, the key to recovery lies more with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As I said, it is primarily for the Government to create the economic conditions in which recovery can take place. In the words of my right hon. Friend's amendment, that can best be done by controlling public spending, reducing taxation, relieving business of burdens, and, above all, getting inflation down. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on his success in achieving that aim, and agree that nothing must be done to jeopardise the progress made so far. I hope, however, that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will take the earliest possible opportunity to reduce interest rates again. With inflation falling, the real level of interest rates is actually rising, which is adding to the difficulties facing my constituents.

I hope also that when interest rates fall again, that will be reflected in the rates charged by banks to small business men. I am concerned that too often they tell me that, despite the nine reductions in interest rates, the interest on their loans has not fallen accordingly—or that they have had to pay more in other charges.

The other essential requirement for recovery is continued control of public expenditure. In that, I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West. It is understandable at a time of recession that the public sector borrowing requirement will increase. Although it is higher than I would like, I am reassured that it is less than the average under the last Government, and that it is this Government's intention to restore it to balance in the medium term. That will not be easy. It will require my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, like Ulysses, to lash himself to the mast and to fill his colleagues' ears with wax so that they do not succumb to the siren voices in favour of higher public spending.

If my right hon. Friend does that, and if the proportion of our gross domestic product taken by public expenditure can once again be reduced, allowing industry and the public to keep still more of the wealth that they create, then I am confident that, as the recovery gathers pace, the future for commerce and industry in my constituency and throughout the country will be bright.

6.34 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): I congratulate the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) on his impressive and sincere maiden speech. We all concur with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about his predecessor, and remember the moving occasion on which he first returned to the House after the horrific incident to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I have no doubt that we will hear a lot more about the hon. Gentleman's constituency. However, he need not concern himself about the Chief Secretary to the Treasury having to lash himself to the mast—many others will be doing that in the not-too-distant future. Nevertheless, I welcome the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon to the House, and no doubt he will contribute to many debates in years to come.

It was interesting to hear the President of the Board of Trade admit that Britain is suffering the worst recession since the second world war. Unfortunately, he did not produce many solutions for tackling it. The right hon. Gentleman said that the House ought to consider the recession itself, the practical options available to the Government, and the world context. The depth of the recession has been highlighted by right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. The seriousness of the situation emphasises the lack of Government foresight. Many of the people who watch this debate or who read it in *Hansard* will feel concern about the lack of Government initiatives.

I can offer the right hon. Gentleman practical options not only in terms of action taken centrally by his Department but regionally. If only the Government were prepared to give effect to subsidiarity in its true sense. We have heard from Government Members about monetary control but little about the real economy. There are many in the country who seriously want to tackle that aspect. In my own area, they include industrialists, academic institutions, local authorities, trade unions, and local communities. After surviving the recession of the early 1980s, which destroyed much of our manufacturing base, industry in my region became leaner and fitter, but in the current recession those enterprises risk going to the wall. That is true of many of the country's other industrial areas.

I hope that the President of the Board of Trade will in the first instance consider public expenditure. Expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Defence, and Department of Transport in the south-east of England is £546 per head of population, whereas it is only £248 in the north. At a time when resources are scarce, there ought to be more equity in the way that they are distributed.

Many parts of the United Kingdom attempting to grapple with the serious problems that confront them receive little support from central Government. Last Friday's announcement about the streamlining of the DTI is itself welcome, but in terms of overcoming regional problems it will offer few, if any, advantages. Although people may argue in the macro sense about interest rates —and the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) made a compelling argument, which I hope is taken on board—the exchange rate mechanism and the City's short-termism should also be considered.

The Government could do much to assist the entrepreneurial spirit in the regions, and to create a climate in which that spirit can operate, without necessarily creating a climate of intervention, or adopting a hands-on approach. The DTI should give serious consideration to the partnerships that are developing in the regions, thus enabling them to operate more effectively and to initiate their plans for local economies. The Government and, in

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particular, the DTI are obstructing and stifling the development of ideas in regions. It was, I believe, the Audit Commission that described the DTI's actions as a programme overload in a strategic vacuum.

I trust that I have spoken briefly, although Front-Bench Members are looking daggers at me. Let me conclude by expressing the hope that, as the Secretary of State travels around the country, he will take seriously, in an entirely non-partisan way, the ideas that are currently being expressed. People are genuinely trying to work in partnership, and to ensure that the industrial base—the real economy—gets back into first gear. I hope that, when considering further reforms of his Department, the right hon. Gentleman will take that on board. His record and his writings lean in such a direction, and I hope that he has the guts and the determination to make certain that his wishes are carried out by the Department.

6.41 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) that, at this point in the calendar of the parliamentary Labour party, Front-Bench Members do not look daggers at anyone.

The motion has given rise to a good debate in the short time available. We have heard some eloquent maiden speeches from the hon. Members for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) and for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), and a "return maiden speech" from the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley). We also heard an excellent speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen), who was generous in his praise of his predecessors in both parties, and showed great understanding of the problems that face industry and those who work in it. Middlesbrough's loss is Feltham's gain, and long may it remain so. We also heard interesting speeches from the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), for Preston (Mrs. Wise) and for Sheffield, Central.

In a speech of the highest quality, my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) outlined the case for an industrial policy. In the speech that followed it, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) admitted that the present recession was the deepest that the country had experienced since the war. I do not know whether that was a boast or a complaint, but it was significant that the right hon. Gentleman should make comparisons with Malaysia and Poland rather than comparing Britain with the great nations of Germany and the United States, as he might have done in the past.

People in this country know that unemployment has now reached 2·6 million and has been rising for 24 consecutive months—a tragedy that has caused deprivation and hardship in all walks of life and all regions of the country. In my own region, north-east England, 153,000 people are now out of work; most alarming of all, 35 per cent. of all manufacturing jobs have been lost between 1979 and 1992. Output is now below the 1988 level, and —if this morning's forecast by Ernst and Young is correct —the 2·6 per cent. fall in output in 1991 will be followed in 1992 by a further fall of 0·6 per cent.

Manufacturing output has fallen for seven consecutive quarters. Business failures were up by 32 per cent. in the first six months of this year, and mortgage repossessions were at an all-time high. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will know of the pain and hardship that that has caused families throughout the country, because of the increasing number of people who have come to their surgeries to complain.

Most critical of all at this time of deep recession is our serious trade deficit. Is not that the most telling statistic of all? More successful industrial economies with stronger manufacturing bases show, at the very least, a major improvement in their balance of trade at a time of recession, and many run a trade surplus as the demand for imports falls; yet, after two years of deep recession, the British economy now has a projected deficit of £10 billion for 1992.

I take issue with the right hon. Member for Henley on two points. First, he said—if I understood him correctly —that the world recession has been a major contribution to Britain's difficulty in achieving recovery by means of an export drive. The right hon. Gentleman has missed the point. As Britain was in recession first, we should still have been able to increase our exports more than we did before other countries, in Europe and elsewhere, went into recession. The right hon. Gentleman would do well to face up to the fact that our real problem is our lack of supply-side competitiveness: that is what has prevented us from improving our balance of trade.

Secondly, I believe that the right hon. Gentleman was both wrong and complacent in saying what he did about world trade in manufactured exports. Britain's position improved under a Labour Government: its share rose from 7·4 per cent. in 1974 to 7·9 per cent. in 1979, and subsequently fell to 6·4 per cent. in 1990 under a Conservative Government. That is a telling statistic.

Does not our trade deficit tell us, very sharply, that our industrial base is so weak that we cannot even meet our domestic demand for many industrial products? Does it not tell us that there has been no supply-side miracle—that we still have all the problems of under-investment, lack of training, lack of export assistance and inadequate infrastructure? Most damaging of all, does it not tell us that any upturn in the economy—and we all want an upturn—is likely to be halted quickly when a further surge in imports of industrial products that we can no longer produce leads to more balance-of-payments problems, and they in turn lead to a further policy of deflation in an effort to control inflationary pressures in the economy and to hold the currency?

In the past, the right hon. Gentleman has acknowledged the formidable nature of the task faced by British industry. I want to be fair to him: he has been recognised by hon. Members on both sides of the House as a man with the courage to face up to the nation's problems. He has shown courage in Cabinet—not to be dismissed lightly just because it was a little over-focused on the question of helicopters. He has shown courage in the wilderness, displaying enormous fortitude in the dark ages of 1985-86 and carrying his message to countless dimly lit church halls and civic centres. He was then in competition with Jeffrey Archer in the great battle of the chicken-leg suppers. The right hon. Gentleman's publisher has told me, with some

chagrin, that, although the right hon. Gentleman may have edged ahead in the battle of the chicken legs, he could not match the about-to-be-ennobled Jeffrey Archer in the battle of the autographed paperbacks.

The right hon. Gentleman showed courage in his comeback. When he realised that he needed a new legend, he cried from the same dimly lit church halls, "You Margaret, me thinker." Where is that thinking now? Where is the thinking that was contained in the book that the right hon. Genlteman published in those dark, dark ages? Where are the strategies, the policies and the measures to help industry? Where is the firm action to rebuild our industrial base? Where is the right hon. Gentleman's British solution now? Surely he does not claim that the shuffle of desks announced on Friday addresses the issues that he identified previously.

Industrialists—people who work in industry and have experienced the damage done to their businesses and jobs —want to know when the President of the Board of Trade will preside. When will he preside over tax allowances to help companies to invest in new equipment? When will he preside over the establishment of an English development agency, to which he was previously committed? When will he preside over the establishment, or rather re-establishment, of a body like the National Economic Development Office, which could provide a real forum for partnership discussions—where industry and the world of science and technology could sit down independently to discuss Britain's problems with Government, and to tackle the problems of competitiveness, market share and export potential? Does the Secretary of State support the need for a body such as the National Economic Development Office, or is he caught up in the same revenge or the same spite as the Treasury which, rather than deal with the problems that have been thrown up by the NEDO reports, has sought to shoot the messenger?

Many people have lost their businesses and jobs as a result of the recession. Both those who have lost their jobs and those who still struggle to provide the nation's wealth know that further damage to industry could still be caused by present policies. They know that lack of investment has often left their businesses and jobs uncompetitive; they know that there has been no supply-side miracle in the economy; they know that industrialists abroad get real support from their Governments to help them undertake research and development, invest in new equipment, and make sure that the work force is highly skilled.

Our industry could have the same support, but that will demand honesty by the Government about the difficulties that industry faces. It will demand determination by the Secretary of State to build a partnership with industry to meet the challenges of the 1990s and genuinely to modernise the supply side of our economy. It will demand policies to avoid another plunge into further recession. It will demand that the Secretary of State does not timidly serve his parole in Cabinet in permanent hock to the post-Thatcherites in the Treasury. These are reasonable and realistic demands. The House should support them.

6.51 pm

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): This has been an important debate, for three reasons. First, it has given the House an opportunity to hear some fine maiden speeches. Secondly, it has provided a constant reminder to us of the importance of controlling inflation. The control of inflation is the key to sustainable economic recovery and to international competitiveness. Thirdly, it has provided us with some indication of the ideas—or perhaps I should say lack of them—of the Labour party on industry.

I pay tribute to the excellent maiden speakers. My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) will perhaps forgive me if I include him among them. We welcome him back to the House. I particularly appreciated his tribute to his predecessor. The hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen) also paid a nice tribute to his predecessor in the witty first part of his speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) deserves to be congratulated on the skilful way in which he overcame the handicap that he identified of being a new Member for a new seat in a new town. He, too, paid a generous tribute, not just to half his predecessor but to the whole of his predecessor. He made some interesting comments on the economy which I am sure all those who did not hear his speech will want to read.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) paid a particularly moving tribute to his predecessor, whom we are delighted to know is now helping us from another place. He added a miniature, albeit interesting, history lesson, although I am not sure what conclusions we should draw from it.

The House always expects, and always gets, a thoughtful and interesting contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen). He will appreciate it, I know, if I say that I do not always agree with him, even on the subject of interest rates, but he knows all too well that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer keeps interest rates always under review. There are, however, many implications in making changes in interest rates, particularly for inflation. If I followed the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North on the exchange rate mechanism, I fear that there would be implications not only for inflation but for inflationary expectations.

We are well aware that lower interest rates could help industry, but I am sure that we all agree that consistently low inflation is more important. Among other things, it is the key to improved productivity. During the 1980s, substantial progress was made on productivity. It grew faster in Britain than in any other major industrial country, after decades when our record has been quite the contrary.

We tend to think of inflation most in the context of the general level of prices and the disastrous effect that high inflation can have on our international competitiveness and exports. That is certainly important, but it is by no means the only reason why keeping inflation down is vital for industrial success. Investment decisions are always difficult. I know that from my own experience in industry. They require not just an analysis of facts and figures but judgment.

Judgments are made more difficult and the outcome of investment decisions more unpredictable the higher the rate of inflation and the greater the difficulty of forecasting the costs—particularly the cost of investments, of which there are many, that take several years to complete before products are ready to be sold in the marketplace. The larger the scale of the investment, the longer the time scales involved, the more difficult the judgment becomes, if we have high inflation. Therefore, we have to make sure that we control inflation. That is the only way to avoid

[Mr. Tim Sainsbury]

deterring investment and to ensure that good investment decisions are made. High rates of inflation erode the purchasing power of wage packets. That in itself can lead to industrial unrest, as we were all too frequently reminded during the period in office—now, happily, a fairly distant memory—of the Labour party.

There has been general recognition throughout the debate of the severity of the recession. Conservative Members recognise that it is an international phenomenon and that there are no quick fixes. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) recognised that there are no quick fixes, but I am not sure that he carries his party with him. I suspect that some members of his party have always been addicted to quick fixes.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) called, as he often does, for a regional policy. He never says what a regional policy is meant to be, nor does he recognise what our regional policy is now doing to help the various areas. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) also referred to that point. The current assisted areas map—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. There is an undercurrent of conversation on both sides of the House. It makes it difficult for me to hear the Minister, and that I wish to do.

Mr. Sainsbury: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I was about to say that the current assisted areas map—the map that identifies the areas which receive regional assistance—was drawn in 1984 and covers some 35 per cent. of the working population: 15 per cent. in development areas and a further 20 per cent. in intermediate areas. I hope that even the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East agrees that in the intervening seven and a half years British industry has gone through major changes. As one would expect, the effect of those changes on employment opportunities has not been uniform throughout all the regions. After such an interval, therefore, it must be appropriate to review the assisted areas map to ensure that it remains effectively focused on the areas of greatest need.

As the House will know, we have issued a consultation paper which confirms that measures relating to unemployment will continue to be the major component in the review, although other factors will also be considered. Our intention is to reach conclusions on the review later this year. I shall make the results known to the House at the appropriate time. Our assisted areas map, like those of other European Community countries, is subject to clearance by the European Commission. A new map should therefore be in place in early 1993.

The Government are conscious that assisted area status is important to many local and regional bodies that are concerned with economic regeneration. We have decided, therefore, as part of the review, to consult as fully and widely as possible. We have invited local and regional bodies that wish to do so to make representations before the end of September. I assure the House that we take such consultation very seriously and that we shall listen carefully to any points that are put to us. The Government remain committed to an effective, properly targeted regional industrial policy.

The third benefit of this important debate was the reminder that it gave of the views of the Labour party. We heard outdated ideas, with which we are familiar, and antiquated policies. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade eloquently and powerfully reminded the House of them. He said that, even among Labour Members, some doubt is creeping in about those outdated ideas and antiquated policies. Some of those doubts were expressed. I suspect that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East may think that we heard too much. Again, we heard nothing about the alternatives. It is no wonder that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not remind us of the extraordinarily toxic—perhaps lethal—cocktail of policies that the Labour party proposed for British industry in the election: higher taxes to deter entrepreneurs and investors and to frighten away inward investors, and the abolition of the reforms of the trade union laws that have been of such benefit to industrial relations and investment.

As always, we heard from Labour Members about red tape, regulation, quangos and committees too numerous to mention. However, worst of all, although it is not often mentioned now, we heard about the minimum wage. Everybody knows that that would have destroyed jobs and increased unemployment.

I cannot say that we cannot wait to hear what changes might emerge from the moving of chairs in the Labour party, but, happily, I can say that the electorate has ensured that we do not have to worry about those ideas and that industry does not have to worry when it recovers from the recession. I therefore urge the House to reject the motion and accept the amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 262, Noes 301.

Division No. 50] **[7.02 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Callaghan, Jim
Adams, Mrs Irene	Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Ainger, Nicholas	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*
Allen, Graham	Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Cann, Jamie
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Chisholm, Malcolm
Armstrong, Hilary	Clapham, Michael
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Ashton, Joe	Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Austin-Walker, John	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Clelland, David
Barron, Kevin	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Battle, John	Coffey, Ms Ann
Bayley, Hugh	Cohen, Harry
Beckett, Margaret	Connarty, Michael
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Bennett, Andrew F.	Corbett, Robin
Benton, Joe	Corbyn, Jeremy
Bermingham, Gerald	Cousins, Jim
Berry, Roger	Cox, Tom
Betts, Clive	Cryer, Bob
Blunkett, David	Cummings, John
Boateng, Paul	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Boyce, Jimmy	Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Boyes, Roland	Dalyell, Tam
Bradley, Keith	Darling, Alistair
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Davidson, Ian
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*	Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Burden, Richard	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Byers, Stephen	Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Caborn, Richard	Denham, John

Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, William
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Michael
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoff
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Ms Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Ms Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Ms Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*

Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the essential need to maintain British competitiveness by containing inflation and improving productivity; and believes that the long term needs of British industry are best served by the control of public expenditure, competitive tax rates, deregulation, and an incentive economy.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I must announce to the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.15 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I beg to move,

That this House regards Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy as currently one of the greatest threats facing British agriculture; notes with regret that Her Majesty's Government's estimate of the cumulative total of cows dying of BSE was 20,000 and that to date more than 60,000 cows have succumbed to the disease and these numbers are rising; calls upon Her Majesty's Government as a matter of precaution to establish a working party of outside experts to undertake a strategic review of the current position and Her Majesty's Government's response to it, and to extend the ban on specified bovine offal, including the brain, for human consumption to offal from cows under six months of age; and, in order to ensure that no cows dying of BSE are slipping into the food chain, demands Her Majesty's Government undertake random sampling of routinely slaughtered cows.

We make no apology whatsoever for raising the important issue of bovine spongiform encephalopathy. As stated in the opening lines of the motion, we regard BSE as

"currently one of the greatest threats facing British agriculture".

It is now more than two years since we had a full-scale debate on it in the House, so that it is time for us to reassess the situation. I fully appreciate the fact that the Government are not worried about BSE, and that is all the more reason why the House should show concern. The Government's complacency is clearly an error on a scale that is plain to see if we care to look.

It is worth emphasising the fact that the problem is almost peculiarly a British problem, and it is a British problem largely because of the actions of Conservative Governments. Tragically, the world recognises that it is a British disease, with the result that many countries still refuse to accept British meat or British cattle. Even our partners and neighbours in Europe discriminate against British beef in that no British beef containing bones from BSE-infected herds is allowed into any European Community country. Their officials still believe that a question mark hangs over BSE.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Does the hon. Gentleman think that he is doing anything to help the British cattle industry by continually highlighting the problem in Parliament?

Dr. Clark: It is two years since we had a full-scale debate on the topic. Has society reached such a state that we are not allowed to discuss a serious aspect of Government policy or to question that policy seriously and responsibly without being charged with scaremongering by Conservative Members who have other interests, as he has made plain to the House?

Mr. Gill *rose*——

Dr. Clark: I must continue, or we shall not make much progress.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) somehow linked to the industry? If so, does not he think that he should have declared to the House what that link is before he made that intervention? Would he care to do so now?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. If hon. Members have an interest, it is incumbent on them to declare it.

Mr. Gill: I am happy to declare my interest, which is stated in the Register of Members' Interests. If I may continue, does the hon. Gentleman——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must confine himself to the declaration, or otherwise, of an interest and not pursue the previous point which was the subject of an intervention.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Ludlow alluded to an interest. As our proceedings are televised and the public witness our debate, will he tell the House precisely what his interest is? It may be that the hon. Gentleman's decision to intervene was motivated by that specific interest. Will he tell the House what his interest is?

Madam Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Member catches my eye he will have to declare any interest, but there is no requirement to declare an interest during an intervention.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: With great respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have to differ with you when you say that there is no requirement, in an intervention, to declare an interest. There is such a requirement. The hon. Gentleman was not putting a question to a Minister; he was making a statement, which will be recorded in *Hansard*. Again I ask whether he is prepared to make a specific declaration of his interest in this debate so that hon. Members may be aware of it. Perhaps you should take advice from the Clerks, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: When I need to take advice I shall do so, but not at the behest of the hon. Member. The position that I have taken will stand until such time as I discover otherwise.

Dr. Clark: As this is a very serious and important matter, I hope that we shall be able to get on with the debate.

This disease did not simply happen, nor was it an act of God; it happened because the Conservative Government were incompetent. With their obsession—their continuing obsession—with deregulation, they have brought about this terrible disease. It is a generally accepted scientific explanation that originally the disease was introduced by cows eating meal containing scrapie from sheep. But, as that is a common practice throughout the world, why did this happen in Britain? It happened in Britain because of the Government's attitude to the rendering industry. Before 1979 the then Labour Government was concerned about the standards in the rendering industry, and they published tighter draft regulations. Unfortunately, the incoming Conservative Government, following the Conservatives' usual practice of rewarding their friends, including those in the rendering industry, scrapped those regulations. The rendering industry did not hide this; it was quite honest. Indeed, the chairman of the United Kingdom renderers said:

[Dr. Clark]

"The original proposals were very expensive, but there was a distinct change of heart when the Conservatives came into office. They were happy to drop the idea of a code and settle for random testing."

Mr. Field, an executive member, went a stage further. Referring to the different technology permitted by the weakened regulations, he said:

"This was partly as a result of changes in animal feed technique, but the basic motive was profit."

I repeat:

"the basic motive was profit."

It is because of that obsession with profit, at whatever cost, that we have this terrible disease in Britain.

Faced with that situation, the Government did not know what to do. As usual, procrastination, coupled with their policy of being "economical with the truth", was the order of the day. The Government were obsessed with secrecy. It was a question of too little, too late. The Government took 18 months to make BSE a notifiable disease, and two and a half years to announce a ban on cattle offal. And, having announced the ban, they took five months to bring it into effect. After the disease was made notifiable, they took 20 months to introduce 100 per cent compensation.

All this has taken place against the background of the Government's deliberate running down of the state veterinary service. Between 1979 and this year the number of veterinary officers employed by the service has declined by 42 per cent. No wonder the veterinary service is hard done by in its attempts to deal with the BSE problem, which has now affected almost one third of the dairy herds in the United Kingdom—31 per cent. of herds having had at least one case of BSE.

But that is all in the past. The Labour party is here to focus attention on the present and, indeed, the future. It is our sincere hope that the Government's policies on BSE are effective and that their timetable for the disappearance of the disease is correct. However, we should be failing in our duty as the official Opposition if we were not to raise the public anxieties, and if we were not to seek to explore the full truth with a view to ascertaining the current position.

Until recently most people in Britain believed that BSE had gone away. They have been shocked by the news not only that BSE has not disappeared but that the situation has actually worsened. It is a matter for regret that, in respect of these matters, the Government have not always been as open as they should have been. For example, on 13 March this year the Minister flatly refused to give me the number of BSE cases. However, while we may disagree about details, there is one simple matter upon which the House can agree, for it is a matter of fact and of record. I refer to the fact that the Government got their estimates and their predictions badly wrong.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Here comes a farmer!

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Yes, I am a farmer.

The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that the forecasts were not correct—it was difficult to forecast—but he seems to be trying to suggest that the disease is still spreading. That is not the case. The number of animals that were fed on this substance is finite, and there have been no cases of spread of the disease to the next generation. The hon. Gentleman is deliberately trying to dissuade people from eating beef, which is perfectly safe to eat.

Dr. Clark: The hon. Lady attends most of our debates on agriculture.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: All of them.

Dr. Clark: She attends all of our debates on agriculture. I will deal with some of these points in the course of my speech. Serious points must be addressed.

In February 1989 the Southwood report, which was published and endorsed by the Government, estimated that, given the usual lifespan of the milk cow and the nature of our dairy herd, there was

"a cumulative total of about 17,000 to 20,000 cases from cows currently alive and subclinically infected."

If the hon. Lady were correct—if there were no new cases among cows born after that date, which is not so—Southwood would be adhered to. The maximum would be 20,000 cases. There is no doubt—the hon. Lady has conceded the point—that the Government got their figures wrong just over three years ago.

But they went further and said that the number of cases would peak at about 350 to 400 a month. I emphasise that the period referred to was a month. I do not quibble with those figures—they were the best available at the time—but we are concerned about the fact that the Government's whole strategy is based on that estimate, and, as the House knows, they got the figures wrong. For example, from the Government's own figures we know that, far from the total number of cows dying from BSE being 20,000, it is now more than 60,000 and is increasing literally every day. Far from being 350 to 400 cases a month, the latest confirmed figure is 1,080 a week—not a month—or, extrapolated on a monthly basis, 10 times higher than the Government's predicted figure. Even if that figure is an aberration, the weekly average for the first six months of 1992 is 703—and it is better to take six months rather than a week.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): The hon. Gentleman will surely allow that there is a distinction to be drawn between a weekly rate of confirmations and a weekly rate of reporting. Attributing confirmations to the week in which they were reported shows that the actual rate is significantly lower than 1,000 a week.

Dr. Clark: It is for that very reason that I said that we must examine the figures over a decent period. When hon. Members look at *Hansard* tomorrow, they will find that the sentence that I used immediately before the Minister intervened was to the effect that it is much better to look at the figures over six months than to take one week at random. I stand by that.

The Government have been changing the goalposts—changing the rules and taking one week with another. Surely the best way of measuring the rate of incidence of BSE is to take the number of confirmed cases: actual cases of actual cows confirmed as having actual BSE. That must be done over a period.

It is not very ingenious of the Minister to play around with the figures and to muddy the waters with other figures when confirmed cases, taken over a period, are the best way of judging the scale of the problem.

Even on averages for a year the figures have risen. Up to the end of April there were 631 cases a week. The

Government talk of 400 a month. By the end of June, the figure had risen from 631 to 703. So it is clear for all to see that the Government got the scale of the problem wrong; the figures are between five and 10 times worse than they predicted. Far from a total of 20,000, as the Government estimated, in all likelihood 100,000 will have died.

One reason why the Government got the scale of the problem wrong was that they got the science wrong in some areas as well. I mentioned at the outset that the original assumption was that the virus or agent was introduced to cows by their eating scrapie—contaminated meat, scrapie being endemic in our sheep flock. It was on that thesis that the Government made their predictions and based their strategy.

Now it is widely suggested, even by Ministry vets, that the disease increased dramatically because parts of the cows already infected with BSE by scrapie were then fed to other cows—straightforward cannibalism. Thus, although the original route for the virus was scrapie, most of the increase was due to BSE—infected feed being given to cattle. In other words, cows were more susceptible to catching BSE from meal made from cows already infected by BSE.

If this theory is correct, the Minister clearly has some aspects of the science wrong, and that raises what may form part of a hidden agenda behind tonight's debate—the transfer of related brain diseases species. The surprise initially was that spongiform encephalopathy had jumped species from sheep to cows; not quite as surprising was the transmissibility within a species. Similarly, an article published in *The Guardian* today reveals the transmission of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease between humans as a result of injections from the pituitary glands of dead people. We are at the edge of the unknown, and that is why this debate is so important.

Before I move on I want to ask the Minister a question about the disposal of carcases. The Minister has already agreed under pressure from the Opposition that all carcases should be disposed of by incineration. He told me in a parliamentary answer on 22 May that the capacity for incineration is about 1,000 a week, although there has already been one week in which there were more than 1,000 confirmed cases. Having visited incineration plants and discussed this with the operators, I think that the Minister's figure may be on the high side.

Will the Minister confirm that certain BSE carcases are being stored in the back of refrigerated lorries while awaiting incineration; and what is the longest time such carcases are held in such a fashion? It is clearly sensible that for incineration they should be moved in refrigerated wagons, but it is not sensible to hold them in those wagons.

The Government's sole response so far to this public debate has been to say that the problem will soon start diminishing; it will go away. I sincerely hope that they are right, but I suggest that policies based on a hope and prayer are not necessarily the best policies. They may be the Government's only response, but they are not necessarily the best.

The Government argue, rather misleadingly, that the pattern and the figures are exactly as they predicted. In that they are not being truthful. Mr. Keith Meldrum, the chief veterinary officer, has been precise on this point, as we would expect from such an eminent scientist. On 2 September 1991 he told a London conference, according to MAFF press release number 292/91:

"the latest predictions point to a rapid decline in the number of confirmed BSE cases within the next year."

That is explicit enough. More than 10 months ago he asserted that in less than two months from today there would begin to be a rapid decline in BSE cases. I hope that he is right, but the Labour party asks: why wait for two, four or six months? The potential scale of the problem is so serious that precautionary steps should be taken now.

One of the tenets of all scientific inquiry is that of the examination of one's thesis and experiments by other scientists in one's peer group. We challenge the Government to allow that in the case of BSE. We believe that the time is ripe for a peer group review of the strategic implications of the Government's approach to BSE. We do not question the ability or integrity of the scientists advising the Ministry, but we do suggest that they have been so deeply involved in the project for two years that outside experts might prove of some further assistance. The problem is so threatening that there is nothing to lose —so why is the Minister so reluctant to follow this precautionary approach? Even the *Farmers Weekly* supports the Labour party's position on this.

I suggest that the Minister invite the Royal Society to undertake this strategic reassessment of the Government's role. As the Minister knows, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who sponsors science in the Cabinet, has shown his general support for giving the Royal Society this type of role. Indeed, he did so as recently as 11 June, as reported in column 493, during a debate on science and technology, in response to a suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), who has pursued this suggestion for some time, arguing that BSE would be an ideal topic for this type of review.

If the Minister is prepared to follow this line, he will have the wholehearted support of the Labour party and of most people outside. We believe it unwise to waste a further six months in the hope that the Government's policies will work. Too much is at risk for that.

Our second positive suggestion is that proscribed offal, including brains from cows, should be extended to that from calves under six months old. We think it ludicrous that the brains of calves can still be legally used in meat products such as mock turtle soup and meat pies. Of course we understand that it is unlikely that the BSE infection will have manifested itself in a calf, but the agent or virus may be present even in nascent form, and we cannot predict how it will react in different host species. We plead with the Government to take some action and to follow a precautionary line.

Finally, it really is time the Government acted on the suggestion of their own Tyrrell committee advisers and introduced random sampling of routinely slaughtered animals. We see no reason why Ministry scientists could not visit slaughterhouses and select routinely slaughtered cows' heads for examination. That too would be a precautionary measure, and, assuming no cows were found positive, it would provide the ultimate reassurance for the public. If infected cows were found to have slipped through into the animal food chain, other action might be necessary.

The public have a right to know, and if the Government are so sure of their ground I challenge them to take up the gauntlet and to introduce random sampling. When we put it to the Government originally, they said that they felt that they did not have the necessary scientific techniques to undertake that work. However, that problem has now

[Dr. Clark]

been overcome. The Minister wrote to me on 18 April 1991 rejecting a move to support Dr. Narang in Newcastle because he was working on a simple post-mortem diagnostic test. The Minister said that that was unnecessary for

"Quite simply, an effective post mortem test for BSE already exists."

The Government now have the techniques and there is no reason why they should not act. They have the scientific evidence, but do they have the will? What are they afraid of? If the Government are so confident, why not go ahead and undertake random testing?

I hope that I have made it clear that we earnestly and sincerely wish the Government well and hope that their policies are successful. However, the essence of our case is that they have got the scale of the problem wrong by a factor of between five and 10. We are urging a precautionary approach by suggesting another look to see whether we have got the science right.

7.40 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'endorses Her Majesty's Government's vigorous and comprehensive action in response to the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy to bring the outbreak under control.'.

When discussing BSE it is important to start at the beginning and to consider the various steps that have been taken. It is my thesis that we have taken every measure that was recommended and that we have done that promptly and effectively. We have the disease under control and we will see the disease disappear. However, it is necessary to trace its cause to know why we took the actions that we did and why we took them at particular times.

BSE was first diagnosed at Weybridge in 1986. It had no known cause and the agent looked like scrapie. In order to define diagnostic criteria and to study the natural history of the disease, it was necessary to have a sample of around 200 cases. In the event, a study was carried out on the basis of 189 cases. That study showed that we had a genuinely new disease; that the first case probably dated back to 1985; that it was not imported and that all the animals had been infected from a single source. There was no evidence of transmission between animals or of maternal transmission.

The early outbreaks showed that we were not dealing with an infection. That is still the case because many herds had had only one case within the herd. They showed that the incidence was highest in the south of England and that it struck mainly, although not exclusively, at dairy herds. They showed that it hit mainly adult animals. There was no association with the sex of the animals, pregnancy, lactation, time of year or, within dairy breeds, the breed of the animal. The presence or absence of sheep on the farm was irrelevant. Those were the findings of the early studies.

Those findings led to the central hypothesis that has governed Government action: that BSE was a new disease; that it was caused by infected food; that the food was probably meat and bone meal, including the remains of sheep infected with scrapie; and that something had happened in 1981 or 1982 which permitted the infection to move across the species from sheep to cattle. We were subsequently able to identify that "something" as a change in rendering practice. In particular, most plants stopped using a process in which hydrocarbon solvent was used to remove extra fat from the processed material by applying wet heat at high temperatures. We believe that that application of wet heat was the effective destroyer of the agent. Significantly, the only two plants still using the technique are in Scotland and Scotland has had a very low incidence of BSE. Nothing which has happened since then has invalidated those conclusions. It is a remarkable tribute to the scientists concerned that, 60,000 animals later, the findings still hold good.

In April 1988, the Ministers of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and for Health appointed Professor Sir Richard Southwood to inquire into the health implications of BSE. Before any recommendation from that committee was received, the first big control measure was put in place: the disease was made notifiable and a ban was introduced on the feeding of ruminant protein to ruminant animals. That measure was, is and will remain the keystone of the policy to combat BSE on all the evidence available to us.

Three weeks later, on the basis of an interim recommendation from the Southwood report that suspect animals should be taken out of the human food chain, and on a purely precautionary basis—the precautionary basis that has informed the whole of Government policy—we ordered the slaughter of suspect animals and their destruction.

The pattern of the Government's response was clear: to resort to the best scientific expertise available—and we could not get better than Professor Sir Richard Southwood; the acceptance of recommendations made on scientific grounds; the pursuit of a twin track policy to control the disease as an animal disease, and address, on an ultra-precautionary basis, any public health concerns; and, finally, the pursuit of epidemiological studies so that, if necessary, the Government would be informed and be able to adapt or change their controls.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If, as we understand it, precautionary considerations are taken into account, why should a cow which has the disease and whose meat—according to what we hear—is uncontaminated be slaughtered, and a cow which is not showing any physical indications but which has the disease and which might be caught in the random sampling—to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) referred—not be slaughtered? What is the difference between the two? Is the difference simply the physical movement of the cow which shows that it has the problem? Why should one be slaughtered and not the other? Why should one be identified and not the other? I do not understand the distinction that the Minister has drawn.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will reply to that in detail when he has had time to work out what the question means. I must confess that I have not managed to work out the nature of the hon. Gentleman's question. We undertook that a suspect animal would be slaughtered on a precautionary basis. That remains a sensible policy and it is one that we have always pursued.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Minister has said that the Government decided that the infected animals would

be slaughtered, so why were the Government so slow at providing the appropriate incineration plants to dispose of the infected animals? Such facilities are still not yet in place.

Mr. Curry: That is not true. The incineration facilities are in place. Only two infected animals have not been incinerated this year and both of them were in the most extreme rural circumstances. Even if animals are not incinerated, they are buried 20 ft down. That is a safe means of disposal. However, all animals can now be incinerated except in the most exceptional circumstances that I have just described.

There are basically two important strands to policy. The first is the control of the disease in animals and the other is the prevention of any possible disease in humans on a precautionary basis. With regard to the disease in animals, the first important measure was the ban on feed. As I have said, that is still the fundamental measure to prevent recycling within the cattle chain. That alone will eliminate BSE on the evidence that we have.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Can the Minister confirm that there have been some cases of vertical transmission from cow to cow?

Mr. Curry: There has been only one case among the thousands of cases in which we have not been able to establish irrefutably that the animal was possibly exposed to contaminated feed. I will deal with that later.

The second important measure was the restrictions, on a precautionary basis, on pregnant cows about to calve again to prevent any possible spread to other animals, although, as I have said, there is no evidence that that can happen.

The third important measure was the ban on the feeding of specified bovine offals—brains, spinal cords, thymus, tonsils, spleen and intestine—and all proteins defined from them, to any animal species. That measure was taken in September 1990 following evidence that a pig could be infected after massive injections simultaneously into the brain, veins and abdomen of infected material. So of course it is possible to transmit the disease in laboratory conditions with the injection of enormous doses of heavily infected materials. We have not had any cases or been able to prove any cases of any transmission outside those conditions. That is a very important factor.

As for protecting human health, we have the slaughter and destruction of suspect animals and, of course now, as I have said, centralised incineration facilities, and, again on a precautionary basis, the prevention of the use of milk from suspect animals for human or animal consumption, except the feeding of the animal's own calf. Also, in June 1989, the Government announced and, later that year after the statutory consultation, implemented, the decision to ban the use of offals in human food—not a recommendation of the Southwood report but something that the Government implemented, again in pursuit of their policy of precautionary action. That was done, of course, because it was based on identifying the tissues susceptible to the scrapie agent. The ban did not extend to calves under six months, because scrapie has never been found in sheep under 10 months, and young cattle will not have been fed the infected agent. That remains the policy.

There are, of course, two possibilities for spread which have to be and are being investigated, as I have said. One is maternal transmission. As I said to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), there is one case out of 60,000 where there is a possibility—an animal born in October 1988 which went down two years later. Even then, we cannot establish that it was not exposed to contaminated feed because we do not have all the information about conditions when it was a young animal. Even if there were maternal transmission, it would still not sustain the epidemic because to do so would require one new case for every existing case. On average, fewer than one of the calves born to dairy cows survive to enter the dairy herd. So there is no evidence of maternal transmission or of horizontal transmission. Forty six per cent. of herds which have had a case have had a single case, and in 80 per cent. of herds there has been no case at all.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am sorry to come back to this point, but I want to press the Minister to satisfy myself. Could a cow with BSE which is not showing the physical symptoms of BSE and which is not wobbling or whatever such cows do, enter an abattoir without any one knowing, be slaughtered and be subject to all the restrictions, constraints and controls and the meat of that cow enter the food chain? I am not suggesting that the meat will be contaminated, but simply asking whether that cow can be slaughtered and its meat get into the food chain when physical symptoms are not apparent but when it might have BSE.

Mr. Curry: Where there are no physical symptoms, the cow is a healthy cow. If it is a healthy cow, it is slaughtered —*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members cannot expect us to detect BSE by psychology. Where an animal has shown no symptoms—

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: Let me finish my point. Where an animal shows no symptoms of BSE, it is deemed to be a healthy animal. Because we take the ultra-precautionary approach even to healthy animals, all those tissues and elements of an animal in which the scrapie agent might be found are removed. The agent has been found only in the brain, so we are doubly precautionary in our approach.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That is a very important matter. Some might argue that, despite the fact that the animal does not show physical symptoms, it might have BSE in its early stages. Is the Minister actually saying that that animal can be slaughtered and that the meat, without restriction, can go into the food chain? I am not suggesting that the meat has BSE. Will the Minister confirm that, as that appears to be what he is saying?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman appears to be suggesting that no beef should be eaten. That is the only conclusion to what he is saying. The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that if an animal has no symptom, presumably it should not go to an abattoir, should not be slaughtered and the meat should not be eaten. That is the only conclusion to be drawn from what he has said. That policy would merely prevent anybody from consuming beef. I cannot see that that addresses the problem in any sense. It is important that, on the precautionary principle, those tissues of an animal which might harbour the agent, on the basis of the analogy with scrapie, are removed from all animals, and they are removed from all animals because we take such a cautious approach.

[Mr. Curry]

The Southwood report was published in February 1989 and it said that the chances of transmission to humans were remote. Since then, the Food Safety Advisory Centre has published a leaflet about BSE, and Professor Southwood has written a foreword to it, in which he states:

"There has naturally been much anxiety as to whether the disease could pass from cattle to humans. Even prior to the implementation of the current measures this risk was remote. With the present precautions, as explained in the following pages"—

he goes on to refer to them—

"we have more reason to be concerned about being struck by lightning than catching BSE from eating beef and other products from cattle".

That has been stated quite categorically by Professor Sir Richard Southwood, and I know of no reputable figure in the industry who would dispute those conclusions. Professor Southwood recommended that we set up a committee to examine research needs, and of course that is what led to the committee under the chairmanship of Dr. David Tyrrell, and that committee still exists in order to monitor and recommend on our research activity.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Knowing some of Sir Richard Southwood's colleagues and his distinguished department, may I ask what precisely is the remit that he now has? Does he have a continuing remit to monitor the situation? What precisely is his locus in the matter?

Mr. Curry: The continuing remit is with the committee that was set up by Dr. David Tyrrell, which monitors research activity and makes recommendations in relation to research into BSE. That report came out recently. He is also able to make continuing recommendations in this matter. We maintain contact with the scientific opinion which we called into being.

It has been suggested that we should opt for random testing for BSE in routinely slaughtered cattle. We already inspect a high proportion of cows at slaughterhouses for clinical signs of the disease. I do not think that it is worth while to keep pressing for something which the first Tyrrell committee saw as a very low priority. That has been confirmed by the current Tyrrell committee. It would not add to our comprehensive public health precautions or to our animal health measures. The offals ban already removes from the food chain the relevant tissues from any pre-clinically infected animals, and all that random testing would do is to direct resources in terms of expertise away from the more important work.

But what about the numbers? That is the nub of the case made by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). Professor Southwood made very heavily qualified forecasts. He said—it is stated quite clearly in his report —that his forecast assumed that the only cause of the infection was sheep-to-cattle transmission via bonemeal. In his calculations, he discounted, and said that he was discounting quite clearly, the recycling of material from infected cattle to cattle via meat and bonemeal. That has proved to be a significant factor. It is the main driving force of the epidemic and it accounts for the higher than anticipated numbers, particularly as meat and bonemeal rations were used in calf feeding.

It is important to remember the pattern of diagnosis. We need to know the date of infection. We do not know the date of infection; it is impossible to know the actual date of infection, but one needs an approximate time. Of course, the incidence has been most frequent in animals of a mean four to five years, and the minimum age at which any animal has gone down is just under two years. We need to know the date of the first symptoms, the date of notification, the date of slaughter and the date of confirmation. They are, of course, different dates because the rate of confirmation and the rate of incidence of the disease are not the same.

In 99·99 per cent. of cases, the animals were born before the feed ban and had the opportunity to eat the infected feed. We cannot prove that they did, of course, but we can prove that the feed was available for consumption. That is the important link. However, the key lies in cases born since the ban. There have been 101 of them and only two came from mothers with BSE. Eighty-nine out of those 101 were found in the course of investigation to have been born before the end of October 1988, within three months of the ban. We know that contaminated feed was still hanging around on farms at that time.

We are now seeing the results of what happened in 1987-88. The disease has an average incubation period approaching five years. In the early weeks of 1992 we averaged more than 900 suspected cases a week. In the past four weeks the average has been fewer than 700. We expect an increase in late summer and autumn, consistent with the pattern in previous years. But the increase will be much smaller than if the feed ban had not been introduced. In the youngest age group—two to three years—the number of cases is significantly smaller than it would have been if the epidemic had followed its earlier pattern. This year will see the peak, as we get over the 1988 hump, and then we shall be on the downward path.

We got it right from the start. We are still right in our actions. There is no hidden research. There are no secret findings. There is no hidden horror. There is no secret agenda. Our actions are based on expert advice implemented openly and a precautionary approach which is extreme in its carefulness. The policies are in place to control and eliminate the disease. There is no threat to human health. Our beef is safe.

We have acted promptly, wisely and openly. We have nothing to conceal and everything to be proud of. From the farmer to the processor to the supermarkets, we have an alliance for honesty, openness and effective action in this tragic business. We shall sustain that policy. It has been endorsed by the Select Committee and by national and international experts. We have nothing to learn from the Opposition in this valedictory debate introduced by the hon. Member for South Shields. I invite the House to endorse our policies.

8.1 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): It is important that we set the problem of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the context of the economic problems that face many livestock farmers.

I had the pleasure of attending the royal show today before coming back to the House for the debate. A Cornish farmer handed me an interesting equation on the back of a traditional envelope. It said that if in 1970 a livestock farmer had had £1,000 he could have bought six cows or one tractor; or he might have had the opportunity to invest it, perhaps more wisely, on the stock exchange or in another form of investment. Capital appreciation might have brought the total to £10,000.

Of course, today that £10,000 would be far less effective. If the farmer had stayed in agriculture during that period, he would need to sell 12 cows to make £10,000 but could buy only half a tractor. It is extremely important that we consider the problem of BSE in the context of the livestock industry as a whole.

As the Minister said, most of the traces of the extraordinary and sad tale of BSE can and have been detected. It cannot be a coincidence that major changes took place in the rendering plants in the late 1970s. The processing of meat and bonemeal for animal feeds changed dramatically. Instead of processing batches of carcase material at high temperature and removing the fat with solvents, many plants—indeed all except, as the Minister said, those in Scotland—went over to continuous processing at lower temperatures. The high temperatures to which the product was previously subjected to remove the solvents were also abandoned. That final heating surely must have been the reason why the disease did not occur previously. Certainly, William Reilly, the chair of the British Veterinary Association's committee, believes that that is what killed the scrapie virus.

The long incubation period is another problem that has made BSE difficult to deal with. It can be anything from two and a half years to eight years. The massively variable lead time makes it extremely difficult to deal with the disease, as the Minister acknowledged.

Some would say that the most effective way of dealing with the problem at the outset would have been simply to reverse the trend and go back to the previous systems of rendering. If the rendering processes had still achieved high temperatures, it might have killed off the virus.

We must take it into account that the disease has a limited impact on small parts of the carcase—the brains and spinal cord. It is absolutely clear from all the evidence that those are the parts which are affected, whether in pigs, marmoset monkeys or whatever. One of the most important immediate remedial actions that should have been taken when the disease first appeared was to ensure that all those parts were removed completely from the food chain until the disease disappeared. If that had happened, the knackers' yards, which are currently going out of business at a fast rate, could have retained their position in local rural economies. The side effects on the knackers' yards are serious, as all of us who come from agricultural areas know. The fate of fallen stock is now a great conundrum. The answers to questions that we have put to Ministers have shown that the full pattern of the fate of fallen stock is not known.

Is there a public health risk—a human health risk? The major risk may be from the unknown consequences of the ending of the knackers' service and the effect on the fate of fallen stock. Even though scrapie has been around for about 200 years, it seems that there is no apparent link with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. There is certainly no evidence to suggest that people who work closely with sheep or in areas with a high incidence of scrapie are more likely to get the human version of the disease.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that in the 200 years that scrapie has existed—scrapie is a similar pathogen to BSE—a link has never been proven with the human Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease?

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He underlines my point. So far as I am aware, there is no proven case. If there was a connection, one would have thought that the great searchlight of interest in the issue since BSE was discovered would have uncovered it.

It is also important to recognise that the period immediately after the changes in the rendering process was one of enormous expansion in the sheep flock, particularly in the west and south-west of the British Isles. During the 1970s and early 1980s the sheep flock increased from 13 million to more than 17 million. So the simple pro rata increase was bound to have its effect. The fact that it coincided with the changes in rendering methods cannot be seen as pure coincidence. It must have had some causal effect.

There are legitimate fears about the relationship between confirmed and reported cases of BSE, I noted the exchanges between Members on the two Front Benches. I hope that the Minister will refer again to that when he replies. There is naturally some anxiety that if all the attention is placed on confirmed cases it will not necessarily be the best test of what is happening to BSE.

We must all have noted the point made by the Minister about the number of cases which have been proved to be or could have been the result of maternal or vertical transmission. The possibility seems infinitesimally small. We can rule that out unless other evidence comes to light. But, of course, we must still be worried about the overall growth of the disease. I calculate that in 1987, before the disease became a major problem, we had eight confirmed cases a week. As we heard earlier, in 1992 we have 703 confirmed cases a week. Within that figure there are regional variations. For example, the south-west has a particularly large number of cases. But, of course, it is not the snapshot but the trend that is important. I understand that at the moment there are no figures for regional trends. However, we need to know what is happening region by region.

We can also justifiably ask the Minister to be specific about when he expects reported cases to stop rising, when the confirmed cases are expected to drop and what the total number of cases are projected to be by the end of 1992 and 1993. As we heard earlier, previous forecasts have proved to be wrong. Furthermore, when do we expect BSE to be wiped out?

We may need more research on the tests. At the moment, there is no viable test on a live animal. It is possible that one does not need a test on a live animal. However, if we could establish one, it would be possible to ensure that infected animals were taken out much more quickly and BSE could be identified earlier. I am not sure whether the Tyrrell committee is studying the viability of tests on live animals, but if it is I hope that its report will be made available as quickly as possible.

We should be grateful to the Minister for the information that he has given the House, but is it in the public interest that the information has to be dragged out of the Ministry? Should it not be in the public domain already? As I said earlier, I spent some time today at the royal show and I took the opportunity to go to the Department of Health stand in the food hall to gather all the information that I could on food and health matters. The stand had excellent documents and a lot of information and, on my train journey back to London, I read every word of it. The initials BSE do not appear in

[Mr. Tyler]

any context. There is no reference to it. It has been left to some of the supermarkets to produce a short guide to the problem and to identify the information available.

So far, this has been a useful debate and when other hon. Members on both sides of the House and representing many areas have contributed, we shall be the wiser. What a pity it is that the detailed information that we have from Ministers this evening was not available this afternoon to the industry and to the general public. Scaremongering breeds in an atmosphere of confusion and complacency, and when there is only limited information.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): Will the hon. Gentleman accept that all the figures that he could want are freely and readily available in the public domain?

Mr. Tyler: With respect, we have had information this evening that could have been on the stand at the royal show today and the public, who are legitimately interested in this issue, and the industry, which wants to see the right information in the public domain, had every reason to expect it to be there. It was not there, and we have a right, as consumers and producers, and as representatives of the agriculture industry and the backbone of England, to expect our Ministers to be more forthcoming.

8.12 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): I am alarmed and horrified that this debate is taking place. The object of the Opposition is to undermine the confidence of not only the farmers but the meat trade and the consumers. The idea that the visitors to the royal show should want to go away weighed down with masses of technical and scientific information about BSE is nonsense. This small but detailed study makes it clear that everyone believes that beef is in no way damaging to health and that it is safe to eat.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on his quick reaction to this problem when it first arose. He took professional and scientific advice and relied on experts to give him advice to point the way forward. That was thoroughly responsible, and I cannot understand why, as matters are unfolding along the lines that they were predicted to follow, the Labour party is calling for more information. Advice on how the disease came about has been given and it has been made clear that the disease takes four years to develop. It occurs only in older dairy cattle, rather than in those cattle that go for slaughter for beef.

Others have spoken about the experiments on vertical and horizontal transferability and on infection between species, which have been encouraging because of the lack of evidence that that takes place. The slaughtering and disposal methods have been closely examined and recommendations have been made. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, the Select Committee on Agriculture examined the problem and with only one partially dissenting voice produced a unanimous report that was accepted by the Government.

Mr. Martlew: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Marland: Here comes that one voice.

Mr. Martlew: I agreed with the Select Committee report, which said that the Government had dealt with the matter much better than they had dealt with the salmonella problem. Let us remember that we thought that the way that they dealt with salmonella resulted in a shambles.

Mr. Marland: It is good to see that there has been some improvement. I shall not forget that point. However, I started by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on taking action quickly. and said that that action was based on proper scientific advice. The Select Committee was responsible enough to examine the problem and the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) will remember that we went to look at an incinerator to see how the process was carried out. It is not good enough to use one case, about which there may have been a misunderstanding, to try to prove that a whole policy is wrong. That is a favourite trick of the Opposition.

Dr. David Clark: Will the hon. Gentleman inform the House of the "one case" to which I presumably referred?

Mr. Marland: The hon. Gentleman tried to undermine the case that has been made by the Government and the Government's actions. He implied that there was some evidence that the situation was not under control, but I disagree.

The Government have taken advice from the chief medical officer, who said that beef could be eaten without risk. The Tyrrell report concluded that all safeguards were in place to stop the spread of BSE. The EC experts—that must be worth something—have endorsed the Government's action and confirmed that there is no risk to public health in eating beef. The Food Safety Advisory Centre leaflet with a foreword by Sir Richard Southwood, which was probably available at the royal show today, confirmed that steps are being taken that will lead to the disappearance of the disease by the end of the decade. That should answer the question from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) about when the disease would be bred out of the system.

We examine a problem thoroughly and get the best advice that there is in the land. Not for us the cranks and quirky advisers who have found favour among those on the Opposition Benches, who may be peddling this information for their own ends rather than for the good of the public. Those of us on the Select Committee remember full well who those individuals are.

Recent figures forecast that the incubation period was four years and that the numbers of cattle infected with BSE will decline by the end of the decade. It had been forecast that there would be an increase in the number of BSE-affected animals during 1992 and early 1993, but that the number would start to decline thereafter. BSE will grow out of the system, and everything is happening more or less as predicted.

Public confidence has recently returned to beef sales. This debate shows that the Labour party does not give a damn about the facts but wants only to cause trouble. The holier-than-thou attitude that the Opposition like to adopt on certain occasions is of little constructive help to anybody. I hope that the House, to a man, throws out the motion.

8.19 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I took part in the debate on BSE two years ago and I detect in the Government and in Conservative Members the same complacency as there was then.

We had predictions then of the incidence of BSE for the early 1990s. We were told that the ban on ruminant protein from animal feed would solve the problem. The Southwood report estimated that there would be about 20,000 cases. The fact is, however, that the numbers are far higher than anything envisaged in the report, as the numbers given by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) show.

I have with me the figures for the past five years. In 1987, there were 460 cases; in 1988, 3,038; in 1989, 7,614; and, in 1990, 14,332—the figure doubled in each of those years——

Mr. Gill: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that it is possible to forecast with any accuracy the number of animals likely to be affected by the disease?

Mr. Williams: That was clearly the impression that the Government gave in the debate two years ago.

Mr. Gill: But what does the hon. Gentleman think?

Mr. Williams: The forecast was based on the best possible assumptions in 1990. The figures given were 400 a month and a total of 20,000.

Mr. Gill *rose*——

Mr. Williams: I will not give way again on this point. I want to develop my argument.

We should like an explanation why the incidence is five times as high as the Southwood report suggested. To complete my figures, I should add that last year there were 17,997 incidents. I must confess that last year when I heard reports of those figures I thought that perhaps we had reached a plateau, because the number had not increased by as much as in previous years. Unfortunately, in the first six months of this year we already have 18,000 cases. When the Minister replies, he must explain why the numbers are five times as high as the projection.

I am concerned about farms where there are multiple cases of BSE. I have an article here about a farm in Pluckley, Kent where 12 milking cows have contracted the disease since 1988. That is by no means uncommon. Apparently, about 100 farms have more than 10 incidents each of BSE. It would be instructive to carry out tests at some of those farms on the animals that have contracted the disease. Where there is such a cluster, all the cows should be slaughtered and examined for sub-clinical symptoms of BSE. A pilot study might provide useful information. In that context, the Select Committee called for routine random sampling of cattle at slaughterhouses.

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): As the hon. Gentleman has clearly studied the Select Committee report, will he acknowledge that we considered slaughtering whole herds to find clinical symptoms and that scientific advice and all the evidence concluded unanimously that, even if that information could be gathered, it would be perfectly useless in trying to reduce the incidence of this disastrous disease? If the hon. Gentleman knows of any merits in such a test, perhaps he can explain more fully what they may be.

Mr. Williams: I seriously question that judgment. It raises the very same question that my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) put three times to the Minister in his opening remarks. The diagnosis of BSE is very crude. It is done simply by physical appearance, not by a biological test of any kind. Many cows that are being slaughtered may have sub-clinical symptoms of BSE, but how can they be told apart? It is not black and white, as the Minister seemed to suggest—that either a cow has or it does not have the physical manifestations. It is a progressive disease. Thousands of our cows may be without the physical manifestations of BSE, yet within a week or a month they will develop those symptoms. We need to find out more about that by conducting random sampling.

On 13th February 1992, *The Guardian* published information on the incidence of BSE in young cattle. It is important that the Government keep a sharp eye on the number of cows of two or three years of age that contract the disease. The numbers given for 1989 were 28 cows of two years and 586 cows of three years and, for 1991, 46 cows of two years and 3,000 cows of three years. Bearing in mind that the offal ban was introduced in July 1988, no two-year-old cows should have contracted BSE in 1991 if the sole cause was ruminant beef in offal. Why, then, has the number of cattle infected by BSE increased from 11 per cent. of the total in 1989 to 17 per cent. in 1991?

Although the Government will not like these comments, I must quote what Dr. Helen Grant, a recently retired consultant neuropathologist at Charing Cross hospital, said when those figures were put to her:

"Quite a number of these animals are so young that they may have got the disease after the offal ban was put in place."

If that is the case, there may be another route of transmission other than that of offal. I note that the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) shakes his head. I sincerely hope that his judgment is right. I know that he knows much more about this than I do, but that article has caused me serious doubts. The Government must look into that matter carefully.

I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the hon. Member for South Shields about the need for a new inquiry by independent top scientists. Obviously, eminent scientists at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and on the Southwood and Tyrrell committees have been investigating the problem for several years, but the Royal Society has in its good offices the expertise and manpower to investigate the whole array of social and technical problems. I hope that the Government will take up my hon. Friend's suggestion of asking it for a peer group review on this subject.

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman should know that Dr. David Tyrrell, the chairman of the Tyrrell committee, is himself a fellow of the Royal Society.

Mr. Williams: There are 800 fellows of the Royal Society. I suggested a peer group review. We should let the Royal Society appoint half a dozen eminent scientists from various relevant specialisms to look independently at the work of the Tyrrell committee and what has been happening in the past two or three years. There is much to explain. We need to assess the success of the control methods so far and to review the evidence on transmission, especially where young cattle that should never have caught the disease are victims of it. We must revise our projections. Is the curve exponential and is there no

[Mr. Williams]

plateau? A new inquiry needs to recommend what further action can be taken to control the spread of this awful disease.

8.30 pm

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): The Select Committee on Agriculture concluded that beef was safe. That has always been the Government's belief and it is my strong belief. There is no way in which the consumption of beef can affect humans, but BSE clearly has an effect upon the brain of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and his condition is getting worse by the hour. I am worried about that because if the disease progresses to its natural conclusion, I shall lose my pairing and no amount of compensation would be adequate for such a disaster.

This is the day on which agriculture leaders gather for a biannual event and it is unfortunate that the Opposition have chosen to stage this debate today. If the hon. Member for South Shields attended the royal show, he would learn a great deal more about agriculture and possibly about BSE than he will learn from the debate. To choose today for the debate was quite unsympathetic and unfeeling.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman says that there is no risk from eating beef, and I desperately want to believe him. I keep asking myself one question: how is it transmitted from the gut to the brain, assuming that it is transmitted orally?

Mr. Wiggin: The hon. Gentleman would do well to study the voluminous evidence presented to the Select Committee. I note that the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) has that evidence with him. The evidence shows how much the scientists know or do not know about the disease. The Committee's unanimous view was that beef was safe and I have no evidence to show that it is not. The debate has once again brought the issue into the public forum at a time when the bogey had been laid and the public reassured.

Sales of beef have increased and the industry desperately needs those sales. Snide and ill-informed comments without basis are damaging. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) should study the evidence and discuss it properly. I am simply repeating what great scientific brains have concluded. The hon. Gentleman should put his questions to a better source. The Committee, which consisted of Conservative and Opposition Members, listened to the evidence and unanimously concluded that beef is safe.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Wiggin: No, I shall not give way again. There is no point in throwing queries from one side of the House to the other. As I say, when we considered the evidence, the Committee of which I had the honour to be Chairman concluded that beef was safe.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: All the latest scientific evidence suggests that the pathogen is incubated in the spinal cord and brain tissue and not in muscle tissue. Therefore, it is quite safe to eat beef.

Mr. Wiggin: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I am not a scientist. The evidence was presented to the Select Committee two years ago and I regret that we did not have an opportunity to debate the Committee report. Such is the fate of many of our reports but perhaps this is an opportunity to comment on one or two of the issues.

The hon. Member for South Shields said that the cause was Government parsimony. He was right to say that there was a change in the rendering process. There is circumstantial but no clear evidence that the older, more expensive and slower process of rendering meat may well have dealt with the BSE agent. As far as I know—this was certainly the case at the time of the inquiry—no one has identified the true and final nature of that agent. That is one of the intriguing mysteries of this scientific puzzle. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that the cause was Government parsimony. The cause was scrapie which was endemic in our sheep flock for several hundred years. The transfer from sheep to cattle, from one species to another, via rendering meant that cattle contracted a disease which to all intents and purposes was exactly the same as scrapie. The hon. Member for South Shields shakes his head, but what I have said is correct.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made a valid point about tests. If we had a foolproof test on the live animal to show the presence of encephalopathy in cattle or sheep, it might be possible to eliminate scrapie. We all agree that that would be well worth while because scrapie prevents the export of sheep to some countries and causes a continual loss of sheep.

There is no connection whatever between the increase or onset of BSE and a decline in the number of people in the state veterinary service, which is still too large. The service should consist of a small handful of expert veterinary surgeons to advise Whitehall. Almost all the work carried out by the service could be contracted out to the private sector. I have experience of the way in which the state veterinary service and the private sector operate. In the foot and mouth outbreak in Worcestershire in the 1970s, a great many herds had to be slaughtered and many veterinary surgeons were immediately required, but there was no way in which the state veterinary service could provide such manpower at short notice. Many private sector vets were brought in and an extremely competent operation was conducted.

Everyone agrees that Sir Richard Southwood was a powerful and convincing witness before the Select Committee. His immense grasp of the intricacies of this difficult problem impressed every member of the Committee. We considered the evidence of many experts, but without difficulty we attached prime importance to what Sir Richard said.

I shall not trouble the House with all the Select Committee's recommendations, but it is appropriate to consider one or two because there was no debate on our report, although it was generally well accepted. We had our differences in Committee, but the report was unanimous. Perhaps we should now question our judgment on one or two of our weaker mutual recommendations—however, the report was prepared two years ago. We started by discussing the level of scientific knowledge on the subject. We said:

"We believe these measures should reassure people that eating beef is safe".

That was the clear, definitive and fully agreed statement, and nothing that has happened since has led me to believe any differently.

The hon. Member for Carlisle represented the Opposition in Committee, and did so extremely well in

that he spent much of his time opposing. We listened carefully to what he said and sometimes adopted his suggestions. He rightly said that we had commented on the fact that there had been a substantial improvement on the Government's handling of the salmonella crisis.

We were deeply concerned that, when the salmonella crisis broke, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was not able to convince the public or put forward a view without seeming to suggest that the Government were hand in glove with the producers and less interested in the consumers. That point was well taken by the Government, and our purpose in the phrase contained in the report was to show that the Government's handling of the BSE crisis—it was a serious crisis; we have no illusions about that—was considerably better. I do not think that there is any easy way for a Government Department to handle such a problem, but I believe that in this case it did so in a way that we were unable to fault.

However, the all-party recommendations of the Select Committee calmed down the general level of public concern. It took the issue out of the arena of sensation. I am deeply sorry that there are still some hon. Members who would seek to put it back in that category, given that we have done so much to try, in a reasonable and authoritative way, to take it out of such low-level debate.

We commended MAFF on relying on independent scientific advice. The more I think about the matter, the more I am absolutely certain that my right hon. Friend the Minister was right to do as he said he would: take advice from the scientists, then act on it. We are, by nature, a little big-headed and we thought that we knew more. We qualified my right hon. Friend's decision by saying that "in the interests" of reassuring the public, he could have taken one or two steps beyond the scientific advice. Such action, which would not have been too costly, would have gone a little way towards helping people such as the hon. Member for Workington to realise that the matter was being dealt with properly. However, my right hon. Friend stuck to his guns. He refuses to go beyond the scientific advice. That no longer matters, but at the time we rightly registered a note of criticism.

One of the virtues of my right hon. Friend's approach is that, in arguing our case with foreign countries, we can do so on a purely scientific and veterinary basis. It makes it much easier for us when dealing with matters of animal health to be able to say that we will act on the grounds of scientific evidence, not the grounds of political or commercial will. Those unfortunate influences can lead to difficulties, distrust and, eventually, disaster.

We were not told of any possibility of live tests and were informed that research on the issue would take a long time. If my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary could say anything about testing in his winding-up speech, I think that the agricultural world would be extremely interested——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Hear, hear.

Mr. Wiggin: I am glad to hear my hon. Friend saying, "Hear, hear". I will remember this debate for an aside, which may not have been picked up by the *Hansard* reporters, to the effect that my hon. Friend was once a dairy maid. We respect her deep knowledge of such matters.

I have no hesitation in saying that the Government have played a straight bat; they have got it right in so far as one can get it right on such a national disaster. I am sorry that the Opposition should feel that there is any political difference over the issue. It is a matter of national concern, and it is a great pity that all hon. Members cannot come together to deal with what has been an unpleasant, damaging and unfortunate experience for the nation.

8.46 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am sure that today is the right time to be re-examining the problems created by BSE. It is now two years since the crisis broke, and the media have lost interest in it. If people do not believe me, they should look at the Press Gallery. Today we can say things that we could not say two years ago for fear of fuelling the panic. If we were to ask the general public what they remember about the BSE scare they would say that they remembered the Minister of Agriculture trying to force-feed his delightful daughter with a couple of beefburgers.

The issue has disappeared from the public consciousness, but let us consider the cost. One reason for re-examining and debating the problem is the financial cost of compensating farmers that the taxpayer has had to pick up. In 1989, the figure was £1 million. In 1990, it was £4 million. In 1989, farmers were paid only half compensation, but by 1991 the figure was £10 million. It is estimated that the figure for 1992 will be £18 million in compensation. As estimates are normally wrong, that figures is likely to be £20 million—a staggering amount. The total compensation for farmers over the past four years is £40 million.

The Opposition do not begrudge the farmers that compensation. It was only through the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) that the Government were forced into paying full compensation. Time and again Ministers came to the Dispatch Box and refused to authorise the payment of full compensation, and there was not much support among Conservative Back Benchers for our proposals at the time.

The Government's inaction caused the terrible plague among cattle. First, they decided to ignore the report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution in 1979. It warned the Government that there would be problems in feeding rendered animal pieces to animals. Were any layman to consider the idea of feeding pieces of animals to ruminants such as cows, he would be bound to agree that there would be side effects. The Royal Commission warned the Government of that in 1979, but the Government did nothing about it.

At that time there were also changes in the rendering regulations. The Government's inaction meant that the problems created through the new rendering processes—which reduced the temperature at which rendered sheep carcases were treated and so introduced scrapie into the cows' food chain—allowed the virus to persist. We are not sure that BSE is a virus—it is difficult to decide exactly what it is—but we know that it exists in scrapie, cattle and, unfortunately, man. Autopsies on all those show the disease looking the same.

References have been made to the Select Committee's handling of the BSE crisis. It was better than the Government's handling of the salmonella scare, but a Minister resigned over that. The Government's handling of that crisis was a shambles and a disaster, and anything would be better than that. However, they did not take all

[Mr. Eric Martlew]

the advice. Were the Chairman of the Select Committee to read the recommendations on beef safety, he would see that he forgot to mention that it was stated that cast-iron guarantees could not be given. I accept that beef may be safe now, there can be no cast-iron guarantee for the future.

The Select Committee asked MAFF to discourage farmers from breeding from the offspring of cows with BSE, but it refused. It refused also to extend the offal ban to calves. There is growing evidence of vertical transmission. It is limited, but even the National Farmers Union brief makes mention of vertical transmission from cow to cow. If that exists, the disease is being kept alive, and offal from calves that could be affected continues to be sold for human consumption.

As to the random sampling of carcases, there has been some shifting about among Conservative Members tonight. The Government are obviously against random sampling. The reason is obvious. If they look for evidence of infected animals entering the food chain, they are likely to find it. Professor Mills of Cambridge says that only cattle visibly affected by BSE are destroyed, so apparently healthy animals can enter the food chain. Only cattle that look as though they have BSE are incinerated.

The Government are against random sampling because they know that if they look for BSE, they will find it—and then they will have to explain to the public why infected meat entered the food chain. I accept the logic of the argument that it does not matter much if the offal, brain, and spinal cord of infected carcases are removed. By the same logic, however, there is no sense in burning the carcase of an infected beast, because that part of it that remains will be perfectly safe.

The Government have got their facts wrong. One Conservative Member suggested that we should not accept any Government figures. I agree that the Government have a habit of getting their sums wrong—but to be wrong threefold is rather a lot, even for this Government.

If there is little evidence of vertical transmission—though there is some—at some point the Government must consider eradicating BSE from British cattle by a policy of culling. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary is listening—he does not look as though he is. I repeat that the way to eradicate BSE will be at some point to decide that all cows born before 1988 must be destroyed, and full compensation paid.

Several Hon. Members *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Martlew: That seems to be a problem. I do not know whether the Parliamentary Secretary has done his sums, but I presume not. BSE has already cost £40 million. Our cattle cannot be exported live—no one wants to buy them at present. Britain has a terrible reputation throughout the world because of BSE. Before 1988, we had some of the finest dairy herds in the world. If we want to retrieve our good name, my suggestion represents one option.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Can the hon. Gentleman estimate the effect such a policy would have on the view held in this country and abroad on the safety of British beef to eat?

Mr. Martlew: I am sorry that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, because I understand that he has only just entered the Chamber. We currently have a bad reputation, but if we cleared out BSE, we could only improve it.

I am convinced that there is little risk to humans from BSE. The point was made that more people are likely to be killed from being struck by lightning, and that is correct. Nevertheless, I remind the House that every year a few people are killed by lightning.

8.54 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I join those who criticise the Opposition's motion, and as declaring one's interests is currently fashionable, I must declare mine, in having many farmers in my constituency who make a living from rearing beef.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) gave as the feeble excuse for the motion the fact that the topic has not been debated for two years. I share the view of farmers in my constituency that Labour Members have been campaigning on it for a considerable time. Each time that the Opposition seek to make the headlines, it is a stab in the back for British farmers. Each time that the Opposition raise the matter, it threatens to reduce the income of farmers who are already considerably hard pressed.

Of the big restaurant chains, one in particular that buys beef in advance reduces the orders that it places with its wholesalers by 25 per cent. every time that BSE comes back into the news. That is the sum total of the damage done to farm incomes in this country by those who continue to harp on the subject.

As the hon. Member for South Shields knows, farmers in my constituency and in Scotland report a very low incidence of BSE, yet they are punished by continual references to the threat that it poses. Farmers and traditional butchers are baffled by the topic being raised yet again in this debate. Some unkind pundits may say that the Opposition are knackered and do not have any better ideas. Others may say that Opposition Members have been watching too much television. It is odd that this debate comes in the wake of the BBC television series "Natural Lies", which spread seriously damaging rumours about BSE and prompted the chief veterinary officer to say that "the BBC is unwise, if not stupid, to put this on."

I heartily agree. It was also disgraceful of *The Guardian* to make mention in an article today of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in connection with tonight's debate. That article has nothing to do with BSE in animals.

Where is the science in all this? One well-known professor suggested in 1990 that 6 million cattle ought to be slaughtered. Luckily, we did not listen to him. We know also of the views of Dr. Helen Grant, a retired consultant neuropathologist who served as the paid adviser to "Natural Lies". Against that, we have the advice of Dr. David Tyrrell; Keith Meldrum, the chief veterinary officer; Sir Richard Southwood; and many others. They have all shown that BSE is under control and will soon be on the way out.

There was talk of 600 or 700 cases a week. We should give credit to the Ministry for predicting in the late 1980s that the figure would rise to 1,000 a week. That has not happened, and over the past three years there has been a decline in the incidence of BSE, certainly in the case of two-year-olds. All the evidence suggests that the crisis is now abating.

I urge the Opposition not to continue to use the issue as such activity damages our farmers' interests. I believe that farmers should be allowed to get on with earning a living as best they can in these difficult times. I also believe that the final summary in the Tyrrell report is as true now as it was when it was published in 1990:

"We have no hesitation in saying that beef can be eaten safely by everyone, both adults and children."

8.59 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): There can be no doubt that the situation is deteriorating beyond the Government's expectations, and that it continues to raise fundamental issues. We need not apologise to hon. Members who criticise us for raising such issues.

In European Community terms, we are talking about the effectiveness of common policies and freedom of trade. In United Kingdom terms, we are talking about a continuing serious challenge to the livestock industry, and a cause for legitimate public concern. There is no doubt that the Government took action; that is not the issue. There is also no doubt, however, that the Government made mistakes. I hope to demonstrate that for the benefit of the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland)—although I intend to quote from MAFF reports rather than refer to quirky advisers.

Undoubtedly, a delay in positive, direct action between 1986 and 1988 caused the present situation. The Minister shakes his head, but others disagree with him. Another factor is the extent to which the problem was underestimated. Government figures show that, between 1986 and 1991, 26,000 BSE cases were identified—an incidence of about 11·6 per cent. in the total herd, or 3·9 cases per 1,000. The latest figures suggest that some 60,000 animals have been slaughtered; between 1991 and 1992, the number of cases has more than doubled, even according to Government figures. That is not a cause for complacency. At the time of the Southwood report there were 100 cases per week, and now even the Ministry suggests that there are between 600 and 700 cases per week.

I question the Government's continuing prediction that the incidence of BSE will peak towards the end of the year and will then fall rapidly. At best there is serious doubt about that, and I do not believe that it will happen. An important factor, of course, is the two-year delay between the identification of BSE in 1986 and the taking of action in July 1988. During that critical period, when the situation was deteriorating, no decisive direct action was taken. Why?

Many people—I do not count myself among them—believe that producer interests were the dominant factor. The Government did not want the matter to be brought into the public domain; meanwhile, consumers were blissfully unaware of the seriousness of the position. In 1988, the Government moved at last. I believe that the measures that were taken then had more to do with public pressure than with the Government's enthusiasm for taking steps.

Compulsory slaughter was introduced on 8 August. Again, mistakes were made; thankfully, they were righted later, but again that was a result of pressure. The introduction of 50 per cent. compensation had two inevitable results: first, it did not encourage producers to take their animals to slaughter, and, secondly, fewer cases were recorded and the real figure did not emerge. In February 1990, the Government saw the error of their ways and introduced 100 per cent. compensation.

Mr. Curry: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there was absolutely no change in the pattern of reporting the consequences of that move from 50 per cent. to 100 per cent. compensation? We introduced 100 per cent. compensation to assist the industry, not because we thought that farmers were holding back information that they should have given us.

Mr. Stevenson: I thank the Minister for offering that advice to me. I am always grateful for it, as he knows from our debates on these issues in other places. However, the Government were forced to change their mind. They did so reluctantly, after pressure from the Opposition forced them into it.

Reference has been made to changes in the processing and rendering industry. The use of lower temperatures may have led to more infection. A number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have suggested that that was probably so. There were other changes in the industry at that time. Even Ministry documents suggest that there was a significant reduction in the use of solvent extraction methods for removing fat from the meat and bonemeal. The report concluded that.

"This was one of the factors that caused an increase in exposure which resulted in critical cases of BSE in cattle."

These were not quirky advisers; they were Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials. They concluded that changes were only for commercial reasons. Once again the clear evidence is that the Ministry did not take any notice of what was happening in the industry and that that led to an increase in identifiable BSE cases.

Despite the Government's efforts in 1988, two examples demonstrate that the Government's amendment is somewhat incredible. First, the ban on the feeding of specified bovine offals to pigs and poultry was a welcome development, but that important step had literally to be forced on a reluctant Government. In a January 1990 news release the Minister said:

"There is no scientific justification to extend the ruminant food ban to pigs and poultry."

In May 1990 the same Minister said:

"I have, for example, been asked to ban the use of ruminant protein in pig and poultry diets. Doctors and scientists see no justification in that. This is entirely consistent with other feeding practices."

Four months later—not a year later—the Government announced exactly that ban. Does that suggest that the Government had carefully considered the evidence? Not a bit of it. They reacted four months later because of public pressure. Any suggestion by Conservative Members that the Government had carefully considered the position is not borne out by the facts.

The second example is the latest action taken by the European Community to ban imports into the Community of embryos taken from cattle born before 1988 and the offspring of cows suspected of or confirmed as having BSE. That is another example of the Government having been forced to move by public opinion and pressure. In the press release of 25 September, to which I referred earlier, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said:

"There are some who have suggested that there should be a ban on breeding from the offspring of BSE cattle. The Southwood committee did not recommend that, but I was concerned to ensure that all up-to-date information was taken

[Mr. Stevenson]

into account and referred the question to the Tyrrell committee, and they confirmed fully what Southwood said. I am placing a full statement of their advice on this point in the Library."

Again complacency forced the Government to agree on 14 May of this year that a ban on the export of the same embryos to which the Minister had referred should be put in place. Why is that? There is increasing concern in the European Community about the issue, where the view has been established that embryos represent an unacceptable risk. These instances of changes of mind reflect, in my view, an initial dogmatic refusal by the Government to accept the obvious.

I referred to the Government belatedly acting in 1988, but much remains to be done. Our motion should be accepted to make our task clear. We must take all measures to defeat this disease. The Government amendment is complacent in the extreme. They claim "rigorous and comprehensive action" to bring the disease under control, but the statistics show the falsehood of that claim.

There has been a massive increase in recorded cases of BSE. The Government's complacency simply will not do. The greatest precautions should be at the heart of the steps that are taken. The benefit of any doubt—hon. Members agree that there is some doubt—should come down in favour of public health and protection of the food chain. That should be the overriding consideration.

I hope that the House will accept the motion, because it proposes the measures that need to be taken and reflects the wider public interest.

9.10 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I was interested to note that on 21 May I followed the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) when we both made our maiden speeches. I said then that he would be a trenchant contributor to debates, and he did nothing this evening to change my mind.

With great sadness, I part company with the hon. Gentleman in his support of the Opposition motion, the first clause of which says:

"That this House regards Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy as currently one of the great threats facing British agriculture".

That underscores the Opposition's approach to this and many other matters of public concern. Hyperbole is the Labour party's watchword. Exaggeration beyond all logic may not win the scientific or intellectual arguments but it will frighten the public, especially the beef-eating and beef-buying public. BSE is not now and has not been in its development in the past four to six years one of the greatest threats facing agriculture. It may become so if the Opposition and the single-issue lobbies that sustain them continue unjustifiably to scare the public about the effect on public health of eating beef.

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) said: that tonight of all nights is the worst possible occasion to debate BSE. We are in the middle of the royal show, when we should be supporting our agriculture industry rather than knocking it. I wish that we were not debating the subject tonight.

The chief medical officer said that there is no risk to public health from eating beef. EC experts agreed, said that the Government's action is correct and confirmed that beef is not a risk to public health. The Tyrrell report concluded that all safeguards are in place to prevent the spread of BSE and any possible risk of transmission to humans.

If the Labour party wants to damage the British beef farmer and the British beef industry and to give our overseas competitors a free hand, it should say so, but there is no justification for an exaggerated and irresponsible approach to the beef industry or the BSE issue. Its line this evening towards the Government and the recommendations of their advisers is to be deplored. From the outset, the Government have tackled the problem of BSE in dairy herds responsibly and according to the best advice available. If the Labour party had been in office since 1986, I very much doubt that its approach would have been any different. The scientific, veterinary and medical advice would have been exactly the same, regardless of the colour of the party in government. I suggest that the findings and recommendations would have been exactly the same, and we have been listening to them for the past few years.

I am told that BSE is caused by an unconventional living agent, an unclassified germ, which is not within the normal categories of germs that scientists come across. It is not, for example, from the protozoa family, the microscopic animal which causes diseases such as malaria; nor is it a fungus which causes, for example, farmer's lung; nor is it a bacteria which causes enteritis or pneumonia and nor is it a virus which causes diseases such as rabies.

The origins of BSE in cattle are to be found in the common extended feed source which transmitted the modified scrapie-like encephalopathy from sheep to cattle. The sheep disease scrapie has been known in the United Kingdom for more than 250 years with no established human connection. There is no proof of any link between BSE and any human encephalopathy, and any theoretical risk is still more remote because of the care taken in the slaughter of all cattle completely to separate and destroy the brain tissue and central nervous system—the only parts of the body in which BSE has been found—from the rest of the animal. I therefore suggest that it is practically impossible for there to be a risk to human beings from eating beef.

From the first few baffling cases in 1986, through 1987 when the Government and their advisers were collecting and assessing the available data, until the ban on feeding ruminant protein to ruminants was implemented in July 1988, the Government have acted with common sense and sensitivity. It is not Government inaction or Government failure that underlies the rise in the estimated number of affected cows from 20,000 to more than 60,000.

We have been faced with a previously unknown problem in cattle husbandry and epizoology. As research continues under the Tyrrell committee, our knowledge becomes greater. We now know that BSE takes far longer to incubate than was thought or anticipated in 1986-88. We also know that there is no evidence that the disease is spreading. It is the cattle infected before the feed ban came into effect which are now presenting. The number of affected beasts may not begin to fall this year, but I believe that it has peaked or is on a plateau and, by the turn of 1992-93, the numbers will decrease. I venture further to suggest that in the decade 1986-96 the problem will be eradicated.

My constituency is famous for its grass and beef cattle and, traditionally, beef herds have been fattened for

market on its rich pasture. We have perhaps no more than 20 dairy herds in the constituency but they are some of the finest not only in the county of Leicestershire but in the country as a whole. That under the ownership of the Co-operative Wholesale Society at Stoughton and Stretton is probably the biggest in the country and probably one of the best.

The CWS dairy herd, which, I believe, is made up of seven milking herds of about 200 cows and a breeding herd, contains cows of the very highest quality. As a result of being fed on a high nutrition diet, they can be milked three times a day. However, nothing could be better calculated to damage the reputation of that fine herd—especially the breeding herd—and of other fine dairy herds in the constituency than the alarmist attitude towards BSE exemplified in the motion and especially in its first sentence.

The CWS has traditionally been a good friend to the Labour party, but I wonder whether that will be the case after this evening. Not only will the dairy farmers be damaged by the Opposition's attitude to BSE and to the steps taken by the Government on the advice of their experts, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said, as a direct result of the Opposition's decision to hold a debate on BSE tonight, one of the major restaurant chains has this week dramatically cut its order for beef.

What is more, it is not just the big butchers that will be affected; the small butchers, other small shops and small restaurants where beef is popular will also experience cuts.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government took speedy action after the discovery of BSE? The fact that they spent £10 million over the past three years—and they will spend £15 million over the next three years—made consumers sufficiently confident to go back to eating beef. This debate, which was instigated by the Opposition, will lead to a reduction in sales and to an erosion of the confidence that has been restored as a result of our action.

Mr. Garnier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making my point for me. He did so much more eloquently than I could have done.

My final point, which echoes my hon. Friend's remarks, concerns public confidence. This is not a problem at the present, but it will be a problem in the coming weeks as parents queue up outside schools to tell headmasters and teachers that they do not want their children to eat beef in school dinners, and as worried relatives tell matrons, nurses and doctors that they do not want their sick or elderly relations to have beef in hospital meals. The residents of old people's homes too will be influenced against eating beef. A whole culture against eating beef is being encouraged by motions such as this. That is something that has to be staunched. I urge all hon. Members to reject the motion and to support the Government's amendment.

9.21 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I refuse point-blank to be intimidated by an outside commercial lobby with representatives in the House of Commons into failing to address a matter that is legitimately a subject for debate in this Chamber. That is what the House of Commons is about. People outside who study the remarks made by my hon. Friends this evening will find that every one of them spoke with great care, very conscious of the need to avoid any adverse reaction from the public in its beef-eating habits.

Let me say what worries me about the commercial lobby. One of the members of the Select Committee was the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill). I am sure that he is a very honourable gentleman, but he must understand that, as he, a director of an abattoir and of a meat-processing company—I take that from the statement that he made to the Committee, published in the Committee's report—was taking evidence from senior civil servants and from experts in the field, I, like any member of the British public, am entitled to ask whether such action was proper.

Mr. Gill: That remark calls for some comment by me. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is showing a great deal of interest in this debate, and he has undoubtedly read the minutes of evidence given to the Select Committee. In case he has not done so in detail, let me refer him to evidence recorded on page 15 of the report of 23 May 1990. On that occasion, at the opening of the inquiry, my very first action was to declare an interest. Members of the Select Committee, some of whom are in the Chamber at present, will remember the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), who said—and there was more than a grain of truth in this——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. This is a rather lengthy intervention.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman has added nothing to what he said before. He should check my words, and what he said is a matter of record in the Committee minutes——

Mr. Gill *rose*——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I want to move on to what the Chairman of the Select Committee said——

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I have no intention of giving way; I have only six minutes.

Mr. Gill: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it right that the hon. Gentleman should make such allegations without accepting my explanation? I was halfway through that explanation when you ordered me to sit down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's intervention was very lengthy—beyond what is acceptable to the House.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Member for Ludlow would do well to read the report of our proceedings tomorrow, when he will see that his intervention was unnecessary in the light of what I have said.

I come now to the remarks of the Chairman of the Select Committee on Agriculture. I do not profess to be an expert; until my train journey this morning I knew very little about these matters. But I have read the documents that I had with me. Today I asked the Chairman of the Select Committee a question about transmission from the gut to the brain. He said that all these matters had been

[Mr. Campbell-Savours]

dealt with during the course of the Select Committee's proceedings: in other words, he did not give me an answer. It was not until another Conservative Member intervened that my question got a response. He said that the pathogen is isolated in the spine. That is still not an answer to my simple question.

All I want to know is how the pathogen gets from the gut to the brain. Perhaps it is transmitted via some blood route—I do not know. If, however, that is the answer, surely the Chairman of the Select Committee could have given me it. It is not an answer to tell me that we heard experts in the Select Committee and discussed the matter in a general way. Laymen like me, and members of the British public, are entitled to ask these questions and have them answered, but they have not been dealt with in this debate.

Various matters have been misrepresented in this House over the years. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) offered two examples to which I believe the Minister should respond. Those who were here for our debates on Chernobyl will recall that Ministers made statements that turned out subsequently to be wrong. Farms within a few miles of my constituency are still subject to the post-Chernobyl restrictions six years on. We were not told that that would happen at the time. Last week the Parliamentary Secretary was able to release a number of farms in the county of Cumbria from those restrictions, for which I thank him.

The Minister of Agriculture also misrepresents certain issues—I do not know whether it is fair to say that he does so deliberately, but he does. After the so-called agricultural settlement of a few weeks ago, we were assured that the deal from Brussels was good for Britain and for our consumers and taxpayers. Within a matter of days a report by the Court of Auditors stated that that settlement was a recipe for fraud. Whom should we believe? A Minister gave us assurances at the Dispatch Box, but someone in Brussels said, "I'm sorry, but you have got it wrong. You have misunderstood what the farm settlement is about when it was represented to Parliament as a means of breaking the GATT deadlock."

Looking at the issue today as a layman and not as an expert, I tried to establish whether there is a threat to beef. I passionately want to believe what the Chairman of the Select Committee told the House. Indeed, I am sure all hon. Members would want to believe him. We want to believe that beef is safe and, hopefully, it is safe. However, I found a news release among my papers from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which stated:

"As part of this programme of work designed to clarify the range of species susceptible to BSE, an experiment conducted by the Medical Research Council and MAFF has resulted in BSE being transmitted to a marmoset, following inoculation of cattle brain material from a BSE infected cow into its brain and body cavity."

The report then refers to the Tyrrell committee and what it is doing. It continues:

"I am arranging for a copy of this advice to be placed in the Library of the House."

That report was about transmission to the marmoset. I went to the Library expecting to read that very substantial document about transmission to marmosets. However, I found only one sentence about that which read:

"Marmosets exposed parenterally to scrapie or BSE have succumbed to spongiform encephalopathy."

The problem is the way the information is presented. We are told by MAFF that a report has been published. However, when hon. Members go to satisfy themselves they find that there is only one sentence in the report about that matter.

If we are to have an honest debate, everything must be published. Let us read everything and then there will be no need for arguments and debates like this.

9.31 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has captured the expressions from the Opposition Benches very well. I have listened to the debate with great interest and there seems to be as clear a divide as ever between the Government and the Opposition on the matter.

We have heard a succession of Conservative Members state that there should not be a debate on the matter and that Opposition Members are scaremongering or raising unjustified fears. However, *Hansard* will record some very informed and analytical speeches by Opposition Members and none more so than the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) and for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) who have studied the subject in great detail.

We heard a defence of vested interests from Conservative Members. If we consider those Conservative Members who have spoken, we should not be too surprised about that. That hoary old character, the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland), was the first to lead the charge.

Mr. Martlew: Where is he now?

Mr. Davies: It is worth pointing out for the record that all the Opposition Members who participated in the debate remained in the Chamber throughout the evening and had the courtesy to listen to the contributions from the Conservative Benches. Several Conservative Members who made speeches or interventions have not had the courtesy to remain for the duration of the debate, let alone for its conclusion. Never mind, perhaps they will learn to do that.

It is worth remembering that the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) made the same intervention tonight that he made two years ago. He raised the same arguments. He wants no debate, discussion, deliberation or public information about BSE. That is not because he is a scientist. He was not speaking as a parent. He was speaking tonight as a butcher. The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West, who is from exactly the same background, was not concerned to protect the interests of consumers or of public health. He was concerned solely to represent the interests of the farming community. The prize went to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), who joined the farmer and the butcher. Of course, he is a failed Agriculture Minister. He was sacked from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and now he has been put in the chair of the Agriculture Select Committee. He had the audacity tonight to speak against the many recommendations of his own Select Committee. *[Interruption.]* I hear my hon. Friends——

Mr. Wiggin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: Let me finish. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, he had the opportunity to make his speech. He

made a number of comments which my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) bitterly resented. That should not come as a surprise to Opposition Members, because I had a look at "Dods" and I saw the hon. Gentleman's interests. I found that he is a member of the Beefsteak club. That should not surprise us. *[Interruption.]* He is not only a member of the Beefsteak club; he is a member of Pratt's club as well. I leave it to my hon. Friends to decide which is a better qualification for speaking in the debate.

Conservative Members had some new recruits. The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) claimed to represent the interests of farmers in his constituency. Where is he? He referred to the debate as a campaign which is a stab in the back to farmers in his constituency. It is a pity that he is not here now and it is a pity that he was not here during our debates in 1990 or 1989, because he will know that, without fail, every initiative that the Government have taken on BSE has been presaged by Opposition calls months and, in some cases, years before the Government took action. The hon. Gentleman lists his interests as a former director of the British Field Sports Society. As long as he spends his time chasing little furry animals across the countryside to deliver them a cruel death, he will not have much credibility in the House.

Let us consider the substance of the case. We are told by hon. Members who are trying to frustrate the debate that we do not need and should not have a debate. Let them read *Hansard* tomorrow. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington made this point very clear. Not one Opposition speech can in any way be construed as anti-farmer, anti-meat industry or anti-beef. We have tried to ensure that that message comes across very clearly. Of course, there are major grounds for concern, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields pointed out. In April alone, there were 4,000 cases of BSE. In 1989, about 4,000 cattle herds were affected by BSE. In 1990, that figure had nearly doubled to 7,590 cases. Last year, more than 11,000 herds were affected by BSE.

If Conservative Members are not prepared to stand up and speak for the interests of farmers whose livelihoods are directly affected by that plague, we are certainly not afraid to stand up in the House of Commons and say that the matter has to be debated. Nor will we shirk our responsibility to speak for consumers. Their choice has been restricted. As beef consumption figures show, many consumers are so concerned about the beef industry that they have changed their pattern of beef consumption. That is a matter of concern and we should be prepared to address it in the House of Commons.

If the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has a press office which takes cuttings for him, he will know that scarcely a week goes by in which specialist journals or our quality press do not mention BSE and consumers' real fears. Tim Lang, who is the director of Parents for Safe Food, is a very well respected nutritionist. *[Interruption.]* He is a very well respected nutritionist who speaks for a wide range of opinion. His view is quite clear and quite uncompromising. The Government——

Mr. Wiggin *rose*——

Mr. Davies: I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman. I am sorry. The Minister wants time to reply. The matter is on the record.

Tim Lang made it clear that the Government could not continue pretending that BSE was not an issue. The Southwood committee must be reconvened. It must be open and it must have consumer representation on it.

The scientific community and the veterinary profession are worried about many aspects of BSE. They are worried about the method of transmission, the range of animals affected, the geographical distribution of the disease and feeding offal of six-month old calves into the human food chain. We know that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has some strange habits. The incident of force-feeding hamburgers to his daughter told us as much about his search for publicity as his regard for the sensibilities of his family.

Let me put a direct point to the Parliamentary Secretary, who will reply to the debate. There is clear evidence that some calves and some cattle have contracted BSE since the ban on feeding infected offal to cattle was introduced. The number of cases is in at least double figures. The Minister said earlier that there was evidence that the animals might have had access to contaminated feed. The fact remains that they were born since the ban came into force. If BSE is vertically transmissible—there is considerable veterinary opinion that that is the case—is it not logical to ban the offal from six-month old calves from the human food chain? Vertical transmission might not have built up to critical proportions but the fact remains that the agent exists in the brain, the spleen and the thymus of those six-month old calves.

Why do not the Government accept their responsibility and ban such calves from the food chain? I will tell the House why. It is because there is a lucrative trade in under-age calves to the continent. The Minister realises that this is one occasion when he must put the vested financial interests that he represents before the interests of the consumers. That is why he will not take the action that we demand.

Various attacks have been made on the Opposition tonight. The fact remains that the Government do not want their record on BSE to be examined. The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West has now returned to the Chamber. He did not defend the interest of farmers in his constituency by making the comments that he did tonight. He hid behind the farmers of his constituency.

The hon. Member for Hexham still has not had the courtesy to return to the Chamber. I say to him that the only debates in the House of Commons on BSE have been those initiated by the Opposition. The only action on BSE has been that which we have demanded. When we have specified what action must be taken, the Government have acted months and sometimes years later. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) did not remain in the Chamber for the debate. I do not know where he has been. I suggest that he takes the time to read the record in *Hansard.*

The information that we have on BSE has been obtained only as a result of the vigilance of Opposition Members who dragged it out of the Government. *[Interruption.]* Let us examine the Government's record as the Minister finds it so amusing. In his reply, let him challenge any of the statements that I am about to make. In 1985 the Ministry knew that cattle were being stricken by a mystery disease but covered it up. In 1987 the Ministry knew about a scientific paper which intended to

[Mr. Davies]

refer to a scrapie-like disease in cattle and censored it. The Ministry suspected in 1987 that contaminated feed was the problem and did nothing until August 1988.

In June 1988 the BSE order made the disease notifiable and banned the feeding of ruminant protein to ruminant animals. But the Government did not implement it until July 1988. Ruminant protein continued to be used in pig and poultry feed until September 1990, yet two years previously we demanded that the practice be stopped. In June 1988 the Southwood report recommended introducing compulsory slaughter. The Government did not act until August 1988. For almost two years the Government resisted our calls for 100 per cent. compensation. Initially they paid farmers only 50 per cent. compensation for their animals. For nearly two years, they resisted our claims, and, despite all the public concern and our calls in the House for the banning of bovine offal for human consumption, they did not act until November 1989. Those facts are beyond dispute. I hope that the Minister will have the courtesy to do the House the honour of acknowledging them.

Let us have a look at our record on this matter, as we have been the subject of an attack. We initiated the first debate on this subject in May 1989, the second debate in May 1990 and the third debate tonight. On a whole range of issues, months before the Government took action we called for action. We called for the banning of offal for human consumption. Years later, they introduced a ban. We called for the banning of offal from meat and bone meal exports. Years later, they conceded that. We called for the banning of offals from feeds for pigs and poultry. Years later, they conceded. We called for the raising of compensation to 100 per cent. Years later, they conceded. Let us look at the omissions. We also called for compulsory antemortal inspection, so that all cattle going to a slaughterhouse would be inspected by a veterinary surgeon before slaughter. We also called for sampling, as did the Select Committee on Agriculture, so that the brains of 10 per cent. of cattle slaughtered would be tested to see whether they had the disease. That is the only sure way to find out about the distribution of the disease. We called for the banning of offals from calves under the age of six months. All those claims were supported by the Tyrrell committee, the Select Committee on Agriculture, European legislation, the British Veterinary Association, by a wide range of scientific opinion, by demands in the House of Commons and, above all, by common sense. On all those critical issues, the Government did nothing.

We have made it clear that the case for having random sampling is overwhelming, but the Government have resisted it. We have made it clear that, as the first line of defence, there should be veterinary inspection for all bovines destined for slaughter both at the livestock market and at the abattoir. Two and a half years ago, the Government promised that they would take action. Here we are in 1992, and 50 per cent. of the bovines slaughtered for human consumption are inspected by veterinary officers neither at a livestock market nor at an abattoir. Can the Government justify such a record?

The Government accuse us of scaremongering but we are not scaremongering. We are not looking to create scare stories——

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): No?

Mr. Davies: Despite what the hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position, that is not our aim. We are not taking an alarmist position. We want responsible government and responsible action for farmers, for consumers and for animal and public health. If the only way to get that responsible government is by having debates in the House, so be it. We shall not shirk our responsibility.

9.48 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): To wind up for the Government for the first time is the parliamentary equivalent of riding in the grand national, and in the short time available to me I intend to deal with some of the points raised this evening. The Minister of State—my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry)—took the House step by step through the chronology of this wicked disease and laid carefully before the House all the evidence and all the available facts. Labour Members criticised the Government, claiming that we had covered up or hidden the effect of this inimical disease. However, every piece of information that the Ministry has on BSE has been, and will continue to be, placed within the public domain immediately. I assure the House that that is so, and it is a disgraceful slur to suggest otherwise.

The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) in an intervention and the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) in his speech asked about the difference between animals that are slaughtered and those that are not. Animals that are showing clinical signs of the disease are likely to harbour a relatively large amount of the infectious agent. That led to the Southwood working party's advice that they should be slaughtered and destroyed purely as a precautionary measure. The specified offals of all animals are now withdrawn from human and animal feed. These tissues are those in which the infective agent may be present in animals incubating the disease. It is not possible to identify a cow that is incubating BSE as no diagnostic test is available.

The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), who is not here, asked about incineration and the holding of frozen carcases. The Ministry and all its independent scientific advisers are satisfied that the arrangements for incineration and the holding of carcases, if necessary prior to incineration, are entirely satisfactory. In far-off rural areas where facilities are not available, the disposal of carcases is done by deep burial, which is, in itself, satisfactory.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland), despite some unreasonable and unfortunate calumnies levelled against him, made a vigorous and effective defence of Government policy. He rightly deplored the scaremongering of the Labour party and the profound damage that it has done and continues to do to the industry.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen asked about the slaughter of whole herds on farms with numerous cases and mentioned a case of which he knew in Wales. Thankfully, herds with a high incidence of the disease are rare. That is encouraging, as it supports the view that transmission from one animal to another is not a significant problem. Government veterinarians carefully study herds with multiple cases and all the evidence supports the thesis that the animals were infected by feed.

The hon. Gentleman and others spoke about the disease in animals between two and three years old. There is nothing surprising in the existence of such cases in 1991. It is now clear, however, that the number of cases in two-year-old animals is low. Accurate details have been published in veterinary journals, if hon. Gentlemen could only get on and find them. The fact is that there have been only 101 cases in animals born after the ban and all but one of those animals had access to infected feed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), who was the Chairman of the Select Committee during its inquiry into this matter, was, rightly, listened to with great respect in this debate because of his knowledge. He spoke about the Committee's excellent report which has so well stood the test of time, as has the science. My hon. Friend asked about progress in research into a live test and said that our hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) wished to be associated with the question. A great deal of fundamental knowledge is being accumulated, but a test for the disease in the live animal is still a long way off. That is not for want of effort by the Government; the Ministry alone is spending £5 million a year on research and the Tyrrell committee recently confirmed that the necessary research is continuing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) represented with vigour the interests of his constituents and he spoke of his concern at the damage that might be done by the absurdity of the Opposition motion.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) raised two important points that I propose to deal with properly: offal from calves and random testing. Both were also mentioned by the hon. Member for Workington. Random testing for BSE in routinely slaughtered cattle is a difficult issue and suggestions about it have been made many times. We already inspect for clinical signs of disease a high proportion of cows at slaughterhouses. I do not understand why Opposition Members continue to press for a process to which the first Tyrrell committee attached a low priority. The offals ban already removes from the food chain the relevant tissues from clinically infected animals, and random testing would merely direct valuable expert resources away from the main problem.

We were also asked about offals from cows aged under six months. The decision to exclude such animals was taken after careful consideration and in the light of advice from experts. The basis of that decision is that such young cattle have not been fed the infected agent in the first place. We also know from detailed work on scrapie that the agent has been found only in animals over the age of 10 months. Therefore, a six months limit for cattle gives a four-month safety margin and action on these offals is deemed unnecessary.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) spoke at length and grossly inaccurately about compensation. However, he asked one important question: why was no action taken earlier than 1988? Action could not be taken until we understood the epidemiology of the disease. That could not be done until enough cases had been studied, and only 189 had been diagnosed by the end of 1987. As soon as we were confident that we knew the cause, we took steps to remove it—hence the feed ban. The hon. Gentleman alleged that we were not careful about protecting food. We attach paramount importance not only to our treatment of BSE but to all that we do to protect the consumer and to maintain the integrity of the food chain and public confidence in it. What the hon. Gentleman said about that was idiotic.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) rightly attacked the Opposition for their sloppy thinking and the worrying side-effects of their scaremongering. I shall make sure that my hon. Friend's message is carried to the industry when I attend the royal show tomorrow. The hon. Member for Workington treated my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) in a most disagreeable and uncharacteristic manner. He showed a want of chivalry that was quite unlike him. However, he raised the serious issue of how the BSE agent is passed from the gut to the brain. *[Interruption.]* In my case, the transfer would take a long time. The answer is not known, but the agents of such a disease have never been detected in blood, muscle or any other tissue. The development of BSE research is one of the key targets of all the scientific work carried on by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) made his usual robust speech with which we all found ourselves in almost total disagreement. I shall deal with the numbers issues that he and other Opposition Members raised. Much stress has been laid on the number of cases currently being confirmed, and it is important to understand the meaning of those figures. The weekly figure of confirmed cases simply reflects the number of animals for which the confirmation process has been concluded. Obviously, that is a lengthy process. It is much more important to understand the comparison between those figures and the forecast in the early stages of the epidemic.

We are entirely satisfied, and it has been confirmed by independent specialists, that the Government's figures are entirely consistent with the initial expectations. Although the number of cases currently looks high, it simply reflects the number of animals infected before the feed ban became effective. There is no way of knowing how many such cases there were, but the important point is that there remains no reason to doubt that, through the feed ban, the Government have done all that is necessary to curb the epidemic.

We have heard tonight of the Government's vigorous and comprehensive response to BSE. Their response received endorsement from the Select Committee, the European Community and many other countries. The House will be much more impressed by that reception than by the suggestion of the hon. Member for South Shields that we should establish another committee. The Government's response has been prompt, resolute and effective. Surely——

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place, and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 241, Noes 310.

Division No. 51] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Allen, Graham
Adams, Mrs Irene	Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ainger, Nicholas	Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Ashton, Joe

Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ms Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, James
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Enright, Derek
Etherington, William
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Michael
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoff
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Ms Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Ms Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Ms Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan

Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House endorses Her Majesty's Government's vigorous and comprehensive action in response to the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy to bring the outbreak under control.

Prisons

10.14 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I beg to move,

That the draft Criminal Justice Act 1991 (Contracted Out Prisons) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 21st February, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

This short but rather technical order is simple in its purpose. It extends the power in the Criminal Justice Act 1991 to contract out the management of a prison to new prisons holding sentenced prisoners. At present the Act is confined to new prisons holding an unsentenced population.

The greater flexibility to contract out provided by this order was the result of a Back-Bench amendment to the then Bill which the Government were persuaded to accept. I am delighted to see that its original sponsor, my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), is in his place tonight. The occasion to exercise that greater flexibility has now arisen.

On 5 December 1991 the Government announced that competitive tenders would be sought from the private sector for the management of Blakenhurst prison, currently under construction near Redditch, subject to the approval of Parliament and the receipt of satisfactory tenders.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced on 15 June 1992 that work on the operational specification for Blakenhurst had been completed and that it had been issued to potential contractors. Copies of the operational and training specifications were placed in the Library of the House. These, I am sure, will have helped to inform this evening's debate, giving, as they do, a clear indication of the standards and safeguards the Government are looking to achieve and which they confidently expect will be capable of delivery by the private sector.

The decision to invite tenders for Blakenhurst followed the successful tendering exercise at Wolds. When Wolds opened in April, it became the first privately operated prison in the country. The exercise showed that the private sector had much to offer. Many of the proposals put forward then demonstrated imagination and insight into the complex issues involved.

Prisoners at Wolds are able to spend 15 hours a day out of their cells within the secure confines of the prison and with the opportunity to participate in a programme consistent with the needs of a remand population. They have full access to legal assistance and generous opportunities for visits, telephone calls and letters. The Government believe that the benefits accruing to the remand population at Wolds should be more widely available to other sections of the prison population—notably sentenced prisoners.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): As the Minister knows. I represent a Leeds constituency. Armley prison is situated in Leeds. So that we can have a comparison of the weekly subsidy from the Government, can the Minister tell me how much it costs a week, at current rates, to keep a prisoner at Wolds compared with how much it costs a week to keep a prisoner in Armley prison?

Mr. Lloyd: I cannot compare the cost of Wolds with the prison mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. As he knows, different prisons have different regimes and buildings of different sizes. Therefore, the costs are different. However, the tender for Wolds was no higher than the prison service estimated that it would be if it were to provide the manning for that prison. As the hon. Gentleman is so interested in comparisons, he may be interested in what I shall say later. Therefore, I hope that he will continue to pay attention to my remarks, as he has done so far.

To deliver benefits more widely in the prison service we have invited tenders for Blakenhurst, which will be a local prison with a capacity of 649 prisoners. It will hold remand, convicted and sentenced adult men. It will thus deepen and extend prison service experience of private management. The Blakenhurst specification extends to convicted and sentenced prisoners many of the regime improvements that the Wolds prison has brought to its remand population.

Contractors are invited to structure regimes on the premise that prisoners will be out of their cells from first unlock in the morning to final lock-up at night. An absolute minimum cell-free period of 12 hours a day must be achieved. All prisoners will be offered an initial education assessment and thereafter be entitled to a minimum of six hours education a week. Similar provision will be made for physical education, and great care has been taken to ensure that high standards are achieved in providing medical and suicide screening, including the involvement of such voluntary agencies as the Samaritans.

In addition, the sentenced prisoner's time in prison will be structured by a compact agreement. This will set out an understanding between the prisoner and the establishment on the likely profile of activities and goals and the level and timing of commitment that both parties have agreed to make the prison sentence positive and constructive.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): We all welcome what the Minister said about introducing the Samaritans into prisons, but is he aware that valuable research was undertaken in an American prison 10 years ago that involved inmates in reducing suicide among prisoners? Sadly, although I brought that information to the attention of one of his colleagues, it was not available in this country because the prison had been privatised and the information was copyright. Is not that the unacceptable face of privatised prisons that we shall have here as well?

Mr. Lloyd: If the information was copyright, those who hold the copyright have the power to release it. That has nothing to do with private prisons. I am puzzled by the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I think that he is confused, but if he will write to me I shall reply to him more thoughtfully.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that his description of the regime for a local prison will be the envy of many other local prisons such as Horfield, which is on the edge of my constituency? When will the tendering process that he has described for Blakenhurst be extended to other prisons?

Mr. Lloyd: Contractors will make bids and we shall see whether they can supply the regimes that we are seeking. Such a regime will not be widely available in the prison service, although many of its characteristics have been developed in various prison service prisons. The order will not extend tendering to prisons already operating in the

prison service; it deals specifically with brand new prisons. We are merely extending tendering from remand prisons to those that take sentenced prisoners.

The opportunity for prisoners to engage in productive activity for at least seven hours a day is an important feature of the specification. Contractors are invited to consider the extent to which local, commercial and industrial interests might become involved in order that prisoners can be paid the going rate for the job and from which deductions might be made to offset the cost of board and lodgings, family support and victims' reparation. The impact of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, in terms of preparing prisoners for release and the development of open reporting, will also be fully integrated into the regime. Most importantly, provision will also be made for the management of special category prisoners, including the treatment of sex offenders.

As at Wolds, prisoners at Blakenhurst will have the option of wearing their own clothing or, if their own clothes are unsuitable, of more frequent changes of prison clothing than is at present achievable in the public sector. They will be free to send as many letters as they wish, limited only by their own decision as to how much of their prison earnings they choose to spend on postage. Letters will be checked to prevent any illicit enclosure but will not otherwise be examined or read, except when there is reason to believe that it is necessary.

Visiting entitlement for convicted and sentenced prisoners will be set at a minimum of one visit a week of one hour's duration, twice the current statutory entitlement. Contractors will be invited to improve on that where possible. Facilities for evening visits from legal representatives and other professionals will also be made.

The Government recognise that the prison service currently does a very difficult job, often in unpleasant environments. Following the report by Lord Justice Woolf, the prison service has made strenuous efforts to set new standards for itself and is making great progress towards implementing them. However, the Government believe that the element of competition provided by the private sector in bringing new ideas and, more importantly, new managerial methods to the running of prisons can provide additional benefits to the prison service and the prisoners.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): This is the first time in the 30 years that I have been a Member of the House that I have asked a question about prisons, partly for personal reasons. However, having listened to "The World at One", and having read about the issue, I have become more and more uncomfortable. The Minister talks about competition, but we are dealing with people whose freedoms have been taken away. I should like an answer to a simple question: is it proper for anyone other than the state to deal with people whose freedoms have been removed by the state? Is it proper to talk about competition in that context?

Mr. Lloyd: What is not proper is to stand in the way of the introduction of more positive, demanding and humane regimes such as that at the Wolds and that which is intended at Blakenhurst because of some prejudice—ideological or otherwise—to the private sector being part of it. Of course, the prisons will still be part of the prison service, as is the Wolds. They will take prisoners sentenced by the courts. The Home Office controller will be on duty. He is responsible for investigating any complaints that the prisoners might have and for ensuring that the prison is run according to the contract and in the manner that the Home Secretary and the House expect. It is merely prejudice to deny opportunities to prisoners such as those at the Wolds by saying that the private sector cannot properly be involved. If the private sector can produce superior regimes, it is improper that it should not be involved.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the Minister allow the same sums of money to Armley, for example, as are to be allowed to the Wolds?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes. The whole point is that where there is no in-house competition the tendering process will not be met unless the tenders at least make a better offer than the usual prison service estimate of the costs of opening the prison. Of course, the prison service must make an estimate of what the opening of a prison will cost. It must decide on normal manning levels, according to the usual processes. We do not necessarily expect to save money with private management, but we expect to get very much better value for the money that is spent.

As I said, the order empowers the Government to contract out the management of new prisons. Naturally, the occasion is Blakenhurst and I have concentrated on our plans for that establishment. However, I want to make it clear that we expect to invite private sector tenders for each new prison that opens after Blakenhurst.

We also want to see the prison service in due course mount in-house bids for new prisons in competition with the private sector. There is at all levels in the prison service a huge reservoir of dedication, experience and managerial skills, which need to be brought together effectively.

I am sure the stimulus that private management is now starting to bring to the prison system will help to achieve the Government's overriding objective: to bring improved regimes—positive and constructive regimes, which everyone wants to see, and which Lord Justice Woolf catalogued in his report; regimes which are designed to address systematically the particular offending behaviour of each prisoner and which help to fit that prisoner, as far as practicable, to resume his place in society, with a better chance of leading a useful and law-abiding life, and to do so as cost-effectively as possible.

I commend the order to the House.

10.30 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It seems that the Minister and I have been locked in Front-Bench home affairs issues—one side or the other—for quite a long time. I am sure that we have reached the stage of being regarded as trusties in respect of these matters. I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his brief in the Home Office. I believe that this is the first time we have met in these circumstances. The hon. Gentleman was not involved in the passage of the long Criminal Justice Act 1991. During the debates on that legislation we discussed these matters in some detail. The hon. Gentleman said that the Government had given in to pressure from their Back Benchers by expanding the scope of that Act to embrace the privatisation not only of the remand sector but of institutions for sentenced prisoners. At the Committee stage we fought that very strongly and

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bitterly, and we continue to do so because we believe that that direction is wrong—wrong in principle, and wrong in terms of practicalities.

I have referred to the Minister's long service in the Home Office team. I do not remember exactly when he came to office, but I know that he has covered the whole gamut of opinion on privatisation. The right hon. Gentleman who is now Foreign Secretary set his face absolutely against privatisation. In July 1987 he said that there was no case at all for privatisation of the prisons, that there was not case at all for handing the business of keeping prisoners safe to anyone other than Government servants. I believe that the Minister who introduced this order was a member of the team of that Home Secretary in those days. Since then he has been led by various valleys —Ribble Valley, Mole Valley—and we have seen the changes in that time. Conveniently the hon. Gentleman has changed his tune with the arrival of each new boss.

His current boss is not from a valley, but he wants to push this even further. This boss has brought some baggage with him. It is not ideological baggage; it is a kind of trick that he sets down in each department. He says, "Here we have a very interesting trick. It is called 'opt out'. It does wonders for the health service and the education service." And now we are told that it will do wonders for the prison service. It is very interesting that before the chickens come home to roost in any of these Departments, off goes the right hon. and learned Gentleman for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) to new pastures. We have seen what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has wrought in other Departments, and we fear the worst for the prison service.

We have debated private prisons on several occasions. Each time the Opposition have made clear their profound concern about the whole notion of privatising penal establishments. Indeed, many Conservative Members have shared our concern. The two parties are not always wholly divided on this. I know that hon. Members on both sides have deep misgivings about the trend of Government actions in this area.

The key arguments against privatisation are those that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) encapsulated so well: it is wrong that anyone but the state should deprive men or women of their liberty or be directly responsible for prisoners throughout their sentences. The deprivation of liberty is the worst punishment that can be imposed on a person in this country. Certainly, the judiciary metes out the sentence, but once the sentence is given more is involved than just locking up a prisoner and educating and exercising him—although such activities should take place in a good prison. There is also the assessment of a prisoner's fitness to be released. That is done not by the judiciary but by the men and women who supervise prisoners.

We believe that decisions about the fitness of an individual to be released should be made by servants of the state.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): In that case, I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman—he has held his responsibility for some time now—saying that the state does not make such decisions. Such assessments are carried out first by the Parole Board and, secondly, on the advice of the probation service, both of which will remain in the state sector.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman must know that the officers who run our prisons carry out day-to-day assessments of how prisoners obey the rules and how they fit into prison life—all of which feeds into the information on which the probation service and the Parole Board make their decisions. The relationship is highly complex.

Imprisonment is a sensitive and often dangerous task. Ministers have underestimated its dangers. At Strangeways the bravery and resolute behaviour and reactions of the prison officers and the governor came into play. As we shall argue this evening, special circumstances obtain in prisons—circumstances to be found nowhere else.

It is repugnant that private companies should make a profit out of those whom the state decides to imprison.

Mr. Battle: The parallel with opted-out hospitals looms large. Members of Parliament cannot interrogate Ministers about these budgets. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow was right: we will not be able to know by how much these prisons are being subsidised, or to compare their budgets with those of prisons in the public sector such as Armley. We will know neither the profits nor the subsidies of private prisons.

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend is right. Conservative Members have yet to learn that after every other privatisation accountability has been diminished. Already we cannot find out what is going on in Wolds prison. We are told that these matters are the subject of commercial confidentiality. The Minister came out with some fine words, but he did not say how much subsidy that prison receives; neither would he tell us the costs associated with taking remand prisoners in the public prisons sector—at Armley and other gaols. The Minister would not provide a figure and compare it with the figure for the Wolds. Whenever I have asked the Minister or his predecessor how much subsidy is available to the Wolds I have been told that we have no right to know and the Government would not give us any figures.

The accountability of the House for the prison service has begun to slip away and it will continue to do that. That is a serious condemnation of the Government. However, at the end of the day, they do not care about democratic government or accountability. They do not care about that in Europe or in this House. The Government are so used to Executive power that they would love this place to disappear as an effective scrutinising and checking body.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman really is mistaken. There is a contract with the Wolds which details the expected outputs from the prison. He knows more about what is required from that prison than about any other prison in the prison service. That is infinitely clearer.

With regard to the costs, it is impossible to say that there is no subsidy in respect of the Wolds. Every penny is a subsidy paid by the state to the organisation to manage the prison. The figure is no more than the prison service estimated that it would have to spend to run that prison. However, the regimes are more extensive and positive than the prison service believes that it could provide for that money.

Mr. Sheerman *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) continues, I remind the Minister that he, too, must observe the formula for an intervention, not a speech.

Mr. Sheerman: I am happy that the Minister made that point. He is avoiding explaining why there has been no real comparison. The comparison that he gave was simply an estimate made by the Home Office. The prison service was never able to make an internal bid. That would have been the crucial cost evaluation. If the prison service had been able to bid for the Wolds, we would have seen the kind of subsidy given to the private security industry and, in particular, to Group 4.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be satisfied with the process if in-house bids are invited for new prisons at the same time that tenders are invited from outside.

Mr. Sheerman: We would be more content in terms of accountability and evaluation. However, that does not overcome the fact that we object to the privatisation of prisons in principle.

Let us continue with the argument in terms of principle. We believe that it is highly dangerous to build up a penal industrial complex whose members have a vested interest in keeping the prison population high——

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): A penal industrial complex?

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Member may laugh. It is interesting to note that another comedian has joined the Conservative Benches. I had thought that there was an oversupply of that kind of talent on the Government Benches.

I was making the serious point that if we pursue the privatisation of prisons, a large industry will develop. Over the past two or three years many hon. Members have been lobbied by the private prison groups. They are already organised and are paying political consultants and lobbying companies. Some of them have paid Conservative Members—not Labour Members—to lobby for private prisons.

The prison industrial complex already existed and Conservative Members were taking the King's shilling years ago in respect of that professional lobby. That lobby will not go away. It will continue in respect of keeping the number of prisoners at a level that will ensure profits for the private security companies.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid Kent): The hon. Gentleman is making a case which depends entirely on the nature of the contract. If, in time, the nature of the contract were to be so arranged that companies were paid in terms of the success with which they released into the community prisoners who did not reoffend, that part of his argument would fall.

Mr. Sheerman: We object to the principle of the private security industry acting in that way.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Why?

Mr. Sheerman: Let me develop the argument further. Conservative Members who ask why were not members of the Standing Committee which considered the Bill. Time and again, we came back to the heart of our reservations, and that is that the private security industry is unregulated. At present, it cannot be held to any account in a regulatory sense. That means that there are a host of private security companies, some of them made up of cowboy operators employing people with criminal records. Some of the management have criminal records. There is no control of the private security industry.

We do not know what kind of private security company will bid. I am not talking only about blue chip companies being allowed to tender for the early two contracts. Later, as the lowest price becomes the objective of the Government, we shall see all kinds of middle, lower and smaller groups of companies bidding for the contracts when there is no regulation. The Minister will know that the Association of Chief Police Officers is desperately worried about the increase in cowboy private security operators, desperately worried that the Government will not introduce any regulation in the industry, and desperately worried that very sensitive matters of policing and prison administration will go to uncontrolled and uncheckable operators.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that, when we considered the Criminal Justice Bill in Committee, we gave many undertakings that the people who were to be employed both in contracted-out prisons and, when it came to it, contracted-out services for transporting prisoners backwards and forwards, would be fully trained and fully answerable to the Home Office and the Home Secretary.

Mr. Sheerman: I shall refer to the right hon. Lady's performance and her words in Committee in a few moments. If she will hold her fire just for a moment, I shall remind her not only of her comments in Committee but of some others as well. We shall see whether she wants to intervene then.

We still believe that, despite criticisms by the Government, right hon. and hon. Members agreed on some objectives of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. The objectives were that we should try to keep in prison only people who should be in prison—that is, people who have committed such crimes that they have had to be locked up. In Committee, the right hon. Lady and I agreed on many objectives. We recognised the importance of ensuring that imprisonment is used only for those who have committed serious offences. What concerns us is that that attitude, which had all-party support and which moved in that fairly liberal direction, could be put into reverse by pressures, which the Government would underrate and ridicule, to increase the number of prisoners. One has only to look at the United States of America and Australia to see some of the problems that are emerging in the private sector.

Conservative Members do not believe that such lobbying does not take place or that the private security industry will lobby, not only for an increased share of the market but to make sure that the market exists. That will be an important part of its technique, and we are concerned that that might become dangerous.

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: Not for a moment.

We believe that the Government display a cavalier attitude to public safety by relying on the private security

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industry, with its appalling record. We are also gravely worried that control of security may be seriously compromised by the inexperienced employees of the private security industry.

We already have reports of problems at Wolds prison. The Minister skated over them.

Mr. Stern: The hon. Gentleman enjoys every such incident.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman says that, but no Opposition Member wants problems in any part of our prison system. The last thing that we want is for people to be hurt or damage to be caused in any of our prison institutions.

When we hear that there have been problems at the Wolds, we are able to say to the Government, "We told you that the training and the staff that you employ are inadequate for the task." Indeed, as someone said in *The Independent* on the same day as the Home Secretary made his visionary call for expansion in the private sector, the prisoners in the Wolds have far more experience of a prison regime than anyone running the prison. That is the problem.

When the two incidents occurred at the Wolds it was with deep regret that we reminded the Government that we had said that such problems would arise.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Has the hon. Gentleman managed to get out of the Government any more specific admission about what has happened at the Wolds than many of us seem to have obtained so far? Does he believe that the troubles extend to a high rate of staff turnover and the exclusion of legitimate press inquiries into what is happening?

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman is right. I am not sure whether he was here when I referred to the mountain of security which was put round the Wolds prison when people sought to find out what was happening. It is a cause for anxiety that Members of Parliament cannot hold the Minister accountable for what happens at the Wolds. We get the brush off when we ask about its financing and its running. If there is a disturbance at the Wolds it seems that there is a cloak of secrecy. We hear that all the staff have been sworn to secrecy and that the governor is not allowed to make public comment. The lid is put on any publicity about what is happening in the Wolds.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Quite the reverse. The director of the Wolds tells the press about problems that have occurred. He made a particular point of doing so, knowing the untrue rumours that had been put around.

There have been three substantial incidents at the Wolds. That is about average for most prisons. Prisons are places where problems arise. The interesting thing about the Wolds is that each of those difficulties was settled with great skill and competence. That has given extra confidence to the staff. It has given the Home Secretary extra confidence in them. None of the incidents involved any violence whatever.

Mr. Sheerman: It is obvious that the Minister has better information than us. The point that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and I make is that the House should have the information that the Minister has. We want to know what is going on in the Wolds. We want to know how things are going. We want to know whether the staff are coping in a prison which, I remind the Minister, has only a third of its complement of prisoners. Already there have been three incidents. I thought that there had been only two disturbances but he says that there have been three. That is three disturbances when only a third of the complement of prisoners are there.

Mr. Lloyd: I am sorry to keep interrupting the hon. Gentleman. He will know, because he has examined the prison service from the outside for several years, that one of the most vulnerable times for a prison is when it is building up its initial complement. The staff is new, the prisoners come in. They have not bedded down. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the experience in new prisons run by the prison service he will see that that is a particularly vulnerable time.

Mr. Sheerman: We want to know the turnover of staff and what are the problems. We want an analysis. If the Government can be judged by the arguments that they made in Committee, this was to be an experiment for learning about how the system works. It is an interesting experiment from which only the Government can learn because the public and public representatives are excluded from proper knowledge. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are too many seated interventions, and not just from one side of the House.

Mr. Devlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: Not now, but I will later.

Let us quickly look at the American experience. In Committee, we were often told that this was the model for privatisation. However, it has been a failure there. The US now imprisons 1 million people. Given that, it is hard to say why the Government feel that there is any merit in copying their ideas. Out of that huge population, only between 15,000 and 20,000 prisoners are in private prisons —15,000 according to the Department of Justice's "Private Corrections Adult Secure Facility Census of 1990". The experience in the US would appear to be going sour, according to the *Washington Post*, which said in November last year:

"Once hailed as a quick fix for the nation's overcrowded prisons privatisation is turning into a quicksand for the companies and the communities involved."

That is the experience of America, which the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) mentioned so often in Committee.

There are other concerns about the Government's decision to extend privatisation from the remand facility at the Wolds to include sentenced prisoners at Blakenhurst. The arguments against such a move have been put extremely well, and I hope Conservative Members will listen to them. They include:

"Because of the different purpose of remand, as opposed to the sentence of imprisonment, and the character of the remand regime, the running of a remand centre by a private company would raise fewer difficult operational questions or issues of principle.

An important feature of the system for sentenced prisoners which does not apply to remand prisoners is that the length of time for which a sentenced prisoner occupies a place in the prison is, in the case of those eligible for parole, influenced by the reports and assessment of staff ... There is understandable unease that such decisions should be taken with the involvement of private contractors and their staff.

Moreover, the regime for remand prisoners as unconvicted inmates is more amenable to the involvement of private contractors because of its different purpose and character." That quote comes not from the present Home Secretary but from the Goverment's Green Paper of July 1988, entitled "Private Sector Involvement in the Remand System". If these arguments were valid then, what has happened to make the Goverment change their mind? Further, because the Government launched their proposals for privatisation solely——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The purpose of a Green Paper is to provide a basis for consultation. It is not to set something in concrete.

Mr. Sheerman: Let us go on from the Green Paper. The Government launched their proposals for privatisation solely in relation to the remand system. It is a serious criticism of the Government that there has been no proper consultation of this extension of privatisation to this sector of the prison population. No formal consultation has taken place on this major new direction of policy.

Moreover, the Government have misled the House on this issue. When we discussed amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill, now the 1991 Act, designed to extend the scope of privatisation, the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden, said:

"If, and only if, the contracted-out remand centre proves to be a success might we move towards privatisation of other parts of the prison service."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1991; Vol. 186, c. 720.]

The clear implication of those remarks and others made by the right hon. Lady was that the Wolds was to be seen as an experiment. If successful, it would be extended to other parts of the prison service. Yet in December 1991, before the experiment had even begun, and the prison at the Wolds opened, we learnt that the Government were intending to extend privatisation to Blakenhurst, a prison that can also hold sentenced offenders.

The Wolds experiment must be the shortest on record —by my reckoning, minus four months. Even in terms of a degree of pragmatism, surely it would have been better for the Government to evaluate what was going on there, to take on board the concerns, to consult properly on the extension of privatisation while the experiment was monitored, and then to take decisions on the basis of that experience.

In an interview in *The Guardian* last week the Home Secretary made it clear that he was considering privatising existing prisons, too. If dogma dictates, clearly experience is irrelevant.

Mr. Stern: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This debate is timed for one and a half hours. My hon. Friend the Minister in opening the debate confined his remarks to 15 minutes. The hon. Gentleman has already been on his feet for half an hour and still has two pages to go. Is not that an abuse of the House when he still has the right of reply?

Madam Deputy Speaker: In the particular circumstances, the Chair has no power over the length of individual speeches.

Mr. Sheerman: I have given way many times in the debate. It is an important debate and I hope that hon. Members will have a chance to intervene and ask questions——

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): We want to make speeches.

Mr. Sheerman: We have an hour and a half and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has time to get in. It is important to get on the record what the Labour Front Bench believes about this important measure.

Although the Wolds has been open only since April, it is already holding one third of the prisoners that it will hold at full capacity. There have already been major problems, about which we know little because of the cloak of secrecy. If the incidents that occurred there did so while it was only one third full, one wonders what will happen when it reaches capacity. It is important to remember that the prisoners at the Wolds are far more experienced in prison life than the staff, as the officers know. Had the Government bothered to wait to see what happened at the Wolds, as they promised, we would be able to judge how effectively the private security company is coping.

I have already mentioned the problem of secrecy. Members of the House and the public have the right to know whether the Crown controller, installed to monitor the performance of the Wolds, will publish an annual report. I hope that the Minister will tell us in his reply. Will there be a published annual report? Will it tell us how much it costs a year to run the Wolds? We have a right to that information. It ill befits the Government with all their recent talk of open government to fob off important questions on the grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Finally, we have long argued that the current obsession with privatisation is having a corrosive effect on morale in existing prisons. Here I come to the nub of the argument.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Sheerman: No. In two seconds I will.

Prison governors, prison officers, probation officers, prison teachers, prison chaplains, prison administrative staff and all the major prison reform groups are against privatisation. I wonder why. The Government had a unique opportunity—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps hon. Gentlemen do not want to hear this—after the tragic events at Strangeways, with the Woolf report, which has been enthusiastically endorsed by all those working in the field, to make real changes in policy and produce an appeals system that did what people wanted. Yes, let us provide prisons where people can repay their debt to society and spend their sentence, but prisons that do not demean and dehumanise them. Let us provide prisons where people are given the chance to rebuild their lives and become decent citizens again. That is an objective that I thought nearly all hon. Members would agree with. That opportunity, post-Strangeways, of the Woolf inquiry report has been thrown aside. Privatisation is merely a piece of ideological baggage that the Government will not put down.

We are angry at what is happening, and we represent enlightened opinion on penal matters. That opinion says that the Strangeways riot and the Woolf report provided an opportunity to rebuild anew our rotten prison system. Producing one or two or even a dozen prisons with good conditions avoids the hard job of modernising our prison system and giving governors, prison officers and the people who have kept the lid on our prison system, as Woolf said,

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for 30 or 50 years, a chance to do the job. At present only a few are being given that opportunity in places such as the Wolds and Blakenhurst.

There is a real challenge for a reforming Government to invest in the prison system and in all the men and women who work in it. We oppose the order because it is doctrinaire and avoids the opportunities presented by Woolf and takes us down a narrow, miserable path.

11.7 pm

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak in support of the order. It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who spoke more concentrated claptrap than I have heard for a long time. Moreover, it was ideological claptrap, which made it even less interesting.

It is important to extend privatisation from the Wolds to other new prisons and, I hope, to existing prisons. The argument adduced by the hon. Member for Huddersfield for allowing prisons to be managed only by the state does not stand up to scrutiny. It is skating on thin ice to argue for subsidy and for the state to manage these institutions simply because they are part of the state. Such arguments are based on ideology and not on fact.

The Wolds has shown the practicality of allowing the private sector to manage prisons. It contains people who have been sentenced as well as those who have not been for trial. It is important to extend that to Blakenhurst and to other prisons with sentenced populations. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, the most difficult part of the prison population with which to deal is the remand section. The Wolds has managed its affairs slowly and there have been one or two disturbances, but the governor and controller of that prison and many of the employees have been in the prison service for a long time, and know precisely what they are doing. That cuts across the point implied by the hon. Member for Huddersfield, that the private sector has no people with experience in the prison service.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said, the difficulty that the Wolds' employees face is in introducing prisoners into a new prison. There have been great disturbances in new prisons in the public sector, not least earlier this year in Moorlands, where there were some outrageous disturbances by some of the young offenders. They had not been there more than a few weeks before a wing was demolished. That was a disgraceful event that we hope will not be repeated.

It is important to recognise that the staff in the Wolds are no less well trained and experienced than many of those in the public sector.

Mr. Steinberg: Does the right hon. Lady believe that the Prison Officers Association has any role to play in the privatised prisons?

Dame Angela Rumbold: I have never had any problems with the Prison Officers Association. It seems that it can live alongside the private sector; it is up to the private contractors to negotiate with the prison officers if they wish to serve in those prisons. Nobody has ever suggested that they would be prevented from doing so. An arrangement already exists in the Wolds between the trade unions and the staff so that their affairs can be managed under the system currently operated by prison officers in some of the state prisons. It is important to extend the programme to sentenced prisoners because it will not be as difficult to manage a sentenced prison population as it is to manage a remand prison population.

The Wolds and private prisons have better regimes. My hon. Friend the Minister frequently mentioned in his opening speech the extended number of hours that prisoners spent outside their cells. He spoke of the better regimes and treatment and of the greater opportunities that exist for remand prisoners in the Wolds and, one hopes, for those in Blakenhurst. It is exceedingly important that the work carried out in the contracted-out prisons should be repeated and seen to be successful in prisons such as Armley, Wormwood Scrubs and Wandsworth. It has been seen that it is possible for the contracted-out prisons to take in difficult prisoners who have no reason to behave themselves, but do so because the regime is better and more sensitive to their needs and provides them with something more constructive to do.

When I was a Home Office Minister, it was always the Government's intention—I am sure that it is still the intention of my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary—to improve the regimes within our prison system following the Woolf report and the undertakings that we made in the White Paper published last summer. We cannot improve prison regimes overnight, but that improvement will occur much more speedily if it is demonstrated clearly, as it is through the private prisons of the Wolds and Blakenhurst. That will act as a spur to those in the existing prison system to manage their prisons better and undertake to allow the prisoners to have better regimes. That is a good reason to support the order.

11.14 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): It is a little surprising to hear the former Minister with responsibility for prisons, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), speaking so coolly about the experience of the state sector and, by implication, overlooking the good work that is being done in the public sector to improve the state's handling of prisoners. It was also surprising to hear her suggest that something as modest as the Wolds experiment can teach those who have been in the business for generations anything of great importance.

I know that the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden has visited many prisons in her time, and I am sure that she has seen prisons of different sorts and qualities. I can only think that dogmatism leads the right hon. Lady to suggest that there is a great deal to be learned from Wolds. I share the surprise expressed in the intervention earlier by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that it should be thought almost unpatriotic among Conservative Members to suggest that, if the state sentences a person to the deprivation of his liberties, the state has a responsibility—whether exercised directly or indirectly—to ensure that custody is properly effected.

Many people assume, probably rightly, that that is the direct responsibility of the state, the Government, and the House—just as they assume that the defence of the realm will be handled by officers of the realm. We would no more think of sending a brigade of mercenaries to teach the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines how to do their job than we would of expecting the private sector to tell the prison service how to run its affairs. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are too many seated interventions. It is becoming difficult for me to hear the hon. Member.

Mr. Maclennan: The Wolds is rather like a beauty spot on a rather nastily pock-marked face. It is designed to distract attention from the reality of the ugliness of today's prison system. It seems to have had some success in respect

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of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), for he focused a speech of 35 minutes on that little beauty spot. I am not as informed as even the hon. Gentleman about the Wolds, and few of us would feel confident about passing judgment on it at this stage. In any event, it would probably be premature to form a view about the Wolds.

Mr. Battle: We cannot get the information.

Mr. Maclennan: We certainly cannot, and there are certain difficulties in having questions on the subject answered in the House, which is rather deplorable. I hope that the National Audit Office will have full access, and will be able to bring any uncertainties that it has before the Public Accounts Committee—which will, no doubt, have an opportunity in due course to consider whether the public are getting value for money.

I regret that the Government did not take the opportunity provided by this debate to declare their hand as to how far they intend to go with the experiment. Do they seriously intend to solve the problems outlined by Lord Justice Woolf and Judge Tumim by going down the privatisation route full scale? Is it intended—as was suggested at the weekend—to deal with top security prisoners in that way?

The Home Office does not usually leak the kind of stories that have been circulating among the national press without the intention of following through. It would have been better if the Government had told the House tonight what are their intentions. The reports that have appeared will give rise to great anxiety in the prison service, and to great uncertainty in sectors where a little settling down after the excitements of the last year or two might be a very good thing.

Mr. Dickens: Is the hon. Gentleman really telling the House that the Government ought to publicise prison incidents? Would that not encourage the copycat effect all over England, thereby inciting others in custody to commit similar offences in their prisons? I think it far better for the House of Commons to be satisfied with not knowing exactly what is going on, thus preventing similar events from happening in prisons throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclennan: In many ways the hon. Gentleman is a rather better publicist than I am, and I suspect that he is better at grabbing the headlines in regard to prisons than I could ever be. I have no intention of pouring oil on the flames of prison disputes and other troubles, but I believe that it ought to be possible for the hon. Gentleman to find out whether disturbances have taken place in a prison. The Minister made it plain that such disturbances had taken place, and he has made no attempt at a cover-up.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: That is an important point. I agree with the hon. Gentleman rather than with my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens). If disturbances take place in a prison, the House should have an opportunity to ask questions and learn from the answers. Let me make it absolutely clear that hon. Members can ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary about any disturbance in the Wolds, just as they can ask about disturbances in any other prison for which he is responsible.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention, although I think that there is still some uncertainty about whether it is possible to table questions that will enable those issues to be raised. I have no doubt that they can be raised on the margins of other questions, but that involves problems.

Mr. Battle: As one who has tried to put questions about the matter, I feel that the position is the same as that applying to social security benefit agencies. We are told that such agencies are—like private prisons—at one remove from the Government, and that they are therefore not subject to direct question from the House of Commons. We are told to write to the governors and the heads of the organisations concerned, and that means that we may not be able to question the answers that we receive.

Mr. Lloyd *rose*——

Mr. Maclennan: I am sure that you would not approve of an intervention on an intervention, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps the Minister will be prepared to hold himself back until the end of the debate.

So far, alas, the debate has been remarkably unrevealing. The Government have chosen to focus attention on the modest little experiment at the Wolds, almost as if they were providing a lightning conductor; but it is too soon to judge. I think that we would do better to put our criticisms of the Wolds on hold until more information is available, and to press the Minister to be more revealing about the Government's medium-term intentions in regard to the extension of privatisation.

I strongly suspect that the motion is directed at the Prison Officers Association at least as much as it is directed at the House. There has been considerable criticism of the association in Government circles on the ground that it has stood in the way of reform. It is not possible for outsiders to judge the merits of the argument; but I doubt that they, or anyone else, will be overly impressed by what has happened to date.

The Liberal Democrats consider it necessary to go a great deal further in implementing the Woolf report than the changes in the prison system contained in the modest order that we are discussing. In particular, we recommend the establishment of a separate prison agency, managed by people with experience of the prison service. That, we think, would enable us to move much faster in the direction recommended by Woolf.

Our prisons are now full to bursting, and conditions in many community prisons are worse than they were when those prisons were built over 100 years ago. The prison suicide rate is causing many people to worry greatly about our capacity to deal with prisoners, particularly those on remand. I do not think that we are focusing on the real, important issues tonight, and I regret that.

11.24 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said that private sector involvement in the prison service was wrong in principle. It seems to me that what is wrong in principle is the Labour party's blind ideological refusal to accept that the private sector has any role to play in the improvement of our prison service. Week in, week out, many incidents occur in state prisons. Therefore, I welcome the progress that the Government have made in introducing the order.

It is worth recalling the progress that has been made. When the Criminal Justice Bill was considered in Standing Committee, there was originally a clause that provided for only one prison to be run by the private sector—Wolds prison. Some of us thought that that was a wicked waste of parliamentary time and that at the very least we should extend that provision to allow for a widening of the experiment in years to come. That is why a number of my hon. Friends and I tabled a new clause, which the Government gratefully accepted.

The point has already been made in the debate—I believe during an intervention by my hon. Friend the Minister—that the fact that in many respects remand prisoners are more difficult to handle than sentenced prisoners was a matter that some of us had in mind when we suggested that the private sector should be involved in the provision of prisons for sentenced prisoners.

We should be discussing not ideology but two simple questions. The first relates to the best management structure for the prison service. One has just to read not the detailed reports but the summaries of Judge Tumim's visits to many of our prisons to realise that there is a lot wrong with our prision service. I believe that the management structure needs to be changed. If we are to change the management structure, we should do so in a way that allows for public and private sector involvement. That is why I am an enthusiastic supporter of the order. It allows for private sector involvement.

Secondly, we should address the question of standards. Some hon. Members have referred to that question. How can standards be raised? The Woolf report into the Strangeways riot made a number of recommendations. The Government are to be commended for embracing its key recommendations and trying to bring some parts of our prison estate up to sratch. However, just as we modernise our Victorian prisons, so, too, must we modernise the management structure of our prisons. That is the key issue. The need is urgent.

Even if we approve the order, as I hope we shall, it will still be 12 months before this further experiment comes to fruition. We are not exactly running at a hare's pace. However, this is a welcome development.

The House must ask itself a final question: where will all this lead? To put on the private sector a proper contractual obligation for the way in which prisons should be run suggests to me that this will lead to a prison regime under which each prison in this country, whether it is in the public or the private sector, follows a properly defined set of standards and criteria. In time, they will have to publish their own reports—

Mr. Enright: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Greenway: No; I shall not give way because there are only 15 minutes left, and I am not about to finish my speech.

A prison will have to publish its own report and accounts to show how it has used public money, whether it is in the private sector, receiving fees for handling prisoners, or in the public sector, as now. *[Interruption.]* We can open up to proper scrutiny all that is going on in our prison service. What has been happening in Armley gaol in the past few years, about which the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) is as concerned as I am, is an absolute scandal. *[Interruption.]* Our prison service is a disgrace. We need to bring the private sector into play.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Some of the interventions from the Labour Benches are quite unacceptable to me. Will hon. Members please keep quiet?

Mr. Greenway: I believe that much of our prison service is an absolute disgrace. It must be improved, but blind ideology and dogma mean that people refuse to accept that the private sector has a role to play in achieving that improvement.

11.30 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): Despite everything that the Minister said, privatised prisons will reduce parliamentary scrutiny. The Minister said that the cost difference between private and public prisons is minimal. Privatisation will only reduce hon. Members' ability to scrutinise how a prison is run.

Standards will not rise. In the United States, the first privatised prisons provided excellent conditions, but they were show-piece prisons and loss leaders. Evidence suggests that their successors, free from the glare of press publicity, got down to the real task of privatised prisons —making profits for shareholders. Standards began to fall accordingly. The Wolds will try to create a superior prison environment because Group 4 wants to ensure that it is awarded future contracts and will loss-lead to make it successful. The Government will then claim that privatised prisons deliver higher standards, but that will not be true. As in America, standards will fall as profits are squeezed by the Government seeking to impose cheaper contracts on prisons. Shareholders will receive state subsidised dividends to ensure that managers keep their jobs. That is unacceptable when Government deprive people of their liberty.

The Government say that standards will be maintained through enforceable contracts, but the effective policing of standards in prisons is notoriously difficult. It depends on prisoners reporting breaches, which is a very unreliable method, or on an inspectorate, and the inspectorate needed effectively and constantly to police all the terms of the contracts will be enormous and expensive. In other words, it will not be properly enforceable at all.

Do not the Government apply double standards? They have been anxious to insist on standards in the private contracts for the Wolds, yet the Home Office went to the European Court to fight attempts to secure the same standards in state gaols. Is not it unreasonable for the Government to argue that higher standards should be achieved in private prisons while insisting on lower standards for state prisons? Rather than subjecting prisoners' care to market forces, money should be spent on bringing state prisons up to the standards of the Wolds and to other private standards that we are seeking to enforce.

The clear moral question is whether it is right that money should be made out of a person who has been sentenced to imprisonment. Having been deprived of their liberty, it is wrong for prisoners to be put at the mercy of market forces. It is wrong that if the profit margins of private prisons are squeezed, as the Government will seek to do, the prisoner deprived of his liberty should see his conditions squeezed to maintain shareholders' profits.

What sort of companies would want to run Britain's prisons? With honourable exceptions, most of the security industry has an appalling record of low-paid staff, long hours, poor training and of employing persons often of

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

dubious character and sometimes ex-criminals. As a criminal lawyer, I remember representing a person who was employed by Group 4, no less. He had previous convictions and was subsequently convicted of another offence but continued to work for Group 4 and, for all I know, probably still does—although not, I hope, at the Wolds.

While at the Home Office, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) said:

> "I don't want to foist an idea on a system without having sufficient caution to say that I am not going headlong down that route. I am going to take it step by step so that we can test it properly."

Test it properly? It has been open only since April. This is not a step-by-step approach. The order represents a headlong rush. Instead of having a measured assessment of how privatisation is going at the Wolds, the Government are hell bent on advancing nothing but political dogma.

The order is a shallow attempt to shift the debate away from the appalling state of our prisons, as reported by Judge Tumim, and from the Government's disgraceful record on prisons. It is an attempt to shift the debate to a peripheral argument about privatisation.

The Home Office has said that it will train and screen workers for private prisons, but for how long will it do that before it decides to privatise training? I am not the only one who dislikes the idea of Group 4 or any other company being told whether applicants are of good character. Group 4 is not an official body, and it has no right to information about a person's character from police files.

The Howard League has done the only significant independent research into the management of private detention centres. Its conclusions are very interesting because they reveal obsessive secrecy, poor staff in-service training, racist stereotyping by staff and no tangible commitment to justice.

It is the state which rightly reserves unto itself the right to take a person's liberty and the state should take responsibility for all that flows from that. It is directly responsible for the care of prisoners and should not abdicate its responsibilities to others. Its responsibilities include the right to use force to subjugate prisoners in certain circumstances and also, as we heard earlier, in certain circumstances to open and read prisoners' mail. That is not something that should be privatised and given to persons who are not directly answerable to the House.

The real problem is that we have too many bad prisons and too many people in them and a Government who have allowed crime to rise and prisons to become degraded. Privatisation will not deal with the real problems as identified by Lord Justice Woolf after the disturbances at Strangeways; nor will it deal with the failings of the prison service outlined in Judge Tumim's report. The order is a camouflage for what is happening in the prison service, which is why we shall vote against it.

11.37 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): One would think that the prisons in this country were an outstanding success, that they were beautiful places in which people could be properly rehabilitated, where those who are likely to offend could be deterred from offending again and where prison officers would be proud and happy to work. In fact, they are a disgrace.

They are a disgrace despite a massive expenditure of public money—£1 billion—on building more and more prisons. They are also a disgrace despite the dynamic activities of the chief inspector of prisons, Judge Tumim, and they are a disgrace despite the Woolf investigation, inquiry and recommendations. They will continue to be a disgrace as long as they are in the type of buildings that they are in, as long as we are subject to the existing old-fashioned practices, and, unless someone takes an initiative to move the prison service away from the circumstances which is has endured for far too long, prisons will go on being disgraceful places, letting down our society as much as they do.

The Government are proposing a new initiative. But one would think that Labour Members did not wish prisoners to spend less time in their cells, did not wish to see cleaner accommodation, the changing of bed linen and clothing, greater access to telephones and the more respectable approach of educating people in prisons.

One would think that Opposition Members were happy to maintain the situation without any improvement or change. I simply do not believe that any Opposition Members are really content with the present situation. Nevertheless, once again their spokesman, in a knee-jerk reaction, has attacked any move towards privatisation or rationalisation of the system. Have not they learnt the lesson that, broadly, the privatisations that have been undertaken so far have been an outstanding success? Have not they learnt the lesson that every time they speak for the trade union movement—for old-fashioned unions like the Prison Officers Association, which wishes to maintain the old operative systems that have so let down the prison system—they make themselves absolutely incapable of winning any general election?

Mr. Battle: The Prison Officers Association is not affiliated to the Labour party.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have warned Members before about seated interventions of that nature.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: This is one of the ways in which the Labour party has continued to make itself incapable of winning general elections. It sides with the unions that adopt old-fashioned practices. When Labour Members have managed to control their obsession with maintaining the last vestiges of the abuse of trade union power and have given privatisation a chance as it begins to show signs of great achievement in the Wolds—and it will continue to demonstrate great achievement—they will realise that the prison system is being improved.

Many of the objections that have been voiced are absolute nonsense. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said that he would deal immediately with the point about vetting those who run the prisons, but he did not come to it at all. He cannot face up to the Government's clear undertaking that they will continue to ensure that there is proper vetting by the Home Office—the Home Secretary, the directorate of prisons, and the institutions that will monitor the private prison undertakings as they have monitored the state institutions and will reveal anything that has gone wrong.

Let Opposition Members get a grip of themselves and give this initiative a chance. I have no doubt that if it

appears to be failing the Government will change their mind, as they have done in the past. All Governments change their mind. Equally, I hope that, for the first time, the Opposition will change their mind. Actually I do not mean that. The Opposition have changed their mind over the sale of council houses; they have changed their mind over unilateral disarmament; they have changed their mind over a number of nationalisation issues. And I predict that when the new privatised system, introduced experimentally in some prisons, begins to work, they will change their mind about that too.

11.42 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I listened very carefully to the Minister's introductory speech. Everybody agrees that we want improvements in conditions. Nobody has any complaint about good conditions in the Wolds, but we want to know why that matter is connected with privatisation. Why cannot we have similar investment in the other prisons that have been mentioned? What is at issue is the extension of privatisation from new remand prisons to institutions for convicted prisoners. Regardless of what has been said by Conservative Members, this move is fundamentally different from what was talked about when the legislation was passed last year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) referred to the then Minister's comment that only if the contracted-out remand centre proved to be a success might we move towards privatisation of other parts of the service. Well, has it proved to be a success? When points about incidents at the Wolds were being raised, the Minister said that the system was still in the process of bedding down. If so, how can it be proved a success?

What evidence is there of adequate staff training? We have heard assertions about that, but no evidence. What evidence is there of correct recruitment policies? I have asked about staff recruited at the Wolds. Not a single member of staff there has an ethnic minority background.

If the case is not proven now, will it ever be? And what about accountability? We do not know the costs of employing Group 4 at the Wolds. The Minister would not tell us. We do not know what profits it will make; the Minister would not tell us. We are told that that is a commercial consideration.

We have been told that five of the eight——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business):—*

The House divided: Ayes 251, Noes 200.

Division No. 52] **[11.45 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham

Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman
and Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nicholas
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ms Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, James
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Enright, Derek
Etherington, William
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Michael
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoff
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Ms Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Ms Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Criminal Justice Act 1991 (Contracted Out Prisons) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 21st February, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

Parole Board

11.56 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I beg to move,

That the draft Parole Board (Transfer of Functions) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 23rd June, be approved.

The order transfers responsibility for the release and recall of long-term prisoners sentenced to less than seven years under the new Criminal Justice Act 1991 from the Secretary of State to the Parole Board.

Before describing the new arrangements, I think that it is worth spending just a few moments on the existing parole scheme. At present, prisoners serving more than a year must serve one third of their sentence, or six months if that is greater, before becoming eligible for parole.

Every case is considered by a local review committee and the more serious cases—those serving four years or more—are also seen by the Parole Board. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Minister, but there is the usual buzz of conversation which occurs at this time. If hon. Members want to chat, will they go outside and do it?

Mr. Lloyd: Over the years, the scheme has become somewhat repetitive and lost some of its coherence; it can heavily erode the sentence passed by a court. Those who do not get parole but who are in most need of supervision are released "cold" into the community, and the system has been criticised for its secrecy.

Because of those shortcomings, the Carlisle committee was asked to look at the scheme. It reported in 1988. The new arrangements very largely follow its recommendations, but there was one aspect where the Government did not agree with the committee. The committee had proposed that Ministers should withdraw from the decision-making process entirely and give the Parole Board the final say on release and recall of all long-term prisoners.

We believe that Ministers should keep the responsibility for the realease of those who have committed very serious offences. Therefore, in the White Paper, published in 1990, the Government proposed that the Parole Board should have sole responsibility for deciding the release of those serving between four and less than seven years' imprisonment.

The order is made under the new Criminal Justice Act, which comes into force in October. That Act introduces three early release schemes. Although two of them are outside the scope of the order, the House may find it helpful if I explain them as a unity.

First, those serving sentences of less than 12 months will be released automatically at the halfway point of sentence, subject to good prison behaviour. Their release will be delayed by any additional days awarded—if "awarded" is the right word—for misbehaviour. They will not be supervised on release, but, like all prisoners released under the Act, they will be under liability until the end of sentence. That means that the outstanding portion of the sentence will no longer simply be remitted. If they commit a further imprisonable offence before the end of sentence, that unserved period of the original may be added to any new sentence, thus restoring meaning to the entire sentence passed by the court.

Secondly, those serving 12 months to less than four years will also be released automatically at the halfway point—subject to good prison behaviour. But, by contrast, they will be under compulsory supervision by the probation service while they are back in the community. That supervision on licence will extend to the three-quarters point of sentence or to the very end for some sex offenders.

The licence will make real demands on the individual. A condition may be added—for instance, requiring attendance on a course to address an alcohol problem or prohibiting contact with a named victim—and the licensee may, on the decision of a magistrates court, be returned to prison if the licence conditions are breached or may be subjected to a lesser penalty, such as a fine, if the court so decides.

Thirdly, there is the new parole scheme itself which also represents a tougher package. It will apply to those prisoners sentenced to four years or more on or after 1 October this year. They will have to serve at least half their sentence in custody—instead of the current one third—before becoming eligible for discretionary release. If they do not receive parole, release at the two-thirds point is still automatic. But release in either case will be on a licence which will extend to the three-quarters point, or again to the very end of the sentence for some sex offenders.

Contrary to current practice, prisoners will see the reports that constitute the parole dossier and the Parole Board will give reasons for its decisions, which it does not do now. I believe that that represents a significant step towards a more open and fair scheme.

As I have already said, Ministers have decided to retain the final say on the early release of those serving sentences of seven years or more. This seven-year threshold was fully debated during the Committee stage of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. We believe that it is the right one for the start of the new scheme. But the Act also provides for Parliament to be asked to approve a higher, or indeed a lower threshold, if in the light of experience that seems desirable.

When the Criminal Justice Act comes into force, the Parole Board will apply specific directions given to it by the Home Secretary on release. Those directions will come in on 1 October and will be announced very shortly and made available in the Libraries of both Houses. The directions set out three conditions which have to be satisfied before the Parole Board can recommend parole. They relate to the risk of further offences being committed; the prisoner's willingness to tackle offending behaviour; and the resettlement plan and rehabilitation.

The order also extends the board's existing recall powers. Those powers require the Secretary of State to act on the board's recommendation to revoke a prisoner's licence and recall him. However, the Home Secretary will also set out the criteria for recall in new policy directions to the Parole Board. These will be published together with the release directions to which I have just referred. Very importantly, the directions will require the board to assess the risk to the public if an offender is allowed to remain on licence as well as the extent of compliance with the conditions of the licence.

Finally, the order will also provide that the Parole Board, in the light of its expert assessment of any case, may recommend conditions to the licence for released prisoners. This will allow the Parole Board to fit the

[Mr. Lloyd]

detailed licence conditions to the circumstances of each offender and take into account the level of risk involved in release in every case.

These may include conditions which prohibit contact with named individuals, or require attendance on courses designed to tackle alcohol or substance abuse. This will be done in close consultation with supervising officers to ensure the correct level of supervision, such as prohibiting contact with a young victim in a sexual abuse case. This will ensure that licence conditions are consistent and demanding.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My hon. Friend touches on an important point. Although it may not fall within the ambit of the order, will he assure the House that he has every intention of following through the recommendation in the victims charter that the victims of sex crimes should be informed when their assailant is released on parole under the terms that he set out to the House tonight?

Mr. Lloyd: That is right. My hon. Friend raises an important point. The fact that the Parole Board can make conditions about release in such cases is an added protection for the victim after the perpetrator has come back into the community.

The arrangements introduced by the order represent, I believe, a significant improvement in the way in which parole decisions are administered, both in the interests of offenders and even more importantly in ensuring the protection of the public. I commend it to the House.

12.5 am

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): In contrast to what we felt about the former order that we debated, the Opposition broadly welcome this order. It is a step in the right direction to allow the Parole Board to make the decision in parole cases rather than giving discretion to the Home Secretary to overrule the decisions, made after lengthy consideration. However, we should like to know why the order is restricted to those serving less than seven years. The Carlisle committee on the parole sytem in England and Wales, in its 1988 report, argued cogently for the Parole Board to assume executive powers for all cases, as the Minister said. He explained well and clearly the terms of the order and how it would operate, but he did not say why the Carlisle recommendations had not been accepted in their entirety.

Carlisle examined the present system and found it wanting. The report notes that the present sytem, in which the Home Secretary has the final decision, is cumbersome and conducive to delay. It tends to blur the responsibility for decisions, and Carlisle felt the arrangements worked in a particularly unfortunate manner when a case went wrong. The report said:

"The present fragmentation of responsibilities prevents the parole system from giving a robust account of itself when storms arise . . . We were particularly struck by the contrast with the Canadian system. There the Parole Board is executive rather than advisory, and is willing not only to step into the firing line when there is a furore over a case but also to seek positive ways of enhancing the image of parole through the media."

Carlisle was emphatic about the need for this change. He said:

"The present structure . . . is not the right one for the new scheme which we propose . . . We believe that the only answer to these problems is for the Home Secretary to seek to be responsible for individual parole decisions."

We still agree with that thrust of the Carlisle recommendations. We think that it is wrong for the Home Secretary to get involved in parole decisions. We know that it is not always he who makes the decision—often, the junior Minister has that onerous responsibility.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Very sound.

Mr. Sheerman: It may be sound, but it is wrong that the decision should be taken by the Executive, by a politician. Parole is a complex matter that depends on a great deal of sifting of behaviour, of the record in prison and reports. Harking back to our earlier debate, I should point out the people who work in prisons—not just probation officers or the Parole Board members, but those who deal with prisoners day after day—make reports and look at the general way in which the prisoner has behaved, and give an estimate of how he is fitting in and abiding by the rules. It makes an important difference—without wishing to be contentious—whether that person comes from the state system or a private security company.

We think that it would be a happy release for the Home Secretary if he were not involved. We are all familiar with cases—I shall not give the tabloid press the benefit of mentioning some of the notorious cases—that become, for some reason or another, famous. Sometimes, for some inexplicable reason, the most ghastly cases do not hit the tabloid headlines while others do. Where they do, when it is the decision of the politician—the Home Secretary is, after all, a politician—it puts him under enormous pressure from people like the tabloid press.

The tabloid press may create an enormous furore about a particular person who has served a prison sentence, has perhaps been a model prisoner and has been recommended for parole. The Home Secretary may then say that the case is politically sensitive and that this notorious person cannot possibly be allowed out. In other words, he bows to the pressure of the tabloid press rather than takes the advice of the Parole Board. It would let the Home Secretary off the hook to have those decisions made by the Parole Board. It is unwise to have a cut-off point at seven years.

The report goes on to explain that the new parole system that is enacted in the Criminal Justice Act 1991, from which some of us bear the scars, removes much of the scope for public policy considerations which provide the rationale for the Home Secretary's responsibilities. The Act changes the ground on which the decision should be made. Prisoners will now be required to serve at least half of their sentence before they can be released on parole. Most parole decisions will be about whether a particular prisoner should be released at his eligibility date or at his mandatory release date a year or so thence. The number of cases where there will be more than two years at stake will be small as only those serving more than 12 years will be eligible for more than two years' parole.

We will not divide the House on the order, but we seek clarification. Why have the Government decided to limit the order to seven years? Why not follow the Carlisle proposals? Carlisle has tremendous support and is respected in the House in this area. He was a former Conservative Secretary of State for Education when I first came to the House. Why not choose 10 or 12 years? Will

the Home Secretary be prepared to raise the limit above seven years when he has had an opportunity to judge how the new system works? We have had some assurances tonight, but I should like to have them copper bottomed. We believe that Carlisle was right. This sort of decision should be left to the Parole Board after detailed consideration. The Executive should not be involved in these matters.

I do not want to detain the House any longer, but I have a quick last point. Does the Home Secretary intend to retain the power to give general policy guidelines to the Parole Board about the sort of cases that he deems inappropriate for parole? Will the board be free from Home Office oversight of that kind? We shall be grateful for the Minister's views on that issue. We believe that it would not be appropriate for the Home Secretary to be able to fetter the Parole Board in this way. It would undermine the effect of the order in relation to those serving under seven years.

The Opposition support the order, but would have liked the Government to have accepted Carlisle's recommendations in their entirety. We agree with the Minister. We want an open and fair system. The Carlisle recommendations seemed to give us the opportunity to step dramatically away from any political involvement. One of the moves that we hope to see over the next few years is the political input in this and a whole range of issues stepping back and the professionals—the justiciary or the Parole Board—making those decisions. During proceedings on the Criminal Justice Bill, we on this side of the House argued strongly that Ministers should not get involved in matters that are on the one hand judicial and on the other hand for the professionals who serve on the Parole Board.

We will not oppose the order, but we should like answers to those questions.

12.14 am

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I am less than enthusiastic about the Government's actions on parole. I am not against the transfer of decision making to the Parole Board for sentences of from four to seven years because the Home Secretary hardly ever goes against the board's wishes. However, there are one or two worrying aspects of the whole business. First, I do not think that the public realise that there is automatic release after serving 50 per cent. of a sentence. That will happen more frequently and will make judges consider, perhaps for the first time, the consequences of the length of sentence.

If judges are told that there is no question of parole, and that a person sentenced to up to four years will be released after two years or less, they will be tempted to impose a sentence of more than four years. That will lead to the imposition of longer prison sentences, and to more rather than less clutter in our prisons. There will be no way of stopping judges from reflecting what they see as the wish of the people—that the full sentence passed by a judge should be served, and not half that sentence.

The matter was raised at a recent judicial seminar at which judges openly expressed their concern about the Government's tendency to reduce the effectiveness of sentences. Not only judges but the public would be worried about that if they understood precisely what was happening.

Secondly, I am worried about the proposed abolition of the restrictive policy under which a person sentenced to more than five years loses parole if the offence relates to drugs, violence, sex or arson. The sentence imposed in such cases was served, and that was popular with the public.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Even in those cases the whole sentence was not served because normally people were released after serving two thirds of the sentence.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: When he was Home Secretary, Sir Leon Brittan said that some offences were so serious that the public had to be protected and that he would effectively remove parole. Those offences related to sex, drugs, arson, and violence for which the sentence was above five years. The Government propose to abolish that restrictive policy so that parole is not removed from such people. They will be subject to the parole system. People from whom the public were protected will in future spend less time in prison.

There have been several recent examples of people out on bail or on parole seriously attacking members of the public. Some such people have committed murder when they were released rather earlier than the public would have expected. I understand the pressure on the Government about the prison population and I shall do all that I can to help them come to grips with the problem. I spoke for a few minutes on the previous order on the privatisation of prisons, which will help substantially.

But we must not be tempted to weaken our defences against criminals merely because we are having trouble in building enough prisons or improving existing ones quickly enough to keep prisoners in them. The public will not accept or like that. I have a slight feeling that the measure would not have been proposed before the last general election as the Government would not have wanted to go into the election giving the appearnace that they were weakening their defences against crime, not strengthening them.

I understand the Government's problem, and am not unsympathetic to it, but I warn them that the measure may be counterproductive if the judges pass longer sentences. And, on the more serious offences, I do not like the idea of releasing serious offenders much earlier than they would have been under the proposals implemented by the then Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, for good reason. I am not sure that they are being removed for anything like as good a reason. Therefore, I warn my hon. Friend the Minister that I shall watch the issue closely. Regardless of whether I am or am not a Conservative, I shall not hesitate to speak out against the Government if I think that their policy is misguided.

12.22 am

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I do not agree with the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). I think that the Government are right to proceed as they are with the order. If judges consider the law as it stands—the order will become part of the law—they will consider issues such as parole and the dates of eligibility for release when they make their determinations. They are bound to bear in mind parole eligibility when they make their decisions on sentencing.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Hitherto, judges were specifically banned from taking into account the consequences of sentencing a person, other than the direct effects. They

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

were not allowed to consider how soon the date of release would be. Now, the Government have made it impossible, under the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and other such measures, for judges to rule that out, and they are bound to take those matters into consideration. That is the way in which the judicial system operated.

Mr. Maclennan: Judges are bound to have that issue in mind; it is part of the law of the land. Whatever may have been the case, I believe that in reality such matters were in judges' minds. The law has simply regularised the position, and the Government's decision to do so is satisfactory.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton speaks of what the public would expect. That is a piece of naked populism. The reality is that the public have no expectation about the suitability of someone for release some years after the event in a case where there has been a sentence of between four and seven years. It is difficult enough for the Parole Board to know whether it is appropriate to recommend release on licence; it is impossible for the public who are not apprised of the details of the case.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that his constituents and mine expect sentences to mean what they say? If a man is sentenced to six years' imprisonment, our constituents expect him to be behind bars for six years, not to be let out after three. To let a prisoner out after three years is to defraud the public.

Mr. Maclennan: Happily, I think that my constituents are better informed and more intelligent than the hon. Gentleman's. I do not believe that any of my constituents would take such a simple-minded view of the facts. Most members of the public would be astonished at the idea that it was impossible for a prisoner to be released before the end of his or her term of sentence. The hon. Gentleman is not living in the real world.

The Minister cannot sensibly move much farther in the direction that he has taken, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) invited him to do.

Mr. Sheerman: Why not?

Mr. Maclennan: I will explain why. The order will take some time to come into effect. It will apply only to convictions from October this year. The Parole Board's first reviews of the shorter sentences will not, therefore, be made for another 18 or 21 months. If we are to learn anything about how the scheme is working, we will need a little more time.

The exercise of ministerial discretion should be reserved for exceptional circumstances. I hope that view is shared by Home Office Ministers. Nevertheless, such discretion provides a fallback that may be of some residual importance. Certainly, I do not object to the direction in which the Government are moving, and I strongly support the order as a step in a sensible direction.

12.26 am

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will answer briefly the points that were put to me.

Mr. Maclennan *rose*——

Mr. Lloyd: Does the hon. Gentleman want to make another point?

Mr. Maclennan: One so rarely has the opportunity to raise parole matters in the House that I want to take this opportunity to ask the Minister to say something in his reply about the comment about the Parole Board's resources in the letter to the Home Secretary from its chairman to the effect that they gave him cause for anxiety.

Mr. Lloyd: I will answer the points as they were put to me in turn.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) asked why the Government are not adopting Carlisle's entire recommendations. We are adopting almost all of them. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has a much-reduced role. I believe that aspect was the subject of considerable debate during the progress of the Criminal Justice Bill in 1991, so the hon. Member for Huddersfield has seen the mind of the Government exposed over a longer period than I have.

The seven-year period chosen was a matter of judgment, but it encompasses longer sentences and offenders who perpetrate more serious crimes. It is right that the Secretary of State, with his wider responsibilities to the community, should continue—at least for the present and the foreseeable future—to take responsibility for the comparatively small number of longer sentences and for serious criminals who are to be released earlier than the court's sentence prescribed.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield asked what scope exists for re-evaluating the period in question. The measure has been so designed that, by an order, we can extend or reduce its length. We are very open to learning from future experience, but it will be more than a couple of years before cases come before the Parole Board in any number. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, though a very hard worker, would prefer not to do work unnecessarily that can properly be delegated to the board.

The hon. Gentleman asked also whether the directions will relate to special types of offences. They will not. When the directions that are to come into effect in October are published it will become clear that they relate not to particular offences but to general considerations of public safety. Obviously the Parole Board will take that into account when considering the nature of the crime and progress made in gaol, but no specific direction will be imposed in regard to particular types of offence—although the type of consideration that the board should apply to the whole range of offences will be very clear.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) was unhappy about at least part of what we are doing. He thought that the position would be confusing, but in fact it will be much clearer. Some prisoners will be released automatically halfway through their sentences; currently a prisoner could be released as early as a third of the way through his sentence, or as late as two thirds of the way through it. The judges will be much clearer on the matter: they will know that at least half a sentence will always be served, and will pass sentence accordingly, with the law in mind. The law is now rather more straightforward than it has been in the past.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: My hon. Friend misunderstood me. I was not talking about any confusion. At present, a judge has no way of knowing that a person will be released after

serving a third of his sentence, because that person's release may be subject to consideration of parole. But a judge will now know that there is automatic release for anyone in the case of a sentence of up to four years. Judges will be tempted to take that into consideration when sentencing, and will therefore be likely to increase the sentence.

Mr. Lloyd: Of course judges will have that in mind when sentencing, and it is quite right that they should. At present, however, anything between a third and two thirds of the sentence could apply. What judges will now bear in mind is much clearer that what they were able to bear in mind before: there will be less confusion and more clarity in the judicial mind.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton referred to the restricted policy. At the time of its introduction—although not nowadays—the logic of that policy lay in the more detailed general criteria that the board was to take into account. The emphasis was on the need to take into account safety in the community. The board will not release prisoners whose release would be too dangerous, but it will be proper to give parole to some drug offenders.

The most important difference—I think that my hon. and learned Friend missed it—lies in the fact that, in one respect, the policy that we propose is tougher. When, under the restricted policy, a prisoner was finally released, he was released "cold", whether he was a reformed character or as sinful as he had been before. Under this policy, prisoners will not go into the community "cold"; there must be some supervision. I consider that a real safeguard for the community. The policy is tougher but more flexible, and I think that that entirely justifies the removal of the restricted policy.

I was grateful for the approval of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) intervened to ask whether six years meant six years. His constituents, and those of other Conservative Members, think that six years has always meant six years, but it has not. Under the present rules it has sometimes meant two years, but in future we shall know that it will mean at least three years.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about the chairman of the Parole Board. He was concerned about staff numbers. He will be getting more staff than he thought when he expressed his concerns. The Parole Board is taking on a new set of duties. We shall have to watch carefully the weight of work and see that he has sufficient resources to discharge his duties effectively. I commend the order to the House.

12.34 am

Mr. Sheerman: It was fascinating to hear, after our deliberations in Committee on the Criminal Justice Bill, the debate between the Minister and his hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). He mentioned sentencing councils. I remember the lengthy argument we had in Committee about sentencing councils. It would be pertinent to think about sentencing councils if judges reacted in the way that the hon. and learned Member for Burton suggested. Common sense suggests that judges have always taken into consideration the length of sentence that prisoners serve.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) referred to resources for the Parole Board. It is easy to underestimate the increase in the amount of its work. Proper resources must be provided to take account of that increase. It is also important to ensure that adequate resources are provided for the probation service. Proper supervision of prisoners when they are released does not come cheap. If the public are to respect that supervision, it must be done well. It must not be the laying on of hands once a year, or even once every six months. As we argued in Committee, the probation service must be provided with additonal resources to provide proper supervision.

We urge the Minister to provide the resources that are required for adequate supervision. I have high hopes of the working of the Criminal Justice Act. Therefore, supervision must be quality supervision rather than nominal supervision.

12.36 am

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is right. The necessary resources must be provided, both for the Parole Board and for the probation service. Additional staff have been provided for the Parole Board. Additional provision is being made for the probation service.

On put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Parole Board (Transfer of Functions) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 23 June, be approved.

Statutory Instruments, &c

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I will put together the Questions on the four statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.),

Local Government (Scotland)

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1992, dated 6 May 1992, a copy of which was laid before this House on 13 May, be approved.

Town and Country Planning

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Amendment) Regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 15 June, be approved.

Town and Country Planning (Scotland)

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 15 June, be approved.

International Immunities and Privileges

That the draft Vienna Document 1992 (Privileges and Immunities) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 17 June, be approved.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Question agreed to.

Imitation Firearms

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

12.37 am

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): In recent years senior police officers in the Rochdale metropolitan borough, which includes my constituency, have expressed their concern to me about the sharp increase in the number of young men who are stopped late at night and found to be carrying replica guns. When challenged, they say that they are only toys. That causes the police great worry because the police who stop them are unarmed.

The deep concern of police officers is well justified and is echoed by many other police forces throughout the United Kingdom. Reacting to the concern of the local constabulary, last year I wrote to the Home Secretary about their concern and received a reply in early August from the Home Office which I believe was totally unsatisfactory. It suggested to me that the Home Office did not believe that the sale, possession and use of realistic imitation guns was a serious problem and that it was not therefore prepared to initiate any legislation relating to realistic replica guns. I was disturbed by the reply, as I am sure many police officers were; those in my constituency certainly were.

The concern of the police in my constituency is understandable, as two very brave members of their ranks were recently shot by a criminal at the Birch service station on the M62. One officer, Inspector Codling, was shot dead and the other brave officer was seriously wounded. Sergeant James Bowden was indeed very fortunate to escape with his life. I am delighted to say that he has been able to resume his duties and I was very happy to meet him last weekend at a function at St Joseph's Roman Catholic school in my constituency. He told me what happened that night and I can assure the House that it was quite horrific.

Many of my constituents and I find it amazing that neither of those unarmed and brave officers was awarded a medal for their brave attempts to arrest an armed and dangerous criminal. I ask the Minister, quite bluntly and directly, why not? Will that anomaly be rectified in the near future?

By an amazing coincidence, local police officers were called to the Birch motorway services on the M62 in June 1991, acting on an anonymous phone call from a member of the public who told them that two young men at the station were armed. Police surrounded the station and Members can imagine their fears, knowing what had happened on the previous occasion when two officers were shot. They arrested two men in possession of a firearm. On their arrest, one of the men was found to be in possession, I am glad to say, of an imitation revolver. Given the circumstances, both men were detained on suspicion of conspiracy to rob.

As one would expect, both denied that they had the replica gun for criminal purposes. They would say that, wouldn't they? One claimed that he was carrying the gun to protect himself from the irate father of his ex-girlfriend. As a result of extensive police inquiries, no criminal offences were disclosed and the two men were bailed. But the circumstances surrounding the incident did not justify the time and resources expended by the police and the legal profession for such a result.

The local police had to deal with two other more serious cases. In the first, a man bought an imitation gun at a local shop in the town and, a short time later, used that realistic replica to commit a robbery at a local bank. With the aid of the realistic weapon, he was able to steal £5,000, but while making his escape he was seen by an unarmed police officer who very bravely gave chase and caught and arrested the man without knowing whether the gun was real or a replica. That man is now serving a period of imprisonment. I am glad to say that that brave unarmed officer was commended for his efforts by the chief constable.

The other serious incident in my area also involved a young man who had bought an imitation gun in the town and used it to rob a bank of £3,000. The same man made a second attempt to rob a post office using the imitation gun but was unsuccessful. Through extensive police inquiries, he was identified and arrested, ultimately convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

To show that such incidents occur elsewhere and not only in my constituency, I shall give examples of cases in the south. In Dorset last July, a young couple alerted the police after seeing a young man loading a pistol in a Bournemouth launderette. During the following operation, the man was tackled by police officers and brought to the ground while an armed response vehicle stood by. The gun recovered was found to be a realistic Browning replica, loaded with blank ammunition. Following that arrest, another man was arrested with an identical replica which also had a considerable amount of blank ammunition. Both guns had been bought in London the previous day.

The intended use of the guns—criminal or otherwise—could not be established by the police, as often happens in cases involving replica guns. If the officers had not surprised the men or if one or both had pointed the guns in a threatening manner, the results could have been tragic.

In another case, a gang of four armed robbers netted £22,000 over 15 months in the home counties by using a starting pistol and firing blank ammunition. When caught, one robber was gaoled for 14 years.

Such incidents are part of a growing catalogue of cases involving realistic replica guns. I am sure that all chief constables could add to the list. Unfortunately, such cases can and do end in tragedy for police officers and for individuals possessing realistic replica guns.

Only this weekend, an inquest was held in Bradford—not far from my area—at which the jury returned a verdict on the death of a young man who was shot by the police while brandishing a replica rifle. Another man found carrying an unloaded air pistol near Wellington railway station in Shropshire was shot and killed by West Mercia police officers.

I have no wish to comment on such tragedies because I do not have detailed information at my disposal, but I offer my sympathies to the relatives of the deceased and to the police officers involved. Officers have a very difficult decision to make and very often have only split seconds in which to make it.

People possessing replica firearms could be playing with fire. While replica firearms are often regarded as toys, their use could have, and often does have, fatal consequences as the type of incident that I have just described grows in number. As a consequence, I call for restrictions on the sale and possession of such guns.

Replica guns first appeared in Britain about 30 years ago. They came from Japan, but today they come from Spain and the far east. The market for such guns is substantial and very profitable. Realistic replicas of Kalashnikov and M16 rifles sell for about £260 each, Berettas for £100, cowboy-style guns for about £45, and the Smith and Wesson 9mm is worth about £25. While no one wishes to deny or deprive a child of his toy, the list of guns that I have just given are not toys for children. Some are most sophisticated and dangerous, and the blank-firing gun, which is totally indistinguishable from the real thing, presents the greatest threat and menace to the public and the police alike.

The consequences of possessing such realistic replicas can be lethal, yet there are at present no laws controlling their sale, provided that they cannot be converted or adapted to fire live rounds of ammunition. In my opinion, the present situation is quite ludicrous. Even those who are prohibited, by virtue of a conviction, from possessing even an air gun can purchase replica guns. It is incomprehensible that people, regardless of age or criminal history, are free to carry imitation guns in public places. It is astonishing too that on 3 June—just over a month ago—a Minister could state that he had been advised by the firearms consultative committee that neither a ban nor licensing controls on realistic replica guns would be feasible or effective. Why not? Just where do the members of that committee live? It seems to me that they do not live on this planet. I wonder what decision they would make if they were suddenly faced with a man threatening them with a gun, real or imitation—they would not know which. That is the situation in which many unarmed police officers find themselves.

The sooner action is taken by the Home Office to control the menace of replica guns, the better. The Home Office must be prepared to do something about the increasing number of incidents in which would-be gunmen brandishing replica guns are shot and injured or killed. Police firearms officers are more mobile than ever before and are therefore more likely to attend even more incidents involving arms. For the sake of saving lives I call for a total ban on the sale or possession of imitation weapons. The Government must legislate now to control the menace of imitation guns. Such imitations are banned from aircraft. Why? We all know why. If they are banned from aircraft they should be banned elsewhere.

In the meantime, the range of offences set down in the firearms legislation, which relate to the misuse of firearms, should be extended to cover imitation weapons. If an adult has an imitation gun without an adequate or reasonable excuse, in circumstances in which, if it were a real gun, an offence would be committed, he should be guilty of an offence. And the courts must be given more power to punish offenders. These changes must be brought about as quickly as possible. In the interests of the safety of the public and the police, I call on the Government to ban these weapons now and to extend the penalties to those carrying them.

12.54 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan) on his success in obtaining this Adjournment debate. His views on the problems of imitation firearms are carefully heeded and widely respected, and the House will have heard his remarks about the bravery of two police officers. I am sure that he would be well advised to make a recommendation for bravery recognition—first, to the chief constable.

The Government are well aware that the police and the public are, quite understandably, deeply anxious about the criminal use of imitation firearms. To a person who has suffered the traumatic experience of an armed attack it does not matter whether the firearm was real or not; the shock and distress which it creates are the same. And a policeman faced with someone brandishing what looks like a genuine firearm must, in the interests of protecting innocent people, assume that that firearm is real and act accordingly. The protection of the public requires no less.

These are unpleasant facts and the Government are determined to do what they can to eliminate the problem. But fear of crime is itself a social evil and we must make sure that fears are not fed by misconceptions. So let me put the problem into perspective.

Armed crime remains rare in this country. It may not always seem that it is because, when it occurs, it invariably attracts media attention. But it is important to remember that in 1990, only 0·2 per cent. of all reported offences in England and Wales involved the use of a firearm. Of those incidents, 420 are known to have involved an imitation firearm. The Government recognise that those figures are unacceptable, but the problem is still on a much smaller scale than many people may have imagined. The Government are determined to take whatever steps they can to reduce and eliminate the criminal use of imitation firearms, but we want to be sure that our actions are likely to prove effective.

Under the Firearms Act 1968 the use of any imitation firearm, whether it can be converted to fire or not, in furtherance of crime, or to resist arrest, carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. It is precisely the same as if a real firearm had been used. Under the 1968 Act an imitation firearm is defined as anything which has the appearence of being a firearm, whether or not it can fire any shot, bullet, or other missile. This definition encompasses the whole range of imitations from the simplest toy gun to faithful replicas of real firearms—the hon. Gentleman mentioned some—accurate down to the last fine detail. There are therefore many millions of items in private hands which fall within the description of an imitation firearm.

There is a special concern about the sort of imitation firearm which can be converted to fire live ammunition. Under the Firearms Act 1982 these firearms are subject to the same strict licensing controls as real firearms.

Other types of imitation firearm may in themselves be completely harmless either because they cannot fire at all or because they fire blanks which give the impression of a shot being fired without actually firing any missile. But it is not the imitation firearms themselves that are harmful—it is the purpose to which they may be put.

The Government have, in the past, looked very carefully at measures which might be taken to reduce the criminal use of imitation firearms. We are frequently told that they should be banned completely or, at the very least, controlled by licence. But workable solutions are rarely so simple.

There are many legitimate reasons for having an imitation firearm. Those which fire blanks are widely used by historical re-enactment groups or for theatre and

[Mr. Charles Wardle]

television productions. Starting pistols are used to start events at school sports days and athletics meetings up and down the country. Many people who are interested in the historical or technical aspects of firearms take pleasure in collecting replicas rather than the genuine article, which reduces the number of real firearms in private hands. So adults, as well as children, get real benefit from owning and studying imitation firearms.

A complete ban on all imitation firearms would prevent all these harmless activities. That would be unfortunate and doubtless unpopular but not necessarily a conclusive argument against banning immitations. The greatest argument against introducing a ban is that it simply would not work.

For one reason, it would be impossible to recover the many millions of imitations already in circulation. So a ban would not prevent criminals from getting hold of them. More importantly, a realistic imitation can easily be made from basic materials. Under conditions of human stress, the poorest imitation can look like the genuine article. There are even documented cases of bread rolls and cucumbers being mistaken for firearms. So a ban would do nothing to prevent criminals from making their own imitations.

It could be argued that a ban might even increase the risk of violent crime. An imitation firearm, however frightening, cannot kill or maim; but criminals denied access to imitations may well turn either to the real thing or to other dangerous weapons such as knives.

Similar difficulties would arise if we tried to make imitation firearms subject to some sort of licensing control, and that would carry the additional problem of creating a huge administrative burden for the authorities.

It has been suggested that only certain types of imitation firearms need be made subject to control—for example, those which fire blanks and which therefore give the sound and impression of a real shot being fired.

The House will recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) sought to introduce a Bill in the last Session along those very lines. The Bill aimed to make blank firing replica firearms subject to licensing by the police. I can understand why my hon. Friend thought that an attractive and straightforward measure. I, and I am sure the rest of the House, can appreciate his aims, but the difficulty is that even a child's toy cap gun is, in effect, a blank firing imitation firearm and would have needed a licence under my hon. Friend's proposal. In any case, what would his proposal achieve? It would make life inconvenient for many law-abiding citizens and yet have no impact whatsoever on criminals, who would simply choose a different type of imitation firearm. Regrettably, the solutions are not that straightforward.

Late last year we asked the firearms consultative committee to review existing controls. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the committee was established in 1989 under section 22 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. The main functions of the committee, which is chaired by Lord Kimball, are to review the Firearms Acts and make recommendations to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for improving them and to advise him on other related matters. The committee looked specifically at the possibility of controlling just blank firing imitations, but advised that any attempt to draw a distinction between blank firing weapons and those which cannot fire at all would be fraught with difficulty. It concluded that it would be well nigh impossible to make workable distinctions between exact replicas, close imitations, de-activated firearms and toys.

The committee concluded that controlling imitation firearms by a ban or by some form of licensing system would be neither feasible nor effective. However, the committee did offer two suggestions for possible action. First, it recommended that the range of offences which apply to the criminal use of real firearms should be extended to cover imitation firearms where that is not already the case.

In broad terms, the committee suggested that where an adult has an imitation firearm with him, without reasonable excuse, in circumstances where, if it had been a real firearm an offence would have been committed, then it should also be an offence to have an imitation firearm in those circumstances and the burden of proof should be placed squarely on the person involved to show that his possession of the imitation firearm was innocent. We have looked carefully at that recommendation. We think that the sort of offences suggested by the committee would usefully strengthen the law in this area.

Both the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Crown prosecution service, whom we have consulted, agree that new offences of this sort would provide a valuable addition to existing controls. We believe that they would increase the deterrent to those thinking about using an imitation to commit a crime and they would also give the courts more powers to punish offenders.

Precise details of the offences have yet to be worked out. We do not, for example, want to make criminals of parents who happen to be walking home from a toy shop with a new toy gun for their child tucked under one arm, but we think that the proposal has considerable merit. I am glad to be able to take this opportunity to tell the House that the Government have accepted the recommendation in principle and will introduce legislation to create additional offences when a suitable opportunity arises.

The committee's second recommendation was that the public should be made more aware of the dangers of misusing imitation firearms. It suggested that that could be achieved by placing warnings on the packaging of imitation firearms about the very heavy penalties which apply to such misuse. I can certainly understand why the committee felt that such a measure was worthy of consideration. We have examined the proposal in detail. Consultations have been held with the Department of Trade and Industry, the trading standards authorities, and with representatives of the gun and toy trades.

In the light of those discussions, I have to say that we are sceptical about the value of warning labels. It seems to us that a criminal hardened enough to buy an imitation firearm for criminal use is hardly going to mend his ways because of a warning on the packet; and even that thought supposes that he would actually read the warning—or that he would obtain the firearm in its wrapping in the first place. Understandable concern was expressed by the toy trade that such warnings could detract from the impact of important information about toy safety, and safety information is, of course, of much more immediate relevance to the principal purchasers of toy guns, that is to

say, parents and children. We have given the recommendation considerable thought, but we are not persuaded that such measures would effectively deter criminal misuse and we are not inclined to pursue that idea.

I would, however, like to take this opportunity to applaud the responsible approach that was taken to the sale of imitation firearms by many in the gun and toy trade. A little while ago, the British Toy and Hobby Manufacturers Association voluntarily introduced a code of practice requiring all toy guns manufactured or sold by its members to be marked, for example, by a bright orange plug, making them more readily identifiable as fakes. Adherence to the code is mandatory for all members of the association, and that will be a useful step forward.

It also became clear to us during consultations that gun trade associations take an equally responsible view to the marketing of replica firearms; many firms voluntarily refuse to sell their products to people under the age of 18 and already include warnings about misuse in the packaging material.

I hope that I have managed to respond to most of the points raised in the course of the debate. I have noted the strength of feeling that the hon. Gentleman has expressed. I hope that I have also made clear that the Government are far from complacent about the issue and will act, where they can sensibly do so, in a practical fashion to reduce the chances of imitation and replica firearms being misused.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 7 July 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREATER MANCHESTER (LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM) (NO. 4) BILL *[Lords]*

As amended, considered; to be read the Third time.

PRICE'S PATENT CANDLE COMPANY LIMITED BILL *[Lords]*

As amended, considered; to be read the Third time.

GREATER NOTTINGHAM LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT BILL

Ordered,

That the Committee on the Greater Nottingham Light Rapid Transit Bill have leave to visit and inspect the site of the proposed works, and any sites which have been proposed as alternatives, provided that no evidence shall be taken in the course of such visit and that any party who has made an appearance before the Committee be permitted to attend by his Counsel, Agent or other representative.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Industrial Action

1. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures the Government are considering to enable action to be taken against unlawful industrial action.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Michael Forsyth): We intend to give people who are denied goods or services because of unlawful industrial action a new right to go to court to have it stopped.

Mr. Day: Does my hon. Friend agree that the measure to which he referred will greatly improve industrial relations in this country? Does he also agree that it will help us to attract even more inward investment into this country?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. The effect of our step-by-step approach to the reform of industrial relations has seen this year the lowest number of days lost through strike action ever recorded. My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of that in respect of inward investment. We in this country enjoy 62 per cent. of United States investment into the European Community and more than 40 per cent. of Japanese investment. That is a testimony to the success of the Government's policies in that area.

Mr. Ashton: Is the Minister aware that if the French Government had taken the lorry drivers to court, they would be out on strike for another week? Is he aware that unofficial action is best settled by negotiations and not by the kind of violence that we saw during the miners' strike, the poll tax riots in Trafalgar square and the incidents that we saw at Wapping? Negotiation is the best way to settle any industrial dispute.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the law in France is, in many respects, far tougher than the law in this country. He must not tempt me down that path. I agree with him that negotiation is always the best way to resolve disputes. They should not result in industrial action. The success of the Government's policy has been to avoid industrial action by creating a climate in which the unions have been given back to their members and are no longer subject to the whims of the trade union barons from whom the Labour party seems keen to distance itself.

Skillcheck Scheme

2. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made with the skillcheck scheme.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): The consultative document, which the White Paper "People, Jobs and Opportunity" promised, has been issued and will be discussed with representatives of training and enterprise councils and other interested parties in the next month.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that in addition to the progress of the skillcheck scheme, it is right to welcome the development of the national training targets as an example of the combination of thinking from training and education leaders and business leaders in the community? The achievements of those targets is well worth while and will be helped by the development of training agencies such as Beneast in my constituency.

Mr. McLoughlin: We are doing a considerable amount to encourage the attainment of those targets. My hon. Friend rightly identified the importance that the Government attach to them. They are not Government targets, but they are targets to which we subscribe.

Training Expenditure

3. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Government's expenditure on training for 1992-93.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government expect to spend £2·7 billion on training, enterprise and vocational education in 1992-93.

Mr. Williams: Will the Minister comment on the report in *The Sunday Times* that the Government, because of their problems with public expenditure, are considering scrapping payments of up to £35 a week to young people on the youth training scheme?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman should not believe everything that he reads in *The Sunday Times*.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is it not a fact that, irrespective of expenditure, the quality of training has improved immeasurably in the past five years?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is quite right. We attach great importance to training and to the results that people who take training courses achieve at the end of them. Obviously, we must ask a number of questions. I am satisfied that youth training fulfils an important role for young people.

Mr. Steinberg: Is the Minister aware that, this year, Durham training and enterprise council has invested about £1 million and at the same time has drastically cut training for special needs? Does he agree that that is absolutely disgraceful, and will he make representations to Durham TEC to put that right?

Mr. McLoughlin: I know that Durham TEC will meet its youth training guarantee, and the Government are determined that that should be done. It is for a local TEC to decide its operation. If the hon. Gentleman has a specific complaint, obviously I will look at it and take it up with the relevant TEC.

Employment Action

4. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what support the trade unions are offering in the employment action programme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I regret to say that the Trades Union Congress voted last September to oppose employment action. *[Interruption.]* That is a programme which helps the unemployed to maintain their skills while undertaking temporary work which is of benefit to the whole community.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that progress by the National Association of Local Government Officers and other unions is destroying employment action projects in Cirencester and Tewkesbury? Does he agree that the Opposition's criticisms would be better directed at their trade union friends and not at the Government, who are fully committed to doing everything that they possibly can to create as many jobs as possible?

Mr. Forsyth: I was aware of the difficulties that have been created with Gloucestershire county council in respect of programmes under employment action. I hope that the whole country will have heard Opposition Members' cheers at the decision by the TUC to boycott a programme which is geared to helping people who are unemployed and helping communities by providing projects of that kind. I hope also that Opposition Members will recognise that the Transport and General Workers Union, which sponsors the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), also voted at its previous conference to boycott youth training and employment training. So let us have no more humbug from Opposition Members that they are concerned about those programmes.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister agree that we had community programmes which provided jobs that were worth while to the community at reasonable wages, then we had employment training, which provided work with no wages but some training, but that employment action is a combination of the worst features of both, combining no training with no wages? Employment action is not a new idea: it is a very old idea—called slavery.

Mr. Forsyth: That is one of the silliest questions that I have heard in the House. The hon. Gentleman should know that people on employment action are paid benefit plus £10. Exactly the same applies to those on employment training. The hon. Gentleman does a great disservice to the many thousands of people who are engaged in running those programmes to help the unemployed with considerable success and distinction.

EC Working Time Directive

5. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further discussions she has had with her EC counterparts on the proposed 48-hour-week directive.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I last met my European Community counterparts to discuss the 48-hour working week and other matters on 24 June at the Social Affairs Council.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the working time proposals challenge the concept of subsidiarity? Does she intend to challenge that directive in the European Court?

Mrs. Shephard: The Government have always made it absolutely clear that they see no need for that directive. We do not want that directive. I remind my hon. Friend that

there is no directive, but if there should be a directive we would certainly reserve the right to challenge its legal base in the European Court.

Mr. Stevenson: Is the Secretary of State prepared to tell the House whether she discussed with her counterparts in the European Community the fact that workers in this country who are involved in perfectly legitimate industrial action can be sacked arbitrarily and that this is the only European Community country in which that disgraceful situation pertains? What action is she prepared to take about the situation?

Mrs. Shephard: It is absolutely clear that such directives, which impose unnecessary burdens on the labour market, are the worst possible solution for employers and employees.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: My right hon. Friend is aware that an exellent firm called Celtech in my constituency works four 12-hour day shifts, followed by four days off, followed by four 12-hour night shifts. If the directive came into operation the workers could voluntarily opt out of the 48-hour provision, but could they opt out of the provisions which forbid such long night shifts? That is extremely important. I have spoken to the staff and they like working those hours. They like the system, the industry likes it, and it does a good job.

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is right to stress that workers in Britain like the flexibility that our labour market affords them, and that they appreciate the opportunity to work more than 48 hours a week if they so choose. Rest periods and shifts would be controlled by reference periods and there is considerable flexibility therein.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: After the recent Council of Ministers meeting, the Secretary of State told the world that she had made no concessions, but will she confirm that when the directive comes through it will establish the principle of a 48-hour maximum working week, of minimum rest breaks and of minimum holiday entitlement? In those circumstances, will she respond to the question put by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) as to whether she intended to take legal action against the directive? Or is it simply huff and puff?

Mrs. Shephard: Perhaps I can repeat to the hon. Gentleman what I said as he does not appear to have heard me. There is no directive. I have made it clear, and I make it clear again this afternoon, that we do not see a need for a directive. We do not want a directive. That is still the case. We reserve the right to challenge it, if and when a directive is adopted. Faced with proposals subject to qualified majority voting, which the United Kingdom could not block on its own, we had to do what we could to improve the proposed directive and to prevent its most damaging effects on employers and employees. The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and his hon. Friends would welcome those effects. We were successful in improving the directive.

Mr. Nicholls: Did my right hon. Friend note that it was urged on her a moment ago that it should be impossible to dismiss strikers for being on strike? Will she confirm that that position is so extreme that it was not adopted even by previous Labour Administrations?

Mrs. Shephard: I agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, the assertions made by Opposition Members in respect of the directive, other labour market matters and industrial action defy description.

Wages Councils

6. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are her plans concerning the future of wages councils.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government have made it clear on many occasions that the wages councils have no permanent place in the labour market.

Mrs. Fyfe: Are not the Government in fact planning to rid themselves entirely of wages councils? How does the Minister reconcile the withdrawal of such little protection as is afforded by wages councils with the fantastic salaries that the heads of the formerly nationalised industries award themselves? How do those two things combine to achieve a country at ease with itself?

Mr. Forsyth: The Government's position is clear. Wages should be negotiated between employers and employees, based on productivity, profitability and the firm's ability to provide the wages which are the subject of the negotiation. They should not be set centrally by the Government or Government bodies. The hon. Lady will recall that in the recent general election the Opposition proposed a national wage. They were soundly defeated because most people recognised that it would cost between 1 million and 2 million jobs.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Will my hon. Friend confirm that we have not had a national wage? Will he say how many wages councils there are? Has employment increased or fallen in those industries that have given up wages councils? Has he done a survey of small employers, who often find that it is of some help to have wages set by wages councils because it provides a way of finding a just level of pay for their employees?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall try to deal with all five questions. There are 26 wages councils. My hon. Friend is right to point to the falling numbers of people employed in many of the wages council industries. Some of them have names which reflect the turn of the century, such as the ostrich, fancy feather and artificial flower wages council. The flax and hemp wages council and others have disappeared. My hon. Friend is right to stress that, for the rest of this century and for the 21st century, the way forward is for wages to be negotiated according to employers' ability to pay, and reflecting local circumstances.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister accept that in such areas employers frequently ask that wages councils should be maintained, to protect them from unfair competition as well as to protect their work forces? Would not the Government's determination to retain the right for Britain to have its own labour market conditions ring a little more true to the unemployed and those with poor conditions if there were any evidence that the Government were prepared to do anything to guarantee the rights of the low paid?

Mr. Forsyth: The Government's record on the low paid is second to none—*[Interruption.]* We have taken measures through the social security system to maintain

the income coming into the family home. If the hon. Gentleman cares to study the facts on wages councils, he will find that many people covered by them are second wage earners. Unemployment is the greatest cause of poverty, and statutory minimum wages destroy jobs and put people on the dole.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware that increasing numbers of employers are becoming more concerned about the operations of the wages councils? Will he also confirm that, in so far as the councils set minimum wage levels, their operations often lead to the destruction of jobs—a fact which seems to have escaped Opposition Members before and since the election?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. He will recall that when we removed young people from the scope of the wages councils. Opposition Members predicted that it would result in falling wage levels. On the contrary, it has not and there is no evidence to sustain such a view. I repeat the point that I have tried to get across to Opposition Members—there is no point in giving people a minimum wage if the consequence is that they have no jobs.

Mr. Blair: Will the Minister answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe)? How does he justify abandoning all forms of protection against poverty pay for the 2·5 million people who work in pubs, hotels and shops throughout the country—there are thousands in every constituency—who will lose hundreds of pounds a year and more if wages councils go? How does he justify that, when the chairmen of the utilities that the Government privatised are paying themselves telephone-figure salaries out of monopoly profits while he and his hon. Friends do nothing?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is talking poppycock. He knows perfectly well that about two thirds of the people covered by wages councils are paid more than the minimum wage set by those councils. That is an expensive, bureaucratic anachronism, which the Government have made clear has no permanent place in the labour market.

Employment, Greater London

7. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new jobs she estimates have been created in the Greater London area since 1979; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am afraid that the information that my hon. Friend requests is not available.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the 1,000 jobs which will shortly come on stream at the Tesco development on the former Hoover site in Perivale in my constituency? Will he ensure that the employment services are geared to help people to get jobs on that site, which we have worked so hard for so long to obtain, and elsewhere in my constituency in Ealing and in greater London?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am pleased to hear of the jobs being created in my hon. Friend's constituency. I assure him that the employment service will do all that it can to help to recruit for that company if the company asks it to do so.

Mr. Gapes: Does the Minister agree that unemployment in London continues to rise week by week and day by day? Does he accept that the Government are responsible for that? Is it not time that they stopped saying that they can do nothing about it and started to take action to put people back to work?

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government believe that one way of ensuring that employment rises is to conquer inflation, which we have taken action to do. That follows the point made by the noble Lord Callaghan that high inflation leads to high unemployment.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that even more important than curbing inflation—important though that undoubtedly is—is the necessity to get real interest rates down substantially and fast? Will that not be the best help for small businesses, and the construction industry in particular, to offer the people of London real hope of increased employment, which is so urgently needed in the capital?

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend will realise that that is a matter not for me but for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's comments are drawn to his attention.

Mr. McLeish: When will the Government come clean on their employment record? Why, in December 1991, were there 191,000 fewer people in work in Britain than in 1979? More importantly, in the 18 months to December 1991, why did Germany, France, Portugal, Spain and Italy have an employment growth——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should restrict his question to the Greater London area since 1979.

Mr. McLeish: Why, relative to the employment growth in Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy and France of 912,000 in 18 months to December 1991, was there a drop in the number of people in employment in London between December 1981 and December 1991? After 13 years, cannot the House and the country expect the Government to be taking employment seriously?

Mr. McLoughlin: What the Government are not prepared to do is to take lectures or sermons from the Opposition. We put our record to the test not so long ago. The Opposition put their proposals to the test; they were rejected by the electorate and ours were endorsed.

Training

8. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will set out her Department's latest training initiative in Essex and Basildon.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Essex training and enterprise council, with the Government, is playing a major role in helping people in Essex to get and keep their jobs.

Mr. Amess: Is my right hon. Friend aware that last month I had the honour to open the Basildon job club, which has already been successful in securing jobs for a number of my constituents? Does my right hon. Friend agree that such job clubs have a vital role to play in

enabling my constituents who have been long-term unemployed to gain the confidence to return to the job market?

Mrs. Shephard: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his continuing concern for his now famous constituency, and I am delighted that he had the pleasure and honour of opening the Basildon job club. Job clubs do a very good job in getting people back to work as fast and effectively as possible. Nearly half the people who attend job clubs go from them into employment, and I am glad to say that this year we have 220,000 places in job clubs.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Secretary of State reflect on the fact that the training initiative for Essex will be irrelevant unless she stops the haemorrhaging of jobs throughout Essex? In particular, will she consider the need for training initiatives to meet the redundancies of Marconi workers in Chelmsford and the hundreds of workers facing redundancy at Ford's in Aveley and Dunton? What does she intend to do to stop the unemployment, particularly in Basildon where it has exceeded 160 per cent. in two years?

Mrs. Shephard: I think that it has escaped the hon. Gentleman's notice, and that of many of his hon. Friends, that the Opposition's economic policies would do nothing but increase unemployment. The only way to create lasting employment is to pursue a policy of low inflation, as this Government are doing.

The hon. Gentleman asked a specific question about what the Government were doing to help people back into jobs. Obviously, he was not listening to my previous answer, but I shall tell him what we are doing. There are increased targets for the employment service and there are 100,000 more places on employment and training programmes this year than last year, making almost 1 million in all. The effectiveness of the measures described by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) should also appeal to the hon. Gentleman if he is actually thinking of getting his constituents back to work as quickly and as effectively as possible.

Dr. Spink: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people from Castle Point, including many from Canvey island, have to travel to beautiful Basildon to get training and further education? While Basildone does an excellent job for my people, should not provision for those services be made on Canvey island for its people? My right hon. Friend may be aware that there is not a single further education place available on Canvey island.

Mrs. Shephard: I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend's plea for his beautiful constituency. Until such places are provided, I feel sure that his constituents will benefit from the excellent service described by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon.

Mr. Blair: On a point of information, will the right hon. Lady tell us—I believe that her Department now has this information—how many young people in Essex and in Britain are waiting for a training place?

Mrs. Shephard: I do not have that information, but I shall remind the hon. Gentleman of the answer that I gave when we last had employment questions. I said that there were sufficient resources to provide youth training places for all young people and that resources need not be a problem to training and enterprise councils. I also said that the machinery for providing those places and for cutting down queues should not fail young people.

I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman that I am today putting into place new measures to establish a national system for monitoring the numbers of young people covered by the YT guarantee and seeking a place on YT. I shall shortly be discussing that matter with TEC representatives.

Unemployment

9. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action she intends to take to reduce unemployment in the Southampton travel-to-work area.

Mr. McLoughlin: The employment service in Southampton and the Hampshire training and enterprise council deliver a wide range of employment, enterprise and training programmes to help unemployed people find the best and quickest route back to employment. The latest figures for the Southampton travel-to-work area show that there was a reduction of 298 in the number of people claiming benefit.

Mr. Denham: Does the Minister accept that during the past three years unemployment in Southampton has risen from 7,400 to almost 13,000 and that there are now 42 unemployed claimants chasing every jobcentre vacancy? Is he aware that according to yesterday's Treasury model forecasts, my constituents can expect unemployment to rise even higher?

May I assume that the hon. Gentleman would not attempt to cure a migraine with a hammer, and that therefore there might to an outside chance that he will realise that Government policies are creating unemployment, not solving the problem?

Mr. McLoughlin: No, I do not accept that. My point was that there was a reduction in the number of people claiming benefit last month. The way to ensure that employment grows is to keep inflation low and not to create artificial barriers to employment—the policy on which the Labour party fought the last election.

Mr. Milligan: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the most serious threats to jobs in the Southampton area is the delay in completing the M3 motorway at Twyford down, which has resulted in some of the worst traffic jams in southern England? Is he further aware that if the Labour party had won the election, it would have carried out its commitment to stop all work on that motorway, which would have seriously damaged employment in Southampton?

Will my hon. Friend convey his view, if it is his view, to our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment that that motorway should be completed as soon as possible? Jobs in Southampton are more important than butterflies on Twyford down.

Mr. McLoughlin: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's point about the importance of infrastructure in serving particular regions and areas. The former Member of Parliament for Southampton, Itchen, Mr. Christopher Chope, played a leading role in securing the completion of the M3, which is a great credit to him. I will convey the

points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

16-plus Policies

11. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to better co-ordinate policies for 16-plus training and education.

Mr. McLoughlin: The jointly produced White Paper "Education and Training in the 21st Century" published in May 1991 was designed to encourage young people to develop to the best of their ability, remove barriers to opportunity, achieve higher standards and provide more choice. We are making good progress towards those aims.

Mr. Luff: Pausing only to apologise for the split infinitive in the question in my name on the Order Paper, which I assure my hon. Friend the Minister was not in the question that I submitted to the Table Office, I invite him to congratulate all those in my constituency who have worked so hard to deliver an important part of the Government's plans for the 16-plus age group. I refer in particular to the training and enterprise council, the chamber of commerce and the wider business community. Will my hon. Friend assure me that, in the unlikely event that allegations that the YT guarantee is not being delivered in a particular area are proved to be true, he will make every effort to ensure that the guarantee is forthcoming.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the praise that he rightly gives to his local training and enterprise council. I am glad that he has approached it to establish how the guarantee is operating—rather than rely on the scare stories that we often hear from Opposition Members. I assure my hon. Friend that the Government take the YT guarantee very seriously. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has just made an announcement about the way in which we shall monitor the scheme to ensure that it is delivered throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leighton: Is the Minister aware that 500 young school leavers in the London borough of Newham have no jobs, no training place and no benefits? That is the situation this year, as it was last year—and the same is projected for the future. Will the Minister give that matter his personal attention? Is he aware that his Department has received a letter inviting a Minister to the borough to study the situation on the ground? Will he make a positive response?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am not aware of the letter to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I will check it out and I hope to respond positively to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Will my hon. Friend confirm that 60 per cent. of young people are staying on at school —the highest ever figure? In my own constituency, the Kidderminster college of further education has seen the number of full-time students rise by 10 per cent. over the past year. Is that not evidence of what occurs when colleges of further education are given greater flexibility and independence from local authorities? Ought we not to pursue that theme, with the support of industry?

Mr. McLoughlin: I agree. The staying-on level in Hereford and Worcester is 63 per cent., which is slightly above the national average. The increase in the numbers staying on for further education are surely welcomed in all parts of the House.

Mr. Fatchett: When all the best estimates suggest that the youth training guarantee is not being delivered to between 60,000 and 100,000 youngsters—and for many of them, that means poverty and homelessness—why do the Government not accept the figures and act upon them? Is it because the Minister is ignorant of the facts, or is he simply callously indifferent?

Mr. McLoughlin: It is because this Minister deals with the facts that he does not recognise the hon. Gentleman's figures. They are bogus and scaremongering. We have made it clear that we want to ensure that the guarantee is met. It is a pity that a number of trade unions and Opposition Members refuse to have anything to do with the youth training guarantee.

RADAR

13. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when she next expects to meet the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation to discuss the employment of people with special needs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend or my noble Friend would certainly consider a request for a meeting, but none has been made.

Mr. Clarke: Should not the Government be using their own initiative and meeting organisations such as RADAR, in which case they would be hearing of people's concerns that every Department, including the Minister's and even the Prime Minister's, is not employing people with disabilities? Is not it disgraceful that this week—the sixth anniversary of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 being passed —because the Government do not fully implement the Act, people with disabilities are not in responsible positions? May I remind the Government that they are not accepting responsibility for giving jobs to people with disabilities?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is being a little unfair, uncharacteristically so. He must not assume that we have to have a meeting with every organisation in order to maintain contact. In fact, I have just received a letter from RADAR in which it raised one or two aspects of help for the disabled which arose from our previous Question Time. The Department maintains a close liaison with such organisations.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, he will know from his own work in this field that there are many organisations concerned with the disabled, which are not backward in coming forward with their views and, of course, the Department seeks to respond to them. The current reorganisation taking place in the employment service is designed in part to respond to representations made to us following the consultation paper that we issued recently.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend bear it in mind that the public sector as a whole is not as good as the

private sector at employing disabled people? Will he take specific steps to encourage public sector employers to do better?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend has a point. It is certainly true that the public sector has not been as successful as the private sector, but I do not think that there is any room for complacency on either side. The employment service uses whatever mechanisms are open to it to try to encourage more help and support for disabled people, but I am sure that my hon. Friend's point will be borne in mind by the organisations in the public sector that could do better.

Mr. Worthington: Will the Minister undertake to examine the problem of youth training for those with special needs because the cost of training such people is legitimately high? At present all over Scotland—and, I am sure, elsewhere—there are signs that in future it will not be possible to meet the costs of the youth training guarantee for those with special needs without taking from elsewhere. Will the Minister consider that and ensure that those with special needs are safeguarded?

Mr. Forsyth: The Government have made the position perfectly clear—the youth training guarantee stands. If the hon. Gentleman knows of specific examples in Scotland where people with special needs or people who are disabled are not having their demands met, he should take them up with the local enterprise companies which are responsible for the delivery of the youth training guarantee. We have made it clear that the youth training guarantee will not fail to be delivered because of a lack of resources. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern that those with special needs should be given priority and should not be left behind. That is reflected in our policies throughout the employment service.

Overtime

14. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the proposed European directive that would restrict the overtime that British workers are allowed to work.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Social Affairs Council did not reach a common position on the proposed working time directive on 24 June so we do not have a directive. In discussions on the text, the United Kingdom secured all its key objectives, in particular the right for employees to work for more than 48 hours a week if they choose to do so. I made it clear that the United Kingdom continues to have very severe doubts about the directive as a whole and its proposed legal base.

Mr. Bruce: I wonder whether the next time my right hon. Friend meets her colleagues in Europe she will express my concern that, having been a Member of Parliament for more than five years—*[Interruption.]*—I have yet to receive a single letter from a single constituent complaining that he has too many hours to work. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will the House come to Order? The hon. Gentleman cannot be heard. Even though he has been here five years, he is going to be heard.

Mr. Bruce: Opposition Members cannot take it, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Will the Minister tell her Employment colleagues at the Council of Ministers that although they may be Euro workaholics working well over 100 hours a week each, they are in no position to legislate for people who would like to arrange with their own employers their own hours of work?

Mrs. Shephard: I shall be pleased to pass on to my European counterparts the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend, who may now find that he receives a letter or two on the issue, and I feel certain that they will be in support of the position taken by the United Kingdom. The number of hours worked by MEPs and MPs would be excluded from the provisions of the directive, should it ever come to pass.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 July.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the economic summit in Munich.

Mr. McMaster: Will the Leader of the House guarantee not to guillotine the Maastricht Bill when it returns to the House for debate?

Mr. Newton: The Leader of the House will guarantee that the Government will consider all matters carefully before deciding how to proceed.

Mr. James Hill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should pass as quickly as possible legislation dealing with imitation firearms? Is he aware that they are becoming a serious problem for the public, because one can suffer as much trauma and be robbed just as effectively with an imitation firearm as with a real one?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend's concern is shared in many quarters. The Home Secretary is on the Bench beside me and will have heard what has been said.

Dr. John Cunningham: Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the Government's moratorium on stamp duty for house purchase has been a success?

Mr. Newton: I believe that the arrangements brought forward by my right hon. Friend and other colleagues at the turn of the year have materially assisted in reducing the number of repossessions and in bringing about an improvement in the housing market compared with what the position would have been. Frankly, I would find the hon. Gentleman's answer more credible but for the fact that his hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), I understand speaking for the Opposition, described the suspension of stamp duty at the time as a racket and a gimmick.

Dr. Cunningham: If it has been of material benefit to the housing industry, is it not a fact that when we are in the depths of the worst recession for 60 years, with confidence at an all-time low and the building and construction industry in disarray, this is the last moment to remove any incentive from the desperately needful building sector? As

the Government have still not used up all the money that they allocated for the scheme, why will they not concentrate the relief on transactions up to £100,000, thus helping the lower end of the market and first-time buyers? That would be a sensible step to take in the depths of the present awful recession.

Mr. Newton: The aim of the scheme was to bring forward transactions that might otherwise have been delayed. I believe that it has made an important contribution in doing just that.

Hastings and Rye

Q2. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an official visit to Hastings and Rye.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and hopes to include the south-east among them.

Mrs. Lait: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I welcome the opportunity of my right hon. Friend visiting Hastings and Rye and hope that he will leave plenty of time to come down the road affectionately known as the snail trail. Will he also visit the Conquest hospital, which is operated by the Hastings and Rother trust, which took its first out-patients yesterday and will take its first in-patients on 20 July? Does he agree that this is another indication that only Conservative health policies deliver health care to the nation?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that, if he is able to visit my hon. Friend's constituency, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will wish to join her in welcoming the opening of the new hospital—and, indeed, in looking forward to phase 2, which is currently under consideration by the regional health authority.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Denham: Does the Leader of the House agree that high-rise tower blocks are entirely unsuitable as homes for young children? Does he, like me, regret that, over the past few years, the number of young children trapped in Southampton tower blocks has risen two and a half times, and that hundreds of children will never have a decent home? Does he accept that Southampton council has a lower-than-average number of vacancies and that the number of children who are trapped in a high-rise hell is a direct result of Government policies? Can he offer those children any hope and what action will he take to ensure that they have a chance to live in a house with a garden?

Mr. Newton: The Government have a range of policies designed to improve the supply of rented accommodation. They are channelling £6 billion into housing associations over the next two years to provide more than 150,000 new homes for rent and low-cost purchase by 1995-96. I very much hope that that will help to solve Southampton's problems, given that the local authority wishes to participate.

Dr. Harrison: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the growing feeling on both sides of the House that the county hall site would be ideal for the London school of economics? Would it not be poignantly symbolic if the Prime Minister, while he is President of the European Council, assisted in the development on the Thames of a great European university on a scale to rival anything on offer in Paris, rather than allowing a fine building to become a second-rate hotel for Japanese package tours?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will know that the disposal of county hall is a matter for the London residuary body. It is now up to the LSE to put firm proposals to that body.

Q4. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cohen: The Lord President will know that I shall be presenting my Homicide (Defence of Provocation) Bill today. Does he agree that a woman who acts in desperation after suffering sustained domestic violence ought to have recourse to a mitigating plea of provocation? Is not the present law—which has gaoled women such as Sara Thornton and Kiranjit Ahluwalia—unjust, and should it not be changed?

Mr. Newton: I understand the concern that is felt about the matter, not least because of my past social services responsibilities. I am not sure that the solution is as easy as the hon. Gentleman suggests, but I certainly undertake to bear his points in mind, along with my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Ward: Is my right hon. Friend aware that thousands of fishermen are demonstrating outside the House today, largely because they fear that the conservation measures required by the EC—which are being dealt with in the House—will not be observed by their counterparts on the other side of the Channel? That has happened many times in the past. Will the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food look again at ways of preserving our fishing industry?

Mr. Newton: I assure my hon. Friend that it is no part of the British Government's purpose to introduce what I take to be sensible measures to promote the conservation of fish stocks and the long-term future of the industry, only to see those measures destroyed by the actions of others. My right hon. Friend the Minister will take every possible step to ensure that that does not happen.

European Community

Q5. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Prime Minister what approaches have been received by Her Majesty's Government concerning reallocation of powers currently the responsibility of the Council of Ministers of the European Community.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

The treaty on European union enshrines in Community law the principle of subsidiarity, but the Community should act only when objectives cannot be achieved at the level of individual member states acting alone. The principle should be applied strictly to existing as well as to future legislation. It calls for urgent work on the procedural and practical steps to implement the principle and invites the Commission and the Council to report to the next European Council in Edinburgh. The treaty contains a presumption of action at the national level.

Mr. Spearing: Yes, but that is answering a question that was not asked. So what is new? Is this not about the possible repatriation of powers? Is it not a fact that President Major as well as President Delors have been in favour of that, or have mooted the possibility? In respect of the President of the Commission, why is it that the Commission must always call the shots? Would it not be an advantage if it reacted only to requests from the Council of Ministers or the Heads of Government and therefore made the whole outfit more intergovernmental than it is already?

Mr. Newton: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I think that my answer did address the question that he asked. The plenary session between the United Kingdom presidency and the Commission last week, which I attended, very much addressed precisely that question. The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that plans are in hand to undertake a review of existing legislation before the Edinburgh summit at the end of the year.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Did my right hon. Friend see certain scholarly articles that were published over the weekend drawing attention to the fact that the word "subsidiarity" is derived from the Latin word "subsidium" which, apparently, is a term of Roman Catholic dogma and that the Roman interpretation of that word is quite different from the Anglican?

Mr. Newton: Coming from a somewhat mixed religious background, I do not intend to allow myself to be caught up in ecclesiastical controversy.

Engagements

Q6. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Eastham: Two weeks ago one of my hon. Friends with a London constituency raised with the Prime Minister the question of the housing crisis. The Prime Minister proceeded to attack local authorities, including Manchester——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Question!

Mr. Eastham: Why don't you shut up? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. It may be very amusing, but it is a great waste of time when we are nearly at 3.30. Can we hear the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) in silence now?

Mr. Eastham: In responding, the Prime Minister proceeded to attack local authorities, including Manchester, and said that we had empty properties. May I point out to the Leader of the House that we have hundreds of empty properties in Manchester that are dangerous and unlettable but that central Government are not allowing Manchester to borrow money to make those properties habitable? Is it not time that the Government got their spending priorities right and accepted their responsibilities, which clearly they are failing to do now?

Mr. Newton: The Government have clearly accepted their responsibilities, with the arrangements that they have made concerning approvals for capital expenditure. I hope that Manchester will look carefully at the policy that leads to so many houses being empty.

Dame Jill Knight: Will my right hon. Friend convey to the Prime Minister the level of public concern over the fact that a professional drug courier should have been protected from police action by hospital staff? Does he agree that drugs constitute an appalling danger, particularly to young people, and that the police ought to be helped, not hindered, in their fight against drugs?

Mr. Newton: Again, I think that my hon. Friend raises a point which will be of concern to other hon. Members. I have seen reports of the case. Clearly, as I think all hon. Members will agree, it is important to balance a patient's right to medical confidentiality against the safety of the community at large, but this is a very complex area. I understand that the chief executive of the North Staffordshire health authority is seeking an urgent meeting with the chief constable to discuss the confidentiality issue and agree clearer lines of communication.

Q7. **Mr. Garrett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Garrett: Last year 69,000 families had their homes repossessed. At the moment, 290,000 borrowers are more than six months in arrears with their mortgage repayments. The Government's mortgage rescue scheme has so far managed to rescue 12 home buyers. When will the Government make a serious attempt to help home buyers and borrowers who are in difficulties?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Council of Mortgage Lenders has estimated that as a result of the action taken at the turn of the year some 55,000 repossessions will be prevented this year, and that the Halifax building society reckons that its repossessions are down by about 40 per cent. over the latest six months compared with the last six months of last year. That is substantial progress which has helped many tens of thousands of families.

European Fighter Aircraft

3.30 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the European fighter aircraft in the light of his meeting on 6 July 1992 with the German Defence Minister.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The German Defence Minister visited me in London yesterday. Along with a range of other current topics, we discussed extensively the European fighter aircraft. It was clear that both countries need a new fighter aircraft by around the year 2000, both are looking for something at lower cost than the earlier projection for EFA, and both would like wide European participation.

Herr Rühe said that Germany would not proceed to produce EFA and would like to develop a completely new aircraft. I indicated that, given the investment of some £5 billion by the partners in EFA already, we believed that the best route to a cheaper aircraft was to drive down the costs of the existing design, as otherwise the taxpayers of each country would lose any benefit from the substantial sums already invested. The next step is to consider with the other EFA partners and with industry how we can best take the project forward. We do not face decisions on the production phase until next year.

Mr. Campbell: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's assurance that it is still his view that the United Kingdom will require a new fighter aircraft by the end of the century will be warmly received in all parts of the House. Can he assure the House that the Government will explore every possibility, with or without partners, to see that the United Kingdom embarks upon the production phase of the European fighter aircraft? Will he further assure the House that, if any reduction in cost is to be obtained, it will not be achieved at the expense of the inherent capability of the aircraft?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his words of support for the Government's efforts. It is of course our desire that we should continue as part of an effective partnership towards the production phase of this project. In trying to identify ways in which the cost can be reduced, already substantial cost savings have been identified. In addition, it is possible to develop EFA on the basis that each participating country could identify which particular components met its own military requirements. That would mean that significant savings would be available for the country in question.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that he has widespread support on both sides of the House for the way in which he has approached this unfortunate affair? Is it not a fact, following his conversations yesterday with the German Defence Minister, that the attitude of Germany is very much conditioned by constitutional restraint and internal political pressure, and that there is an unwillingness to recognise that, since the defence of western Europe relies upon the strength of the NATO alliance, if future threats, which could emanate from outside the traditional areas, are to be met, Germany, along with the NATO alliance, must be faced with the prospect of developing equipment which can face up to those new responsibilities?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend. Of course, we recognise that Germany's decision must be based on its own assessment of its military requirements. However, we pay attention to the fact that Germany continues to state that it will need a new fighter aircraft by the turn of the century, and we cannot see how a new aircraft for which no preliminary work would be taken into account could be anything but vastly more expensive than would developing EFA to the production stage.

We also think it appropriate to take into account the fact that, while we share with the German Government a welcome for the enormous changes that have taken place in Europe, and while we recognise the completely different situation that we face with regard to Russia, a decision taken this year or next year with regard to a new fighter aircraft must take into account all the uncertainties that might develop in Europe and throughout the rest of the world over the next 20 to 30 years. That is the kind of time-frame for which the new fighter aircraft will be required, and it is quite clear that at a time when it is impossible to predict what will happen in Moscow next week it would be very unwise to make assumptions as to what might happen over the next 30 years.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Has the Secretary of State had discussions with the President of the Board of Trade with regard to diversification plans for the employment of workers who will lose their jobs if the Government decide to pull out of the EFA project?

Mr. Rifkind: We have no plans to pull out of the EFA project, but the hon. Lady is right to make reference to the importance of the industrial implications of EFA. At the moment about 9,400 people are employed in work directly attributed to EFA, and at the peak of production the number will rise to about 27,000. I should emphasise that, so far as the Government are concerned, the primary consideration must be our defence requirements, and not the industrial implications, but obviously it is important that the House and the public should be aware of the industrial aspect as well.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I applaud my right hon. and learned Friend for the robust way in which he has endorsed the professional judgment not only of his own air staff but also of the air staffs of the partner nations, which only this spring declared that the European fighter aircraft was the aeroplane best suited to meeting the operational needs of their respective air forces way into the future.

I applaud my right hon. and learned Friend also for his clear view that this aeroplane represents the best investment for the United Kingdom's defence. Will he always see that that consideration is put first? There would be no point in buying any aeroplane that was inferior to those of potential adversaries. That would be the worst possible investment for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend. In our assessment we have been fortified by the views of the Select Committee of the House, which looked into the whole question of whether there were any alternatives to EFA that would represent better value for money, given the very substantial costs involved. The Select Committee unanimously concluded that EFA continues to represent

the best value for money and the best means of ensuring that the defence requirements of this country will be met for the next generation.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Does the Secretary of State accept that all of us hope that RAF pilots will not see active service in the first half of the next century? However, the Government are responsible for ensuring that if those pilots should see active service it would be in planes giving them a much better than evens chance of survival. I put it to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that it was for that reason that the Luftwaffe supported EFA, and it is for that reason that the British Government must reject an inferior spatchcock European alternative.

Mr. Rifkind: It is certainly our view that the only alternative to EFA capable of meeting our defence requirements would be significantly more expensive. Alternative aircraft would be based on much more primitive technology, and could not begin to compete with the existing Russian aircraft, which are used not only by the Russian air force but also by those countries, such as Iraq and Iran, to which they have already been sold.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that EFA would be the best value for money for Britain, for Germany and for Europe? Does he also agree that, while it is desirable to have the Germans on board for the production of EFA, it would not be essential?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend for the efforts that he has made, and his membership of the parliamentary delegation that visited Bonn. The Government's view is that the alternative approach recommended by Mr. Rühe should not commend itself in this country, in Germany or elsewhere. The smaller version of EFA proposed by Mr. Rühe would involve redesign of the EFA airframe, engine and installed equipment. The work done so far would largely be wasted and the development programme would have to start again. This could delay entry of the aircraft into service by up to eight years. The operational performance of the aircraft would inevitably be substantially inferior to EFA and the cost of changing our minds halfway through the existing project would add at least 20 per cent. to the price that we would all have to pay for the aircraft.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Is it not seriously irresponsible of the Government, knowing the difficulties with the EFA and the likelihood that Germany would drop out, not to prepare plans for diversification from an aeroplane that we now cannot afford to an aeroplane that can be used in civilian service? Would it not be better to scrap the EFA scheme and concentrate on civilian airliners, for which there is a real need but in the production of which we have been left sadly behind? We are now completely dependent on American technology, mostly Boeing aircraft. Is not that unsatisfactory? We have the skill and the ability: should not we use them for peace rather than for this doubtful project?

Mr. Rifkind: The first sign of a possible German withdrawal came only two or three months ago. It is a fitting comment on his perception of these matters that the hon. Gentleman believes that the best way to deal with the challenge from hostile fighter aircraft that we might face over the next 30 years is by developing civil airliners.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his robust stance on this matter, which has severe consequences for jobs not just in the north-west of England but throughout the country, and not just with British Aerospace but with hundreds of small firms. They wish him well and hope that he will achieve success.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to say that many thousands of people, not only in this country but in Germany, Spain and Italy, have an equally strong interest in the continuing project to which the House has given its support.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is not a critical factor the financial and technical resources of Italy? Before the House comes to a judgment, could we have more information about the attitude of the Italian Government and the Italian Departments of State to this matter?

Mr. Rifkind: I expect to have a meeting with my Italian and Spanish colleagues soon. It is clear that the Italian Government would like to see the project continue. They share with us a desire to see costs significantly reduced, and we shall be working towards achieving that objective.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Did my right hon. and learned Friend make it clear to the German Minister of Defence that Germany's decision to withdraw from this project seriously undermines Germany's credibility as a serious partner in pan-European collaborative projects of this kind?

Mr. Rifkind: While we do not dispute Germany's legal right to withdraw from involvement in the production phase, it is highly unfortunate and disturbing that, with a project that has been making good progress, that is on time and that is intended to produce an aircraft for which all the participating countries have a requirement, Germany should have decided to withdraw, especially when it is not clear to what alternative strategy it is committed.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Will the Secretary of State give us some more detail of what the German Minister of Defence said to him? I saw Volker Rühe, whom I know to be a realistic man and the one most likely to be the next Chancellor of Germany, interviewed on British television last night. He was dismissive of the British view, saying that we had not caught up with the debate in Europe. He said that Germany had wanted the plane to fight the Russians, but it was not going to fight the Russians any more. He said that the Germans were putting money into East Germany and Russia and that the plane was intended to fight a very advanced MiG. Instead of putting money into a plane to fight the MiG, the MiG can be purchased at a knock-down, bargain price at the moment——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question.

Mr. Leighton: Why should the money be wasted and not devoted to defence diversification? The EFA will not fly.

Mr. Rifkind: The German position is not that they want to buy Russian MiGs. Instead, they want to begin to design and develop a completely new aircraft. The hon. Gentleman must reflect on the fact that it has taken seven

[Mr. Rifkind]

years and £5 billion of expenditure to reach the present stage in respect of the development of EFA. It is simply not credible to believe that putting all that on one side and starting again would result in anything other than a massive increase in expenditure for the countries which might become involved.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Government face very difficult decisions and that the way ahead is by no means clear? Does he accept that the decision must be based on the defence need, because defence is far too important to be a job creation scheme? Will he undertake that the decisions, when they are taken, will be defence-led and not industry or employment-led?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, I can give that clear and unambiguous statement. While we are aware of the industrial implications, when one is dealing with a project which is enormously expensive and a significant burden on the taxpayer, it is crucial that we go forward with such a project only if, and for so long as, we are satisfied that it is necessary to ensure the defence needs of this country. It cannot possibly be justified that we should go forward purely for industrial reasons if the defence case was not and did not remain convincing.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I share the Secretary of State's hope that EFA will be constructed, because of the jobs that are affected in his constituency and in mine at GEC-Ferranti. As Volker Ruhe has said that the Luftwaffe will have to replace its aging Phantoms in the near future, does the Secretary of State believe that Germany is likely to end up buying EFA from Britain, Spain and Italy at a far higher price than it might have had to pay had it remained a participant in the project?

Mr. Rifkind: That is certainly a consequence that cannot be excluded. It was clear from my discussions with the German Minister that the Germans have at the moment no clear idea where they would acquire the aircraft they need. Therefore, if EFA continues without German participation, the Germans acknowledge that they will need a new fighter aircraft and EFA may well become the most attractive option for them, but a more expensive one than if they had not withdrawn from the project.

I must point out that Germany has made it clear that it will continue to pay any outstanding sums due with regard to its commitment to participate in the development project. That means that, even if Germany withdraws from involvement in production, there is a further £1 billion which Germany is committed to investing in the on-going development project for EFA. That is an additional reason why I hope that the German Government will give some further thought to whether it is in the interests of their taxpayers to withdraw from the project.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his staunch championship of the European fighter aircraft will be warmly welcomed by the Royal Air Force, and particularly by the pilots who will be flying that equipment beyond the year 2000? Is it not clear that the House must never let down the very few who man our front-line defences by allowing them to enter future battles—should there be any—with second-rate equipment? Furthermore, Europe needs a military fighter aircraft programme. Buying off the shelf from the United States might be a solution in the short term, but in the longer term it would cost us very dear.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. However, the evidence available at the moment suggests that, even in the short term, buying from the United States would be a more and not less expensive option. I agree with my hon. Friend that, if we expect our fighter pilots to be in combat against enemy aircraft, the least we can do to assist them is ensure that the aircraft in which they fly are at least as sophisticated as those of any enemy that they are likely to face.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Is the Government's support for the European fighter aircraft dependent on the continued involvement of the Spanish and Italian Governments? If those Governments should withdraw their support, what would the Government's view then be? Does the Secretary of State agree that, in the longest recession for 60 years, it is unthinkable that 40,000 defence workers should be thrown on to the dole? Does he agree also that, in the long run, the Government must develop a defence diversification strategy?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not believe that it is the Government's responsibility to tell individual companies that they should diversify into other forms of activity. Many have done so or are doing so. Each company is in the best position to judge what is in its interests. However, I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important and desirable to seek a conclusion that enables those countries which are part of the EFA project to continue in the collaboration and thereby ensure that we have the fighter aircraft and maintain industrial capability.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that there have been too many instances in this nation's military history that have enabled us to judge the importance of air defence and to appreciate the need to have an aircraft of what I would describe as "top gun" capability? Will he confirm that EFA has such a capability? That means that it is able to take out any other aircraft pitted against it at present—perhaps not the F22 of the United States, but that aircraft is not yet flying. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, in a quest for the cheaper version of EFA, that capability will not be sacrificed?

Mr. Rifkind: I can confirm what my hon. Friend asks. Perhaps the attitude of the House, unlike that of our German colleagues, is influenced by the fact that twice in the past 10 years the Royal Air Force has had to fly in combat and therefore has had to rely on the sophistication and quality of its aircraft in combat. That is a factor that none of us would wish to forget.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): The whole House will agree that we do not want our pilots to go to war or into the air in anything but the most effective aircraft available to us, and at the moment EFA is that only option. Does the Secretary of State agree that the significance of EFA to our aerospace industries is greater than that of any of our partners? Does he accept that the narrowness of our industrial base is such that, unlike Germany, we cannot afford to lose the competitive technological edge which EFA represents?

Does the Secretary of State accept that the future of our aerospace industries depends to a large extent on revenue raised by the project and that the Government's refusal to fund diversification means that our aerospace industries would need EFA-generated profits to move into non-military civilian activity? Does the Secretary of State agree that the replacement of aging aircraft with anything but that cost-effective European collaborative project will leave us at the mercy of American suppliers?

Mr. Rifkind: The project certainly is of importance to the British aerospace industry, but it is quite clear from their public statements that German and Spanish industries—I have no doubt Italian industries also—attach equal importance to the continuation of the project. There is not a uniform view in Germany. A number of people and indeed the industry itself have made it quite clear that they believe that the current German proposal would be extremely damaging to their own industrial capacity. That is something which should be borne in mind.

BILLS PRESENTED

Homicide (Defence of Provocation)

Mr. Harry Cohen, supported by Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Mr. Bruce Grocott, Ms. Glenda Jackson, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Mr. David Knox, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Ms. Jo Richardson and Mr. Nicholas Winterton, presented a Bill to amend the Homicide Act 1957 in respect of the defence of provocation: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 13 November and to be printed. [Bill 53.]

Firearms (Amendment)

Mr. Bob Cryer, supported by Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Bill Michie, Mr. Max Madden and Mr. Harry Cohen, presented a Bill to amend the Firearms Act 1982 to include blank-firing replica firearms and detailed replica firearms and to render their sale or carrying uncovered in a public place illegal: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 4 December and to be printed. [Bill 55.]

Hospital Security

3.53 pm

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require persons responsible for hospitals to maintain prescribed standards of security; and for connected purposes.

The Bill is an attempt to deal with the growing and disturbing trend of violence within our nation's hospitals.

On 24 May, a constituent, Mr. Graeme Woodhatch, while a patient at the Royal Free hospital in Hampstead and Highgate, was murdered by being shot by a yet unknown assailant. Five hours earlier, in an entirely separate and unconnected incident, a nurse in the accident and emergency department of the same hospital was assaulted. A week later, another nurse in yet another London hospital, St. Thomas's, was knocked unconscious and slashed with a knife. On the very same day, an attempted rape took place at Guy's hospital. Six days later, the abduction of a newborn baby was foiled only by the prompt action of a porter at the Withington hospital in Manchester, who scared off two intruders.

The incidents would be terrible wherever they were committed, but they adopt a particularly awful dimension when they are committed in places and against people dedicated to saving life and restoring health, and where the recipients of that care are so especially vulnerable. It is equally terrible that the incidents are by no means new or isolated. In 1986, anxiety about the increasing number of violent attacks suffered by the staff of the then Department of Health and Social Security prompted the convening of the Westminster conference, which in turn gave rise to the Committee on Violence to Staff within the DHSS. The committee, chaired by Lord Skelmersdale, published its findings in 1988. Several recommendations were made: better staff training, installation of video cameras and centralised recording of incidents.

Most significantly, Lord Skelmersdale commented:

"Violence must merit a new and high priority, and the provision of extra resources from the centre. Provision of a safe workplace is not seen as an accessory but part of the bedrock of service provision. Ignoring this can, if it becomes significantly serious, lead to an inability to maintain that service."

As I have stated, that report was published five years ago, but the problems of violence which it underlined have by no means diminished.

The centralised recording of incidents for which Lord Skelmersdale called is still not in place. Indeed, a report by Dr. Colin MacKay of the Health and Safety Executive revealed that, in one year, in just five health authorities across Britain, almost 2,700 nurses and more than 200 hospital doctors had been attacked or injured and 650 ambulance personnel had been assaulted. Even more disturbing, it has been estimated that only one out of every 20 such incidents was reported.

This state of affairs simply cannot be allowed to continue. For years, concerned groups and individuals have called for action to combat the growing wave of violence. The Confederation of Health Service Employees, the National Union of Public Employees, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives, and the Police Federation have all communicated their concern that violence in our

[Ms. Glenda Jackson]

hospitals is reaching unacceptable levels. Right hon. and hon. Members in this House and in another place have often voiced their concerns.

It is time that those concerns were finally and properly addressed. It is time that we faced up to the challenge of making our hospitals secure. My Bill proposes a statutory body specifically charged with taking up that challenge. Such a body would have as its task the administration and monitoring of adequate and comprehensive security arrangements within our hospitals. It would be similar in structure and function to the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive. It would comprise representatives of the hospitals, the security sector and local health authorities. It would be independent of the Department of Health but would report and submit recommendations to the Secretary of State.

The body would have as its primary aim the setting of a national framework within which could be co-ordinated a comprehensive strategy for combating crime, whether against property, patients or staff. It would ensure that such a strategy was consistently updated and maintained. Obviously, many security arrangements are best made at a local level. Hospital managers are undoubtedly best placed to recognise their security needs and solutions. They must have the support of national guidelines to which they can refer. At present, 48 per cent. of hospitals give no security training to any members of their staff.

The body that I propose would ensure that training for all staff is compulsory, and is effectively and regularly updated. Prevention is by far the best cure. Training staff to predict and recognise dangerous situations would go a long way to ensuring that they do not escalate. At present, safety improvements are implemented in a haphazard manner, as and when resources allow. The body that I propose would be charged with identifying problem areas, formulating solutions and ensuring that the resources required for those solutions are made available.

It is time for Lord Skelmersdale's recommendations to be fully taken on board. Where there is need, resources must be provided. Hospitals can no longer be forced to choose between employing security staff or buying incubators. The body that I propose would also be charged with the vital task of recording and collecting centrally information on the scale, nature and number of incidents that occur.

Apart from the incalculable human costs, conservative estimates put the annual financial loss to the health service through crime at about £600 million. That is equivalent to six new hospitals every year lost through crime. It is clearly unacceptable for a problem of that scale not even to be centrally recorded. The recording of crime must be one of the first steps taken in any battle to conquer it.

I recognise that the growing menace of crime in our hospitals is not a problem that can be easily solved; nor would I wish our hospitals to become fortresses. A relaxed and open hospital environment is by far the best for rapid and effective treatment and recovery. But neither can we ignore the fact that every day, in virtually every part of the country, crime and violence are already blighting that environment.

When nurses fear to walk down hospital corridors because of the possibility of attack, and when patients are subjected to violence when they should be receiving care, we fail to keep faith with the most hallowed tenets of our health service and with the dedicated people who continue to work within it. To quote Lord Skelmersdale once more:

"A safe work place is not an accessory to the health service but a bedrock."

It is time for that bedrock to be built. It is time for action to be taken to protect our hospitals, those who work in them and those who depend on them. I therefore commend my Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms. Glenda Jackson, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Ms. Ann Coffey, Ms. Jean Corston, Ms. Angela Eagle, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Dr. Lynne Jones, Ms. Tessa Jowell, Mrs. Jane Kennedy, Ms. Estelle Morris, Mrs. Bridget Prentice and Mrs. Barbara Roche.

Hospital Security

Ms. Glenda Jackson accordingly presented a Bill to require persons responsible for hospitals to maintain prescribed standards of security; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 4 December and to be printed. [Bill 55.]

WAYS AND MEANS

Value added tax (inquiries)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 38A of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 and section 20 of the Finance Act 1985.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

Not amended in the Committee and as amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

VAT: TIME FOR RAISING AND ANSWERING INQUIRIES

'.—(1) In section 20 of the Finance Act 1985 (repayment supplement in respect of certain delayed payments or refunds) after subsection (3) there shall be inserted—

"(3A) In determining for the purposes of regulations under subsection (3) above whether any period is referable to the raising and answering of such an inquiry as is mentioned in that subsection, there shall be taken to be so referable any period which—

(a) begins with the date on which the Commissioners first consider it necessary to make such an inquiry, and

(b) ends with the date on which the Commissioners—

(i) satisfy themselves that they have received a complete answer to the inquiry, or

(ii) determine not to make the inquiry or, if they have made it, not to pursue it further,

but excluding so much of that period as may be prescribed; and it is immaterial whether any inquiry is in fact made or whether it is or might have been made of the person or body making the requisite return or claim or of an authorised person or of some other person."

(2) In section 38A of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 (interest in certain cases of official error) after subsection (8) there shall be inserted—

"(8A) In determining for the purposes of subsection (8) above whether any period is referable to the raising and answering of such an inquiry as is there mentioned, there shall be taken to be so referable any period which—

(a) begins with the date on which the Commissioners first consider it necessary to make such an inquiry, and

(b) ends with the date on which the Commissioners—

(i) satisfy themselves that they have received a complete answer to the inquiry, or

(ii) determine not to make the inquiry or, if they have made it, not to pursue it further,

but excluding so much of that period as may be prescribed; and it is immaterial whether any inquiry is in fact made or whether it is or might have been made of the person referred to in subsection (1) above or of an authorised person or of some other person."

(3) Subsection (1) above shall apply where the requisite return or claim is received after the day on which this Act is passed.

(4) Subsection (2) above shall apply where the claim is received after the day on which this Act is passed.'.—*[Sir John Cope.]*

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: (a), in line 7, after 'Commissioners', insert

', intending to act, with no unreasonable delay,'.

(b), in line 9, after 'Commissioners', insert

', acting with no unreasonable delay,'.

(c), in line 23, after 'Commissioners', insert

', intending to act with no unreasonable delay,'.

(d), in line 25, after 'Commissioners', insert

', acting with no unreasonable delay,'.

4.5 pm

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): Following the Keith report, the Finance Act 1985 brought in a package of measures that were aimed mainly at improving compliance by taxpayers registered for VAT in furnishing their returns and payments. It also introduced the so-called "repayment supplement". Under that provision, Customs pays a surcharge if, in a normal case, it takes more than 30 days to process a claim for repayment of VAT.

The period of 30 days was considered appropriate for Customs normally to process and pay such claims. The period would count from the date of receipt of the claim by Customs until the date on which payment was authorised. Where that exceeded 30 days, a supplement of 5 per cent. of the value of the claim, or £30, whichever was greater, would be and has been paid from that time.

However, it was also recognised that it was necessary for Customs to have time to undertake other activities during that period, such as making verification inquiries and correcting errors. Where those inquiries were genuinely pursued by Customs, provision was made in section 20(3) of the Finance Act to provide for such periods to be left out of account in reckoning the net qualifying period of 30 days, and therefore deciding whether to pay a repayment supplement. In effect, the clock stops while Customs is making important inquiries to verify the claim.

Customs has operated on that basis since the repayment supplement regime took effect in October 1986. However, a recent VAT tribunal case, which later turned into a High Court case—the Commissioners of Customs and Excise *v.* L. Rowland and Company (Retail) Ltd.—has shown that the law as it stands allows Customs to leave out of account only the period from when the query is raised with the claimant until the claimant provides an answer to Customs. The time taken for Customs to consider whether to raise a query with the claimant and the time taken for Customs to consider the answer to that query are not to be allowed within the 30 days.

The original intention of the repayment supplement was to exert pressure on Customs to improve its efficiency. It was not intended to bring about a reduction of Customs' necessary efforts to protect the Revenue and taxpayers' interests at large, as opposed to the specific taxpayer's interests in the claim. That would be contrary to its responsibilities for the care and management of the tax.

When Lord Keith originally produced his report, it was suggested that there should be an overall period of 60 days rather than 30 days, to embrace all functions. However, when those proposals were exposed for public consultation, queries were raised and the Government then considered that 30 days, exclusive of the time for reasonable inquiries, would be fairer for claimants, and that is how the law was written. At least, that is how it was intended to be written.

As I said, the recent case of Rowland and Company has decided that that is not how the law was written. The purpose of the new clause is to make the law clear, as the Government and, I assume, Parliament at the time intended and as it has been operated by Customs in the intervening period. It will give Customs the essential freedom to look into claims for the repayment of VAT before they are paid, to prevent the losses of tax to the detriment of taxpayers generally.

[Sir John Cope]

The House will be aware that the whole structure of VAT, particularly the fact that we have a zero rate on a wide range of items, means that repayment is a large feature of VAT. Many traders never actually pay VAT. They are registered for it and they receive repayments each month because essentially they are in a zero-rated business.

Customs receives and processes almost 2·5 million claims for VAT repayment each year, with an overall value of some £23 billion in tax. The repayment of tax is therefore an important matter; hence the importance of the repayment supplement. More than 90 per cent. of the claims are authorised for payment within 10 days of their receipt at the VAT central unit in Southend, which handles the administration for Customs and Excise. That reflects both an efficient system and a high desire to act promptly in the interests of claimants.

Less than 2 per cent. of all claims need further inquiries before verification of repayment, and that is when the clock stops for a time during the 30-day period. Those are the claims which carry the greatest potential risk to the Revenue, which is why it inquires into them—and it is the inquiry time referrable to those cases for which the amendment seeks to provide.

At the same time, we were anxious to ensure that, while there is the necessary protection for the Revenue, the individual claimants and taxpayers should be in a fair position vis-a-vis Customs and Excise. Apart from the new clause, Customs and Excise is producing a code of conduct relating to its processing of claims for repayment. It will say how claims are received and dealt with and the points at which the repayment supplement clock stops and starts.

In particular, the code will describe how, on stopping the clock while verification inquiries are under way, due regard is given to any unreasonable delay that might occur. It will also make more visible the safeguards that are built into the system to ensure that such time will count against Customs and towards the 30 days that would qualify a claimant for repayment supplement.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): If 30 days must be defined more generously to give Customs reasonable time to deal with these matters, is not seven days a little unreasonable for everybody involved to digest the new clause and to determine whether it will work satisfactorily?

Sir John Cope: I agree, but I shall return to that point.

Apart from the code of conduct—this is relevant to the right hon. Gentleman's point—Customs and Excise is already undertaking a review of the repayment supplement regime to determine whether changes should be recommended in addition to the introduction of the new clause. As before, there will be a full consultative process, starting, I hope, in September or October, at a similar time to the production of the code of conduct, with the aim of reaching conclusions before the end of the year. Customs will also be seeking time further to strengthen its procedures.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): As there has not been an opportunity for consultation on the new clause, is my right hon. Friend prepared to consider consultation on the code of practice when it is published? If there are helpful suggestions from those interested in these matters, they might then be taken into account in a way that they cannot be in the consideration of the new clause.

Sir John Cope: Yes, Customs will discuss the draft code of practice with those with whom it is in touch, but initially there will not be public consultation. The idea is to publish the code of practice as soon as possible, together with the review, so that both can be considered together. If necessary, the code can be modified subsequently.

As both the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and my hon. Friend have said, we tabled new clause 1 quickly, in response to the High Court case. That was important, because substantial repayments are involved. It is also right, however, to proceed with the code of conduct and the review, to give an opportunity for further comment.

4.15 pm

The new clause continues the existing practice into the future. We must also consider whether we ought to seek to give the new clause retrospective effect, so that the procedure followed by Customs and Excise since 1986, when the repayment supplement was introduced, can be retrospectively endorsed. We decided not to do that, because it would be inappropriate. Instead, we are accepting the High Court's interpretation of the law in respect of retrospective claims and claims made up to the date that the Bill receives Royal Assent in a few days' time.

The recent High Court judgment will be applied retrospectively. Customs and Excise will publicise the conditions that must be met to qualify for the new repayment supplement under the new interpretation, and will invite traders to apply for such repayments. Claims will have to be considered right back to the days when the supplement was first introduced, in 1986. That is a considerable administrative task that will take some time to complete, but it is right that it should be undertaken.

There will be some cases which have not come to full effect in the tribunal or the courts, as the Rowland case has, but which are nevertheless pending. They are easy to spot and to deal with. There will be other cases that Customs does not know about, where we shall have to rely on traders to submit claims. We will publicise as much as possible the opportunity to make claims under the new provision, so that we can put right any payments and bring them in line with the High Court's interpretation.

I hope that the House agrees, given the large sums of money involved, that we are right to move quickly, and not retrospectively to appeal against the High Court judgment of the law as it was first formulated in 1985. I commend new clause 1 to the House.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I sympathise with the plight of the Paymaster General, in that an unfavourable judgment was made against him, and there is perhaps a case for acting quickly to put matters right—especially as the Finance Bill is before the House. Among the representations I received, however, is one from the Institute of Directors. I will quote from a letter dated 7 July that it sent to the Paymaster General:

> "Indeed, when the New Clause was drawn to the attention of the Joint VAT Consultative Committee yesterday afternoon, Customs were unable to comment on the grave concern raised immediately by the business and professional representatives, because they said that they could not pre-empt your statement"—

that is, the Paymaster General's statement—

"in the House".

As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) implied, time has not been allowed for debate and careful consideration.

Although there has been a problem as a result of the recent court case, the Opposition believe that the new clause swings the balance very far in the direction of Customs and Excise and that Customs and Excise will be able to decide almost as it wishes when the clock will stop and when it will start ticking again.

The Opposition raised the issue in a previous debate on 16 May 1991 in Standing Committee B. During our deliberations on clause 16, entitled "Interest of Overpayments etc.", I said:

"I do not say that Customs and Excise would deliberately take weeks or months over an investigation, but this is not a perfect world. No interest would be paid while an investigation was in hand. There should be a clear provision as to the date from which interest should be paid. If Customs and Excise has received money from a taxpayer which earns interest in a bank, why should that interest be kept if there was an error?"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 16 May 1991; c. 67.]

During the passage of the Finance Bill in 1985, Mr. Barney Hayhoe, who I think was the then Financial Secretary, said during a debate on clause 20:

"if we get it wrong one year, and experience shows that changes are needed, we can seek to put it right the following year. Indeed, large chunks of each year's Finance Bill put right the mistakes or errors of judgment of our predecessors."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 21 May 1985; c. 185.]

If so, this is a considerable error and misjudgment, because it will cost about £100 million or £150 million for the past six years. The new clause should be got right in the first instance. I do not pretend that the Opposition's amendments (a) to (d) would put it right, but they would redress the balance which favours the Customs and Excise should the clause be passed unamended. They would impose a requirement on Customs and Excise not to act with unreasonable delay. It would have to be expeditious and not say that it might want to institute an inquiry so the clock should be stopped. It does not even have to tell the person into whose accounts it is inquiring whether it has stopped the clock.

Under the new clause, the Government are aggregating to themselves all the power to be master and disposer of the issue. The Opposition believe that that is wrong and that the customer, client or person who pays value added tax should know that his or her affairs were to be run properly, that any investigation would be undertaken expeditiously and that there would be no unreasonable delay.

There are other issues which should be explored, but I want to be expeditious myself. If there is not to be 30-day statutory period, why should it not be 40 or 50 days? The subject should be discussed with the various interests involved. There should be a review and a right of appeal, but the new clause makes no such provision. We cannot discuss all the issues on Report, but they should be discussed with the interests involved.

I accept that it is not of the Government's making that the court case happened so recently, but because it did happen so recently, the issues have not been discussed with the appropriate interests. Perhaps it would be best for the Government to withdraw the new clause, and bring back later an agreed statutory instrument, if that is possible. As it is, they will have to pay claims for five years. If the Government were to withdraw the new clause, and if there were general agreement between the industry and the Government, the Opposition would expedite the progress of any legislation which would have to be introduced.

However, that is unlikely to happen, and the Opposition believe strongly that, if accepted, amendments (a) to (d) would go some way towards redressing the balance which undoubtedly needs to be redressed in favour of the consumer, customer or person who pays VAT.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I can best put the clause in context by contrasting it with what would be the position the other way round. If I, as a VAT payer, was due to pay some VAT and informed Customs and Excise that I was doubtful about the amount, or indeed about the legality, of my liability and I therefore wished to stop the clock for an indeterminate period while I investigated whether there was a liability, I can imagine the size of the raspberry that I would get from Customs and Excise.

There has always been a disparity between the right of the taxpayer to receive compensation for the fact that his money is being held by the Treasury, and the duty of the Treasury to compensate the taxpayer for the fact that his money is being held. That disparity is being strengthened, and even made wider, by the clause.

The Paymaster General referred to substantial sums at stake in the clause. I hope that he will be more specific. We are not talking about the overall cost of repayment supplement in relation to VAT overpayments. We are talking about the cost of repayment supplement which is currently payable because Customs and Excise has not made inquiries and has delayed matters beyond 30 days. In all other cases, the clause will not affect the issue. How much does my right hon. Friend believe will be saved by rushing through the clause, when the process of consultation which he is proposing, and which is welcome, for the latter part of the year would enable a fairer and less disputed clause to be introduced?

My right hon. Friend referred to a recent legal case as being the occasion for the clause. It is fair to point to tribunal decisions which were reported last year and which should have given an indication of the need for further legislation. I refer my right hon. Friend in particular to the decision concerning Anthony Albert Aston under the reference MAN/90/499 in *VAT Tribunal Decisions*. In that case, a claim was made by Customs and Excise that it should not have to pay repayment supplement because it had spent some months investigating whether it had ordered a cheque to be issued. Rightly, that claim was objected to by the tribunal. May we be assured that the new clause, and code of conduct resulting from it, would not give rise to the denial of repayment supplement in a case such as that?

The review of the working of the clause will be welcome. After all, as the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said, in a minority of cases it will be open to Customs and Excise to be judge and jury in its own cause. I hope that, as part of the review, an option to be considered will be a return to the Keith recommendation of an absolute time limit—of 60 days or what other time may be considered appropriate—within which no repayment supplement will be paid and after which repayment supplement will automatically be paid. By that means, the taxpayer will at least know where he stands.

Mr. Beith: We are faced with a paradox. The provisions that we are discussing relate to Customs and Excise taking too long to deal with complaints from taxpayers and needing the capacity to adjust the start and stop of the 30-day period to avoid being landed with repayments. Yet that part of Customs and Excise concerned with the introduction of legislation can work to a far stricter timetable. Indeed, there does not appear to be any time limit on that. Within 20 days of the High Court decision, it saw to it that a new clause was slapped on the Order Paper, and seven days later we are debating it. That is well within the 30-day limit. Perhaps that section of Customs and Excise could transfer some staff to the department that deals with VAT payers' inquiries. That would ensure that they were all dealt with within 30 days, and the clause would not be needed.

We are witnessing an incredible amount of haste. That haste is justified by the Paymaster General on the basis that tremendous sums of money are involved. But our understanding, from Customs and Excise information, is that the vast majority of cases are considered within 10, not 30, days. Surely only a small minority of VAT cases will risk falling foul of the procedure if the new clause is not accepted.

As was pointed out by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), various bodies, including the Institute of Directors, are extremely concerned about the way in which the matter has been handled. The institute writes:

"We can understand that Customs should find the decision in the Rowland case unpalatable, but we regard it as totally unacceptable that the Government should table a New Clause . . . on the 1 July Order Paper a mere 20 days after the High Court decision and without any kind of prior warning for the Report Stage debate today 7 July. This is exactly the sort of practical matter which does not involve large sums of revenue but which requires detailed consultation with the representative bodies of taxpayers and their professional advisers."

4.30 pm

The Law Society has made similarly strong representations. In the society's opinion, the proposed new legislation will render it unlikely, in most cases in which Parliament thinks it appropriate for Customs and Excise to pay repayment supplement or interest, that that supplement or interest will be paid. That is partly because it would always be open to Customs and Excise to claim that, in its opinion, an inquiry was necessary, even if it subsequently changed its view and decided not to make any inquiry into the claim. Another reason is the fact that, although a taxpayer may have provided complete and satisfactory answers, time will start running only once the commissioners have satisfied themselves that they have received a complete answer to the inquiry. The inquiry may have to be taken all the way up the line to headquarters; all kinds of factors may have caused problems.

Many people who deal with such matters on a day-to-day basis feel that the new clause is not urgently needed. They believe that it will cause severe difficulties, and that it may well defeat Parliament's intention of providing restitution for the taxpayer in cases that have involved unnecessary delay. The Paymaster General tried to offer a way out by telling us that a code of conduct was being produced, but I gather that even that will not be subject to consultation initially, so that it can be implemented quickly.

The fact that the code of practice is being produced at the same time as the review implies that, once the review begins, the code of conduct already brought in will fall to be considered along with the new clause as a whole. That is a rather backwards way of dealing with the matter, and I do not think that the Paymaster General has convinced us that the present scale of risk to the Revenue justifies such proceedings.

Sir John Cope: Both the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to the letter from the Institute of Directors, which mentioned the speed with which the new clause had been tabled. I gave the reasons for that earlier.

Let me reassure the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed that I did not table the new clause in a half-hearted way. I consider it an important measure: some £30 million a year would be involved without it. At yesterday's meeting with the Institute of Directors and others, Customs and Excise found themselves in a slight difficulty. They had a good idea of what I was likely to say today—particularly about the code of conduct and the review, which we have been discussing ever since the High Court case. Indeed, we had discussed our possible course of action to some extent before the completion of that case. We were able to move as quickly as we did partly because of contingency planning. I hope that the House will consider that wise, in the circumstances.

The Customs and Excise officials were unwilling yesterday to pre-empt what I would tell the House. The House has a right to know things, and sometimes becomes rather upset if they are leaked rather than presented to it first. It is a difficult balance to achieve immediately before a ministerial statement, although in many cases we are keen to consult widely, and usually do so.

Dr. Marek: I understand that, but can the Minister say something about the review and whether he will try to reach an agreement with the industry and the interests involved about how Customs and Excise will stop and start the clock? If he could assure the House that the review would take these matters into consideration in order to arrive at least at an unofficial method of procedure to be followed by Customs and Excise that was satisfactory to the interests involved, it would go a long way towards helping hon. Members on this side of the House and, I suspect, a lot of Conservative Members.

Sir John Cope: Yes. I mentioned earlier that claims are initially sent to the VAT central unit in Southend. During the initial checking process, some of the claims—about 2 per cent.—are selected for further inquiries. The rest have a smoother passage. If the VAT central unit decides to make further inquiries, they may be inquiries either with the local VAT office—that is, local to wherever the trader happens to be—or with the Customs and Excise investigation branch or an outside agency. It is at that point that the clock stops. It is when the points that have been raised that cause the clock to stop in that way have been cleared up that the clock restarts.

A number of hon. Members have suggested that there is no way in which Customs and Excise is accountable for its management of this system. From time to time it has to justify to the VAT tribunal, to Members of Parliament and, through Members of Parliament, to the parliamentary commissioner its actions in this respect. Customs and Excise is, therefore, subject to the checks that I have just mentioned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) is concerned about the disparity between the taxpayer and Customs and Excise. If the taxpayer has reasonable excuse which Customs accepts, the clock stops for the taxpayer, too. My hon. Friend asked whether there should instead by an absolute timetable of 60 days or another period, as was originally suggested by the Keith committee. That is one option. Nevertheless, if we can arrive at a code of conduct and if the results of the review are satisfactory to most people who are involved, I think that the 30-day period, plus a clock-stopping system that is generally acceptable, is the best approach. That is the way that I should prefer to approach it, if possible. I accept, however, that it may not be easy to achieve.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed criticised the order of events. I accept his criticism in some respects. I refer to the timing of the Finance Bill relative to the timing of the High Court case. We thought that the High Court case would not be heard until the autumn, but, somehow or other, the High Court succeeded in clearing its in-tray faster than it normally does and got round to it. It seemed to me that it would be wrong not to use the opportunity that that presented in the interests of taxpayers at large—that is to say, of revenue to the Government.

The code of conduct will to some extent be an interim one while the review takes place. I have no doubt that we shall want to refine it in some ways, or certainly consider doing so, during the review process.

I have some information on the tribunal case to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West referred. That case had to do with the actual date of payment; it was not a reasonable time inquiry. The case was not appealed by Customs and Excise, which might have to consider appealing if there were another similar case. But I do not think that it is on all fours with the case with which we are dealing in this new clause.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West also asked about the cost. The cost would be about £30 million a year if we did not pass the new clause.

Incidentally, the Institute of Directors also drew attention to the fact that the clause inserts into the Finance Acts similar provisions about the stopping of the clock in interest cases. That is dealt with in the second part of the clause. These cases are related to official error. It is, of course, a much smaller matter, because it is a question of interest at an annual rate for a few days while the clock is stopped. However, I think that it is sensible to keep the wording of the two parts of the Finance Acts in line with one another, and that is why we have introduced the second part of the new clause, which I commend to the House.

Dr. Marek: I listened with interest to the Paymaster General who made some encouraging noises to the effect that there will be a review and a code of conduct. I know that he will carry out that review to the best of his ability and I hope that he will try to reach agreement with the interests involved. It is a matter which we can come to again on next year's Finance Bill; there is no problem about that. We will have to keep an eye on it.

I had intended to ask my hon. Friends to support me in the Division Lobby, because we believe that there is an important principle at stake here, but I think that we should be charitable to the new clause. We shall wait and see what happens, reserving our right to come back to the matter on the Finance Bill in a year's time; and we shall not press our amendments to a Division.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 2

INHERITANCE TAX AND ACCESS

'The following section shall be inserted after section 230 (acceptance of property in satisfaction of tax) of the Inheritance Tax Act 1984—

"230A.—(1) The provisions listed in subsections (2) and (3) below shall not apply unless the conditions set out in subsection (4) below are met.

(2) The provisions referred to in subsection (1) above comprise the following sections of this Act—

(a) section 230 (acceptance of property in satisfaction of tax)

(b) section 231 (powers to transfer property in satisfaction).

(3) The provisions referred to in subsection (1) above also comprise section 26A (potentially exempt transfer of property subsequently held for national purposes, etc.) of this Act if any transfer is an exempt transfer under section 26A only by virtue of the phrase '(b) has been disposed of in pursuance of section 230 below'.

(4) The conditions referred to in subsection (1) above are that any property that would, apart from this section, be dealt with under the provisions listed in subsections (2) and (3) above must

(a) if consisting of property other than land, be available for public viewing free of charge at regular intervals and for periods of reasonable duration throughout the whole of the year;

(b) if consisting of land, be available for reasonable public access free of charge on clearly defined access routes or rights of way throughout the whole year.

(5) Without prejudice to the generality of the words in subsection (4) above, property other than land shall not be regarded as available for public viewing at regular intervals and periods of reasonable duration throughout the whole year unless these periods total at least 52 days in each and every continuous twelve month period, commencing the first twelve month period for these purposes no later than a date fifteen months after the date of the Board first accepting property in satisfaction of tax in anticipation that the conditions referred to in subsection (4) above will be met.

(6) Property shall not be regarded as meeting the conditions set out in subsection (4) above unless full details of the public access are readily available, and the Board is empowered by this subsection to set out such criteria as it sees fit for this test to be met.

(7) This section shall apply in relation to all acceptance and transfers of property after 30th June 1992.".'.—*[Mr. Chris Smith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause deals with what are known as conditionally exempt transfers. They represent a procedure under the Inheritance Tax Act 1984, which originated in the Finance Act 1976, where relief, originally from capital transfer tax but subsequently from inheritance tax, is given where works of art or areas of land of special quality remain in the ownership of the original owners in return for their agreeing to maintain the land properly and provide public access to either the land or the works of art.

[Mr. Chris Smith]

Substantial sums of money are involved. In relation to land, the latest information that we have been able to obtain from the Treasury is that there has been a total of 149 cases since 1983 of access agreements over land being made to escape inheritance tax or capital transfer tax, and that the cost to the Exchequer has been between £5 million and £10 million in each year. So we are talking about something like £100 million in a 10-year period.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Can my hon. Friend give one or two examples of where this has occurred throughout the country? These figures sound impressive and I should like to know where I can walk now, as a result of this measure, where I could not walk before.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend, who is well known in the House for his support for the work of the Ramblers Association and for issues of access to the countryside, puts his finger precisely on the problem.

We know of one specific instance, which has been publicised, and I will come to that in a moment. But, apart from that, there is no public information about where the access has been provided. Indeed, in the parliamentary answer that I obtained from the Treasury on 2 June, which told me that there had been 149 cases of access granted and that this had cost £5 million to £10 million a year over the 10-year period, when I asked as part of my question where this access had been made available, the answer from the Financial Secretary was:

"I regret that statistics of new public footpaths and permissive paths, or of land over which there is a right to roam, resulting from conditional exemption are not available."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1992; Vol. 208, c. *399*.]

We are talking about public money forgone—£100 million over a 10-year period—yet, even from the Treasury, which has granted the relief from inheritance tax, or from any other Government Department, information about where the public access is available is simply not available.

4.45 pm

The situation with regard to works of art is similar, although the amounts of money involved are even greater. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) has been pressing this matter for some time. He was told, in a parliamentary answer just a few days ago, that the average amount of inheritance tax relief in return for supposed access to works of art has been £70 million per year over the past 10 years.

In all, therefore, we are facing expenditure from the public purse, effectively, of some £800 million over 10 years, in return for supposed access to areas of landscape quality and superlative works of art.

I have no objection to the principle of relieving inheritance tax in return for gaining public access to important parts of our countryside and important works of art, but the additional access that is given in return for inheritance tax relief must be clearly available and information about it must be readily to hand.

I believe that even the Economic Secretary realises this, because, in Committee a week or two ago, in the debate on some of the changes to inheritance tax which the Government are bringing in in rejecting our argument that the Government were being foolish with regard to areas of high-quality landscape, in going for 100 per cent. agricultural inheritance tax relief, thereby skirting round the present system of 50 per cent. tax relief with the possibility of 100 per cent. relief in return for conditions, the Economic Secretary said:

"It is a more profitable line of inquiry to consider whether conditional exemption agreements are working properly in relation to signposting and so on than it is to explore whether sufficient land is being entered into such arrangements." *[Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 30 June 1992; c. 419.]

Those are the words of the Economic Secretary himself.

It seems to us that the agreements are not working properly. Our new clause seeks to set very clearly on the statute book the requirement that agreements must work properly if inheritance tax relief is to be gained. The new clause provides that information about the rights of access that exist must be made readily available to the public, and it requires that access be free of charge. In relation to land it requires that access must be available throughout the year, and in relation to works of art it requires that reasonable access must be available at least 52 days in every year, on a regular basis such as a day a week.

I want to discuss access to land. Perhaps I should own up to a keen personal interest, as I have roamed the wild and remote parts of our country and hope to be able to do so for many years to come. Public access to land is extremely important. If access is available to the public but no one knows where it is, what is the purpose in having it? There is only one publicly documented case, to which I shall refer in detail in a moment. For the past few years details are supposed to have been lodged with the Central Council of Physical Recreation. On being asked about the matter, the council told us that no details of any arrangements had been lodged in the past few years. We know that in 1990-91 there were 17 cases of the granting of access, and that in 1991-92 there were 16, yet these were not recorded with the CCPR as they should have been.

I appreciate that there is an Inland Revenue rule about the secrecy of the affairs of individual taxpayers. But we are not asking how much relief, in terms of money, has been granted in individual cases; we are asking simply where access has been granted in return for relief.

Mr. Bennett: I understand the taxation principle, but does my hon. Friend accept that if, for example, a farmer in the Peak district enters into an access agreement with the national park, people can find out how much money is involved and can judge whether it represents value for those being provided with extra access? Surely there ought to be some relationship between the sums of money forgone in tax—the amounts appear to be huge—and the number of acres of land or miles of footpath secured. I understand the argument for confidentiality in respect of individual cases, but the House ought to know whether the Government are getting value for money.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A few weeks ago I asked a question about the number of acres that had been made available for the right to roam, the number of additional miles of footpath had been made available, and the overall cost in each year. The answer was that no information was available. But the provision of that information would not contravene the Inland Revenue's secrecy rules.

There is an additional problem. The Government seem to believe that where access is made available some sort of additional right is granted if the access is by rights of way

or what are called permissive paths. But rights of way are precisely what their name suggests. They are rights of way, and whether or not a conditionally exempt transfer agreement is entered into, they will remain so for time immemorial. That must be so. No additional right of access can be granted in the case of a right of way. What about permissive paths? Suppose a permissive path is made available so that people may walk in the countryside. In view of the way in which permissive paths work, I fear that the permission could be withdrawn at any time. Therefore, it is simply not good enough to say that access in return for inheritance tax relief shall be over rights of way and over permissive paths. In terms of additional rights for the public, that does not add up to very much.

I said that I would come to the one specific instance about which we know. I refer to the Bransdale Moor estate in the North York moors. It is known also as the Nawton Tower estate. It is a remote area of moorland of about 15,400 acres and was the subject of a conditionally exempt transfer in 1978. The land in question is owned by Lady Clarissa Collin, who is the granddaughter of the late Earl of Halifax, the Conservative Foreign Secretary from 1938 to 1941. Lady Clarissa Collin entered into a conditionally exempt transfer in 1978. As that took place under a Labour Government, the information was made public. The North York Moors national park, in its information bulletin of the winter of 1978-79, told us exactly what had happened in return for inheritance tax relief for the Bransdale Moor estate. There was an agreement for the maintenance of landscape character; there was a provision that any proposals involving ploughing and reclamation of moorland had to be agreed; there was agreement that there would be a management programme of moor burning; and there was agreement that scientific interest would be looked after. All of that is good conservation management. But, in addition, the undertaking provided that

"The Trust"—

that is, the trust of the estate—

"would agree to ensure that within the context of good estate management and the securing of farming and sporting objectives, there will be reasonable access to members of the public for walking and horseriding."

The undertaking went on:

"Public access shall be normally along existing rights of way. The Trust would accept the principle that access off these routes would be permissible".

There are set out a few conditions about walkers being asked not to leave rights of way during the nesting time in April and May and during grouse shooting in August and September, but otherwise the undertaking says very clearly that access off the existing rights of way shall be permissible. That agreement was signed by Lady Clarissa Collin in 1978 in return for relief from capital transfer tax.

But what happened in March 1990? Twelve land owners in the North York moors wrote to the national park officer, saying:

"Access to the highly important and vulnerable upland heather moors must be restricted to an improved footpath system where that is appropriate."

The signatories included Lady Clarissa Collin. So in 1978 Lady Clarissa Collin entered into an agreement in return for relief from inheritance tax—and the agreement provided that access would be available off rights of way—yet in 1990 she joined other land owners to write to the national park officer saying that access should not be available off the rights of way.

What is happening on the ground follows that letter. There is a notice saying that walkers must keep to the established footpaths and there are gamekeepers wandering around to reinforce the message. In other words, in return for being relieved of inheritance tax, Lady Clarissa Collin has given the public nothing. In her letter of 1990, along with others, she was clearly showing her intention to renege on the agreement that she had made in 1978. Our new clause challenges such practices.

5 pm

One might ask why this is important. Access to the countryside and enjoyment of the open air are extremely important to millions of our fellow citizens. Back in 1934, G. H. B. Ward, founder of the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers and a fighter, throughout his life, for public access to open country, wrote about this matter, putting it better than any of us ever could. He said:

"Rambling is also a culture and a craft . . . an intense love for one's own country, the innermost and the most remote parts of it, the sweetest as well as the wildest, a love for the wind and the rain, the snow and the frost, the hill and the vale, the widest open spaces and the choicest pastoral and arboreal retreats."

That is what the new clause is all about.

In 1884, James Bryce, then Member of Parliament for Aberdeen, South, introduced a Bill to provide unrestricted public access to uncultivated mountain or moorland. We have been waiting 108 years for such a measure to pass through the House. I long to see the day when we legislate to ensure that ordinary people can have access to the wide open spaces as of right rather than having to beg and scrape for it. While such a system exists and while we rely on arrangements such as inheritance tax relief to ensure it, we must make sure that those arrangements work properly.

Let us deal with works of art. If one owns a valuable painting or a piece of sculpture, one can record it as being in one's ownership and, in return for saying that one will grant public access to view the work of art, one can gain relief from inheritance tax. Although there is no list of access to land, there is a list of access to works of art. Held in the Victoria and Albert museum, it runs to 13 files, some of which are an inch thick. There are 10 items on each page and there are probably, although I have not counted them personally, 30,000 to 40,000 items in all. They include paintings, sculpture, furniture and jewellery.

Last year, three members of the public, one of whom was an Inland Revenue inspector, inspected the list. For each item, there is a rough description, an approximate location and a contact name. Normally, the contact name is a local solicitor or someone of the kind. *The Observer*, which has been running an admirable campaign on this issue in recent weeks, noted names and tried to contact five of them. Two of the names were no longer the correct contact names and those people could not say who the right person was. One of the names was the correct contact, but had no idea of the procedure to view the item. One other asked for a request in writing and the fifth, who was the owner of the painting in question, said, "Viewing is difficult."

This is hardly "readily available public access". I understand that some of the owners charge for viewing, and that should not happen. Not only are many of the contacts out of date, but much of the information about the contents of the list is as well. For example, a painting by Miro that is recorded as being in private ownership in

Sussex is in the Scottish National Gallery for Modern Art and has been there for some years. These are not minor paintings. They range from paintings by Leonardo to paintings by Picasso, from Turner to Canaletto. They are part of our vital artistic heritage. We should know where they are and how we can go about seeing them because we, the taxpayers, have effectively paid for doing so.

Arcane and archaic viewing arrangements, inadequate and out-of-date information and no public knowledge at all of land is not good enough. It is high time that we ensured that, where public money is yielded up, proper public access is made available in return. The superb works of art and the finest and most remote of landscapes should be there for the ordinary citizen to enjoy. At heart, that is what the new clause is all about.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Before most major changes in legislation, we have the most elaborate consultations within and outside the House with national and local organisations. There are Green Papers and White Papers and so on. One of the curious anomalies of the Budget process is that, as soon as the Chancellor goes into Budget purdah, there is no such dialogue. Therefore, it is fair to say that the new inheritance tax exemptions have not been digested anything like as thoroughly as, for example, new legislation setting the framework for agricultural and environmental law or that on recreation.

Therefore, we find ourselves in the curious situation that the exemptions that we have had since 1976 in several formats have been assumed to continue until the Budget. As soon as the Budget proposed changes, organisations of the stature of the Countryside Commission, English Nature, the Ramblers Association, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, farmers and landowners and their respective bodies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all wondered what the impact would be on the work that they do on behalf of the Government and the nation.

It may be that the other Departments that have responsibility in this subject were caught napping as well. When I tabled a question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food last week, his answer was at best a holding one and at worst a neat passing of the buck. He seems to have no view of what the impact of these changes will be either in financial and environmental terms or on farming practice.

In Committee, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury reassured us. He said that he did not wish to undo all the good work done by successive Governments by the use of exemptions. By inference, we have to take it that he believes that the success of past policies and the continuing success for whole categories of land that will not otherwise be exempt is such that they will want to boast of their success. One wonders how one can boast of success if everything is kept secret.

It is surely a maxim of Thatcherite economics—if we dare still mention them in this place—that one should know what one is paying for. It is surely a matter for open government that the public, having effectively subsidised a particular asset, should know what they are getting for their money. As the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said, there are already some curious anomalies. It is possible to obtain some information about works of art that have been subject to the concessions. Today's *Hansard* contains written answers which include much detailed information about works of art. The information includes reference to:

"A drawing, 'A wild boar at bay', Frans Snyders (1579-1647)".—[*Official Report*, 6 July 1992; Vol. 211, c. *21*.]

The written answers contain much detail and a long list. However, there is no schedule showing what areas of the country and great heritage items of landscape and recreational access have been bought with our money. There is obviously a curious anomaly.

The new clause is obviously very well intentioned and we support it. However, as worded, it avoids the curious problem which we always have to overcome of the criteria by which a judgment should be made—in this case, for reasonable public access. I am not sure that empowering the board of the Inland Revenue is the best way to ensure that the sharpest minds on that particular issue will be used to produce the right criteria.

The crucial issue in the new clause is the criteria. If the criteria are very detailed, there will be considerable confusion. The issue will be very complex, bureaucratic and possibly litigious because large sums of money will be involved. Whether or not a farmer will receive relief will be of considerable concern to him, his family, his tax advisers and his lawyers.

For example, over what period would the farmer need to have cared for the land in question and ensured that there was public access before the death that triggers inheritance tax liability? What will be taken as proof? Who is to be judge and jury in the matter? Conversely, if the criteria are very scanty, they could surely be met so easily that the new clause would be worthless.

We hope that the proposal can be made to work because it is of considerable interest to landowners, to farmers and to the public. In many areas of tax legislation and administrative criteria, there is already a balance which must be struck. We can only hope that the board or professional advisers from the appropriate national statutory bodies can find the right balance.

We support the new clause and hope that the Government mean what they said in Committee upstairs and in their manifesto about the public interest in future policy for the countryside. We hope that that wider Government interest will prevail against the narrow interests of the Treasury.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I wish to address my comments to tax relief on land. It might seem slightly strange to people with a false impression of the city from which I come and which I have the privilege to represent to learn that, contrary to some opinions, Sheffield contains a great deal of moorland and open countryside of considerable beauty. One third of the city lies within the Peak district national park and rambling is an extremely important local hobby for many people in the city. Much of the land lies within the Sheffield constituencies of Hallam and Hillsborough. As well as having older industrial areas, my constituency contains important areas like the Moss valley which are important to my constituents, as is the whole issue of access to the open countryside.

The Government might argue that the current arrangements for tax relief on land are not working. They might argue that the expenditure of £5 million to £10 million a year of public money over 10 years, when the public have no details about what land that expenditure

refers to and when the supposed benefits of access to the countryside cannot be realised because the public are unaware of that access and to which land it applies, is a waste of public money and cannot be justified.

It is difficult to understand precisely what benefit the public are receiving. The Government could argue that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) explained, because some of the agreements apply to permissive paths as well as to public rights of way, the public are not getting a very good deal. The Government could argue that, because the management agreements often relate to the maintenance of land in its existing state rather than to the addition and enhancement of new land and improvements to management services, the public are not getting a very good deal.

5.15 pm

The Government may even argue strongly that the whole scheme has been a sham, abuse and waste of taxpayers' money since its inception. Those are reasons not for the Government to change the law as they propose, but for the Government to begin to enforce the provisions properly and to make the information about the agreements open so that the public can receive the benefit of the money that has been expended on their behalf.

In Committee, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury said that the Government's proposed changes applied only to 25 per cent. of the land in question. Only 25 per cent. of the land would receive 100 per cent. tax relief automatically. For the remaining 75 per cent. to receive 100 per cent. tax relief, the current agreements on access and management would have to apply.

We must ask whether the Government's proposals will provide equality in respect of that land. I believe that the new clause provides a much better arrangement. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury accepted that there would have been instances in the past when agreements had been reached on access and management of land to obtain the 100 per cent. tax relief. However, according to the Government's proposals, in exactly the same circumstances the tax relief in future will be available automatically without the need for agreements. In other words, because of the timing of the death of the landowner, similar land would be treated in very different ways. There was no proposal to terminate the previous agreements on land even though similar land will be treated differently in future.

It was accepted that in respect of the 75 per cent. of land for which agreements would still be needed for owners to claim 100 per cent. benefit of tax relief, that land in respect of scientific interest, beauty and benefits of walking over it, would be no different from other land which, in future, will gain 100 per cent. tax relief without the need for agreement.

There seems to be an inequality of treatment there and between the 25 per cent. of land for which 100 per cent. of tax relief will be available automatically and the 75 per cent. of land for which agreements on management and access will still be required to secure such relief even though there is no difference in scientific interest, beauty and access between those two cases.

There is a problem. Either the Government are claiming that access and management are not important because tax relief will now be given automatically on some land or, if they are important—and they must be because the agreements are to be maintained for 75 per cent. of the land—how will the Government secure access and proper managment for the 25 per cent. of land unless other inducements and tax reliefs are to be introduced in future at further cost to the Treasury? We pushed that question hard in Committee but we did not receive an answer from the Minister. The matter continues to worry me, and I hope that the Minister will explain why his arrangements are better than the new clause, which would resolve the problem.

The kernel of the argument is that the Government have not thought through the implications of their proposals. One can understand that some arguments about the need for agricultural holdings to be kept together on the death of an owner are relevant, and why the Government have put them forward. However, they have pushed the arguments without considering the important implications for management and access.

Whatever happens when we vote on the new clause, the Government must accept that, in respect of agreements that have previously been reached and new agreements that are reached in future, there will still need to be agreements on management, and access information must be made public so that taxpayers will benefit from the considerable sums that they are forgoing.

Mr. Bennett: I support the new clause. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on the new clause, and I congratulate *The Observer* on its campaign in respect of the issue. I also congratulate the Ramblers Association on its work, particularly its document on public access to the countryside and the inheritance tax. I am not quite so sure whether I should congratulate it on its rather corny title, "Give us Some Quo for Our Quid", but the association still produced a worthwhile document.

It is absolutely amazing that the Government have not come up with any information about benefits to the public as a result of the tax concession. I hope that the Minister will set out some good examples of areas in which access is working and where people benefit from the provision, otherwise hon. Members will feel that there has been a gross fraud such as that which my hon. Friend described. People were given tax benefits, but they appear not to have given the public any access.

I am not one of those who believe that we should pay for access. There should be a right to roam on all mountain land, moorland and open land, and there should be no attempt to charge for that. I do not believe that people walking on land cause any problem, therefore there is no justification for a charge. The only reason for making a charge would be to provide extra stiles or, in a few popular areas, to stop erosion. People should be able to roam freely. If we are to pay from the public purse, it is important to produce fairness across the board.

In large areas of the Lake district and of north Wales, some tenant farmers and owners have always allowed free access. I fear that if those farmers discover that large landowners have been paid to provide what they already provide freely, there will be restrictions on many areas where access is already available. I plead with the Government at least to demonstrate that by making those tax concessions we will have something of outstanding value in return. So far, I can see no evidence of that at all.

[Mr. Bennett]

Instead of improving access, it will be more difficult to achieve in areas in which no one has thought of making charges.

I press the Minister, if there are to be access agreements and conservation, particularly in areas such as the north Yorkshire moors, to consider the argument that it is far better to let people roam freely rather than encourage them to stay on footpaths. Inevitably, if people must follow footpaths, those footpaths become worn and it becomes difficult for small animals and insects to cross from one side to the other. That does far more damage than allowing people freely to roam across the land. Some landowners represent shooting interests and have fought very hard against the right to roam, but, on conservation grounds, it is far better to let people have open access rather than restrict them to footpaths. In areas in which access agreements have been negotiated, particularly in the Peak district, and where people have roamed freely, there are far fewer problems than in areas where they have been restricted to footpaths, some of which are eroded.

I strongly support the new clause. I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury referred to G.H.B. Ward. I was able to go with the ramblers when they dedicated a memorial to Mr. Ward. Admittedly, it was one of those occasions when there was a chance to harangue a large assembly of ramblers. The only aspect that was disappointing was that it was pouring with rain and, in the circumstances, extremely difficult to make a speech. However, Mr. Ward, who was from Sheffield, was a very important fighter for the rights of access.

I hope that the Minister will assure us that we will have a public statement on what new access is to be created as a result of what payments.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): We are talking about a scandal—giving £800 million of taxpayers' money to some of the wealthiest people in the country. Although I support new clause 2, it is rather generous. History over the centuries has proved that those who have received tax relief have managed to keep all their wealth anyhow. There is a feeling that £800 million could have been better spent. That is the exact amount that is needed to upgrade the west coast main line railway from Carlisle to Glasgow, which would ensure that my constituents had an effective railway service. That might not happen because the money will not be available.

The scandal is that landowners have received money for very little. I was told in a parliamentary answer that there are six such landowners in Cumbria. Shortly after that, the Government stopped naming counties in which such landowners live. I cannot understand the reason. However, there are six such landowners in the county of Cumbria. We are refused information on who they are, what access is available and how much it costs. We are told that that is because of confidentiality. That is nonsense.

If those landowners wished to remain anonymous and not have their tax matters discussed, they should not have opted for the tax exemption. They decided that they wanted hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions; we are not to be told—in tax relief from the Exchequer. Surely, by doing that, they forfeited the right to confidentiality. They should have told my constituents, "We have made a deal" —we do not need to know how much it has cost—"for this piece of land, and there is now open access to that land", but that is not the case. It is even worse than that. Not only are the people of the county not told, but representatives of local planning committees and the Lake District planning board—elected representatives—are not told. I recently spoke to the former chairman of the Lake District planning board, Councillor Phizackerley. He had no knowledge that that was happening in the Lake district, even though Lake District national park officers were acting as agents of the Countryside Commission to monitor what was going on. The members of the authority were not told.

I tabled another parliamentary question on the matter and received an ambiguous answer from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. He was not telling us anything. The scandal of money for access to land is nothing compared to the scandal of money for access to works of art. Some £700 million has been given in the past decade to various people in return for making their works of art available to the general public. Of course, that is if people can find those works of art. That is not so easy.

5.30 pm

I went to the House of Commons Library as my first port of call. The Library rang the national art library at the Victoria and Albert museum and was told that information was not available and photocopies could not be made of the records at the national art library. That is nonsensical, because public money is involved and Parliament passed the legislation.

Then I tried to find the information personally. Last Friday I rang the V and A and was told that, due to staff shortages, unfortunately the library was closed. So I rang on Saturday and was told that, due to staff shortages, unfortunately the library had an extended lunch break and was closed from 12 to 2 pm. As I had tabled a parliamentary question asking the Minister to put a copy of the document in the Library, I decided to sit back and wait until it arrived. Surprise, surprise, I received an answer from the Minister that he would not place the document in the Library on the ground that it was a big book. As it cost £700 million to compile the book, it is no wonder that it is a big book.

Undaunted, my research assistant went to the V and A today to have a look at the document. She is a former librarian and she was appalled at the state of the document. It is not even indexed. Unless one knows what one is looking for, there is no point in looking at the document.

Perhaps the position is simply part of a muddle. Perhaps the Government have not taken the matter seriously. But I believe that the Government did not want people to know where to go to see the art treasures. Comments have been made that some well-known parliamentary names from the past appeared in the document. I will not go into those names. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] Hon. Members will have to go and look for themselves. Obviously, names of noble Lords from another place appear in the document.

Perhaps we have now come to the crux of the matter. The Government have dealt with public access in this way. It is a way of maintaining wealth and power in Britain. We see it in the Chamber and in the other place. But how does that compare with the open government and classless society of the Prime Minister?

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): The application of inheritance tax legislation to allow conditionally exempt transfers to attract substantial tax relief is a Kafkaesque exercise in secrecy and obfuscation. Property, land and works of art can be exempted from inheritance tax where undertakings are given which purport to guarantee public access to the property, such as that land should be managed for the benefit of the public and works of art should be available for public view and inspection.

New clause 2 sets out to define the circumstances in which public access should be made available. It defines what in practice public access should mean. It states, first, that details of access rights should be available to members of the public; secondly, that access should be available on a regular basis; and thirdly, that access should be free of charge.

New clause 2 will therefore provide a practical guarantee of public access rights. That is not unreasonable because members of the public pay for those rights through the tax system in the form of tax relief and tax forgone. So why should new clause 2 be necessary? As has already been said, substantial sums of public money are involved and between £5 million and £10 million per year are relieved in return for access to land alone. That is about £100 million in the past 10 years. That raises some basic questions about the land. Where is the land? What public access rights have been granted over it? Are they new rights or have existing rights of access been confirmed? Moreover, what is the point of granting rights of public access if no one knows precisely where the land is and which land is being considered?

Exempt transfers are important because the landowner is required not only to guarantee public access but to keep the land in proper condition. He is required to maintain the land and preserve its character. That is crucial because many of the transfers involve land in areas of outstanding natural beauty and national parks or cover sites of special scientific interest. Again, if no one knows precisely what land is covered, or the nature of the access granted to the public, how is it possible to determine whether the land has been properly maintained or its character properly preserved? It is possible for the landowner to take his tax relief and his money and run to the safety of the badly maintained hills.

The same principles apply to works of art. To qualify for inheritance tax relief it is necessary to lodge with the Victoria and Albert museum details of the nature of the work of art—whether it is a painting, sculpture or piece of furniture—together with information on how the public can exercise their right of access. Unfortunately, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) graphically demonstrated, the practical exercise of that right is frustrated by the administrative nature of the system operated at the museum.

Even though a rough description is required for each work of art, together with its location by county, in practice it is impossible for the public to gain access to a remarkable range of public assets. They include paintings and drawings by Picasso, Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, Rubens, Titian and Hogarth; sculptures by Rodin, Degas and Henry Moore; and thousands of antique rugs, tapestries and items of jewellery and furniture.

As the Government have made train-spotting so difficult by running down our railways, perhaps I could recommend a new public pastime of public access art-spotting. Treasure hunts are popular at weekends. This would be a real treasure hunt. People would be able to draw up lists of property that they had spotted. I am sure that enterprising publishers could publish helpful guides such as "I Spy a Masterpiece".

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): Would not we need to know which land we could cross on the treasure hunt before we could find the works of art?

Mr. Hoon: That would be part of the challenge. Indeed, it would require only a modest addition to new clause 2 to make the treasure hunt competitive. If we knew how much tax had been forgone, points could be awarded according to the value of the pieces of art spotted by enterprising members of the public. The more valuable the item, the more tax relief, and the more points would be awarded. I am confident that the Secretary of State for National Heritage will seize on that modest suggestion and that the ministry of fun will encourage it as part of its attempt to encourage public access to our national heritage.

It follows from what I have said about both land and works of art that land and property owners are technically in breach of the law. They are certainly in breach of the spirit, if not of the letter, of the law. Given that, under the rules, a property owner forfeits the right to tax relief if the land or property is no longer available to the public, clearly he or she should, in such circumstances, be liable to repay the tax forgone.

Perhaps the Government might like to tell us precisely how many tax inspectors are deployed to ensure public access to the works of art or pieces of land in question. I suspect that the Government might be embarrassed by the modesty of their answer to that question. Yet, taxpayers are carefully followed up by tax inspectors, and small businesses face questioning by tax inspectors. I wonder whether the Treasury, which oversees the deals, is allowing substantial amounts of money to escape the Revenue, without a proper investigation into the right of public access.

I recommend new clause 2 to the House. Is it so unreasonable to ask the Government to ensure in practice the largely theoretical rights of public access, enshrined in the tax legislation? That is the purpose of new clause 2, and it is difficult to understand why the Government should resist it.

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): The new clause seeks to put to rights a clear abuse of the tax system. The lax operation of the law puts the interests of the very wealthy —landowners and owners of great national treasures— above those of the public. It confers privileges on the owners of land and art treasures, without any payback for the taxpayer—the people who financed the privileges out of their pockets in the first place. To coin a phrase from *The Ramblers*, the law is supposed to give the taxpayer

"Some quo for its quids."

In return for offering public access to land or works of art, an owner can keep it and be relieved of inheritance tax. All that costs a pretty penny. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said that it is costing the taxpayer and the Exchequer about £10 million per year for land, and my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said that costs for art treasures are way in excess of that figure, at about £70 million per annum.

Normally, we are not privy to the deals negotiated between the Exchequer and owners of land or art

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

treasures. *The Observer* has managed to track down the only case where a known sum of money has been attached to access to land. The land is owned by the Duke of Devonshire—a man who is not known to be short of a bob or two. He owns the Bolton abbey estate in the Yorkshire dales. According to *The Observer*, negotiations are under way at this moment with the Treasury and with the Countryside Commission. It is understood that the Duke of Devonshire is demanding about £12 million in return for keeping open existing public rights of way—they are not new rights of way. The taxpayer and the Exchequer are expected to pay £12 million for the privilege. The Economic Secretary has an opportunity to confirm whether that is the case and how the negotiations are progressing.

It is as well to remember that the Government are anxious to damp down public expenditure, to ensure that we get good value for money and that the taxpayer gets a good deal. I wonder whether the Economic Secretary will confirm that he thinks that the deal being concluded with the Duke of Devonshire fits all those criteria. I think that it probably does not.

In the past decade, handouts from the Exchequer have cost approximately £800 million. Before too long we shall hit the magic figure of £1 billion. As my hon. Friends know only too well, £1 billion is equivalent to ½p on the standard rate of income tax. We are paying through the nose to maintain the privileges of wealthy landowners and the owners of art treasures. Perhaps that would not be so bad if the public were getting some value for money, or at least some knowledge of value for money, but clearly they are not.

5.45 pm

The law states that when inheritance tax relief is given, full details of access rights must be readily available to the public. We know, from contributions from the Opposition Front Bench and from my other hon. Friends, that those details are simply not forthcoming. We know that a substantial amount of land—about 315,000 acres—is covered by such arrangements, including many sites of outstanding beauty or of special scientific interest. They are the jewels in the crown of this country, and the lax operation of the present tax laws means that those 315,000 acres are being subsidised out of the public purse for the private use of the wealthy.

The public, who are supposed to be the direct beneficiaries of deals concluded between the Exchequer and landowners and owners of art treasures, are being kept in the dark about where they can exercise the rights being bought on their behalf. Worse still, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, there is clear evidence that there has been direct infringement of some deals. If anything, the situation is even worse as regards art treasures. When *The Observer* contacted the National Art-Collections Fund, which helps museums to buy works of art, and the Museums Association, the umbrella body dealing with museums, neither knew of the existence of the register of works of art kept at the Victoria and Albert museum.

As we have heard from some of my hon. Friends, the works concerned are treasures indeed. One such work, Canaletto's view of Old Horseguards, was recently bought for the nation for £10 million. It was previously on the register, although few people have seen it. The owner, Viscount FitzHarris, had avoided paying inheritance tax on it amounting to about £4 million at today's prices. The public got a raw deal and I suspect that Viscount FitzHarris got a good deal.

Who does all that benefit? It certainly does not benefit the taxpayer or the Exchequer, the rambler or the art lover. Their rights of access are denied to them, yet we are talking of national treasures which the public have effectively funded. The sole beneficiaries are the very wealthy.

If the Government fail to accept the new clause, which brings public rights out into the open, and defines access in precise terms, we shall be left with the impression that Ministers are more concerned to protect the interests of the very rich than those of the public or the taxpayer. However, that should come as no surprise to my hon. Friends. After all, for about 13 years it has been Conservative party policy to defend the interests of the very wealthy against those of the public in general. I do not say that from any party political or prejudiced point of view, as my hon. Friends will know.

The Financial Secretary, who sadly is absent, told one of my hon. Friends on 29 June that the principal beneficiaries of income tax reductions from 1979 have been those earning more than £80,000 a year. That small group of just 150,000 people gained some £7,200 million in income tax cuts—an average of some £46,000 each per annum. By contrast, the 3 million people who earned less than £5,000 per annum received a total reduction, thanks to income tax cuts, of just some £500 million—a paltry £150 a year each. As always happens under the Conservative party, the gainers have been the most privileged in our society and the losers have been the least privileged.

It is time that the Government accepted that they should govern in the interests of everyone, not just a tiny few. After all, in recent months we have heard many claims by Conservative Members about the need for a classless society and open government. The Government have an opportunity to demonstrate both their commitment to a classless society and to open government by ending what has become a racket in inheritance tax exemptions and by accepting new clause 2.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): It is difficult to understand why the Government might resist the new clause, because it does not alter, but, rather, strengthens the principle that underpins inheritance legislation and assists in enforcing the conditions that the Inland Revenue seeks to oppose. Moreover, the Government should not resist the new clause on grounds of effectiveness and efficiency. It is obviously of wide benefit to the people whom we represent and would not cost the Treasury a penny to implement.

If the new Secretary of State for National Heritage were present, he would probably embrace the new clause enthusiastically because it goes to the heart of the role that the Prime Minister has given him. In one deft move, its acceptance would help to tear away the dust sheet from significant parts of our national heritage and allow the padlocks to be removed from areas of scenic beauty and hitherto unexplored delights in our countryside. The acceptance of the new clause and the more efficient operation of that part of inheritance tax would lift the Heritage Secretary's horizons considerably. Rather than

seeking new photo opportunities for himself, which seems to be what his new post has consisted of so far, it would enable him to create new opportunities for the people of this country to enjoy the national heritage, which the Minister has been appointed to serve.

There has never been disagreement about the objectives and virtues of the relief from inheritance tax. Those objectives are to open up what has hitherto been hidden and provide access to what has been closed or at least unknown or undiscovered in the past. The objectives have never been questioned by Labour or Conservative Governments. The new clause deals with the lack of diligence in the operation and application of the provisions and the lack of thoroughness in extending the benefits of the inheritance tax relief provisions to the public at large. Because of that lack of diligence and thoroughness in the provisions' implementation and operation, a good and fair system has gone badly wrong. Indeed, that fair and reasonable system to defray inheritance tax, which was meant to operate in the public interest, has instead turned into a racket and a rip-off.

The lack of diligence and thoroughness with which the provisions have been implemented has resulted in such abuse of the system and generated such contempt for the authorities that, were it present in the operation of the social security system of welfare benefits, it would produce howls of outrage and demands for a crackdown from Conservative Members.

Recently I was subjected to an intervention by the hon. Member for Welwyn, Hatfield (Mr. Evans), who asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether she planned to act against what he termed "social security scroungers". He said in his characteristically unattractive—some would say obnoxious—way:

> "Is she aware that many of the long-term unemployed are layabouts? They should have to do community work before receiving benefit. The taxpayers are sick and tired of financing these layabouts."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 1992; Vol. 209, c. 139.]

Why should not the same standards that apply to those who enjoy benefits from the social security system also apply to those who are considerably better off and enjoy similar benefits from relief in the operation of inheritance tax?

I am reminded of a story that appeared a couple of weeks ago in *The Sunday Times* by Mr. Andrew Grice, political correspondent and respected member of the reporting staff in the House. He said that the Secretary of State for Social Security was going to order a crackdown on dole fleecers.

Why do the Government operate double standards? If the report is accurate and the Social Security Secretary is preparing to order a crackdown on dole fleecers, why should not the same standards be applied to those getting away with an abuse of the inheritance tax system? They are enjoying the benefits and relief to which they are entitled under the legislation to which the new clause refers, but are not giving back what they are obliged to return under the agreement that they have reached. What is the difference? What is regarded as an abuse of the social security system is treated with a benign shrug in the case of inheritance tax and the relief that is offered to people to defray it.

The harsh punishment that many would like to see given for what they call "scroungers" should not be blindly ignored in the case of rich landowners and art collectors who are taking advantage of the relief under inheritance tax law. Is that not a clear example of double standards? Are not the Government saying that the rich should be given more while the poor should have it taken away?

Abuse of the system allows the well-off, with land and priceless artefacts, to hold on to their wealth without subsequently meeting the obligations into which they have freely entered.

However, for those without such land and artefacts, the abuse of the system denies them access to what it is their right to view, to walk upon or otherwise to enjoy. It is not hard to understand why the system is going wrong and why it is open to such abuse when, upon the death of an enormously rich person, his heirs seek to defray tax payable on the estate by exploiting the available relief.

6 pm

Let us consider the interesting and purely theoretical case of Princess Diana and the Spencer family treasures. What alternative is there to those treasures coming under the hammer to pay the huge death duties that arose upon the tragic death of Princess Diana's father, Earl Spencer? The new Lord Spencer inherited not just an earldom, but the need to find £4 million out of the estate to pay the death duties. The new lord inevitably wants to retain as much of his inheritance as possible. Some people might argue that those magnificent treasures should instead pass in their entirety into public ownership for the benefit of the nation.

To defray those death duties, it is open to the new earl to negotiate a conditionally exempt transfer. That would enable him to keep the treasures in his ownership—his exclusive private ownership—but in exchange he would have to provide assured public access so that those treasures could be viewed by members of the general public. That is the principle at the heart of the provision that is addressed by the new clause.

In the words of the Ramblers Association, there must be a public quo in return for the earl's quid. Instead, we have what my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) described as a treasure trail, but with almost no clues available to enable members of the public to embark on the treasure hunt with any reasonable expectation of success, so that they might view and enjoy treasures that remain in private ownership but which, under the operation of the legislation, are meant to be available for the enjoyment and satisfaction of ordinary members of the public.

I do not doubt the earl's good intentions, but just consider the hoops through which members of the public must go to view the pictures, the furniture and the artefacts —the priceless, stupendous treasures—in the great Spencer collection. My hon. Friends the Members for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) have already referred to the hoops, hurdles and obstacles that any member of the public might have to go through, over or under to have sight of treasures that are available for public viewing.

Mindful of the fact that the Bill and its prolonged proceedings—in which I have been pleased to play some little part over the past almost incalculable number of weeks—are coming to an end, I thought that I might spend my weekend near my constituency walking through scenes of great beauty near Hartlepool in the county of Cleveland.

As has already been said, there is no point going to the Countryside Commission, to the Central Council of

Physical Recreation or to the Ramblers Association because none of them can tell me what rights of way, what sights of scenic beauty or what natural landscapes I can enjoy under the provisions of our legislation near to my home in my constituency of Hartlepool—because there is no land, there are no walkways and there are no scenes of beauty recorded by any of those organisations that would enable me to make my choice.

In the absence of a nice walk, I thought that I might instead use the time available to me, after we have completed a successful constituency barbecue that is to be held this weekend, looking at some nice pictures——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Are there any spare tickets?

Mr. Mandelson: Yes, there are spare tickets.

I thought that I would look at some nice pictures and some nice furniture. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle, I asked my office to contact the Victoria and Albert museum and the national arts library. However, the problem is not that there is any dearth of pictures, artefacts or fine pieces of furniture listed in the locality —on the contrary, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, there are between 30,000 and 40,000 such objects, pictures and items of fine furniture from which I could select; the problem is that they are not broken down geographically. I would have to pore through thick books listing between 30,000 and 40,000 items before I could come upon that picture, that fine piece of furniture, that treasure located near Hartlepool that I might visit this weekend after the completion of my constituency barbecue.

The practical problem is that what is available is not accessible; what is listed is impossible to divine in any simple, practical way that would allow ordinary members of the public, or even ordinary Members of Parliament celebrating the conclusion of the Finance Bill, to benefit from the sight and enjoyment of those items that are listed by the Victoria and Albert museum.

I hope that, in responding to the debate, the Economic Secretary will reflect on the strength of argument that has supported the promotion of the new clause. It is needed to ensure that full details of art and land are readily available to the public, that access to them is free, and that such access is either regularly available during the year in the case of art, or permanently available in the case of land. The new clause is a practical, sensible proposal and I hope that, on reflection, the Economic Secretary will be minded to accept it.

Mr. Tony Banks: I hope that the constituency barbecue of my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) is enormously successful. The only thing that he did not tell us was the price of the tickets.

Mr. Mandelson: They are £4 each.

Mr. Banks: That is an excellent bargain. I hope that anyone within a coach ride of Hartlepool will find his way to the barbecue.

My hon. Friend is lucky to have rural idiocies to enjoy in his constituency at a weekend. I do not have very much in the London borough of Newham. Last Sunday we had a walk along the northern sewer outfall—*[Laughter.]* I knew that hon. Members would laugh, but it is quite beautiful if one likes sewers. It is a grassed-over embankment and it is pleasant to walk along it. When I think of all the wealth and opportunity that some have in our society and then see the deprivation that so many of my constituents have to endure, it is easy to become angry. I could never believe that a scheme that allows people to set aside their tax liability by pledging paintings and land while continuing to enjoy them is anything but a total con. It is an absolute rip-off. The obstacles that are placed in the way of the public when they want to see such treasures make it an absolute sham.

I am deeply grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) and for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) for bringing that abuse to the public's attention. It has been going on for years, but until someone tells us about it, we remain ignorant.

Few people in Newham have hereditary land and artefacts of great beauty that they can pledge to the nation to avoid taxation. They have nicked a few in their time, but have never been able to offset them against tax because the Inland Revenue is not too enthusiastic about the acquisition of property in that manner. The people of Newham cannot take advantage of the scheme, so it makes them feel that much more cheated.

The more that I think of the scheme, the more monstrous it becomes—the idea that people can say, "I will set these paintings against my tax liability, but continue to keep them." What if I were to tell the Inland Revenue," I know that I owe you some money. I will leave it in the bank so that you know that it is there—but you cannot have it." That would never be allowed. It might be a nice try, but one would not be permitted to get away with it.

Artefacts represent accumulated wealth that should be taxed. Many of those wonderful items and much of the land were originally stolen—given away by kings and queens to acolytes who had done them a favour. We all know the favours that used to be done for kings and queens.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in the 1970s, when the now Lord Healey proposed a wealth tax, there was an outcry in all parts of the House? It was realised that it would lead to treasures leaving the country, and the opposition was such that Lord Graham of Edmonton, as he now is, presented to this House an all-party petition signed by more than 1 million people. The all-party arts and heritage group was formed at that time, and claimed the allegiance of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House—as it still does. For once, the hon. Gentleman has got it wrong.

Mr. Banks: Well, there you go. I remember Denis Healey, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, saying that he would squeeze the rich "until the pips squeak". That is one of my favourite political sayings. I looked forward to that, but unfortunately it did not happen. I ask the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), for whom I have great respect, how anyone could take land out of the country. One cannot pick up 3,000 prime acres and ship them abroad. Not even the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South, for all his ingenuity, could do that.

Mr. Cormack: I remind the hon. Gentleman that a country house, with its parklands and treasures, must be sustained by income from some source—and in many cases the income comes from the land.

Mr. Banks: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but he was saying that valuables should not be shipped out of the country. I merely mentioned land as an example. However, the hon. Gentleman is on to something. To answer his point, I would like to be set up a national register of all items of heritage of great value that belonged to the nation. An export embargo should be placed on them so that people would not be allowed to ship them out of the country. Export licences are required in respect of some items designated as being of considerable artistic merit. A national register would prevent items from being disposed of by an individual, who may often have acquired them by some nefarious means in the first place.

I support the new clause, but I would like a Labour Government to commit themselves to getting rid of a tax loophole which is available to only a few privileged people, and which is obviously abused. The new clause attempts to end that abuse, and I hope that the Minister will see his way clear to accepting it.

6.15 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): It has been an interesting debate, and I have taken in a positive spirit many of the contributions made by Opposition Members on the subject of conditional exemption, which I will address later. I am, however, presented with a genuine dilemma. I do not mean to criticise the Opposition, because I am sure that their new clause was intended to do as they said, but in fact it has nothing to do with conditional exemption; it concerns gifts in lieu. I will try to respond, but as a matter of form perhaps the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) will agree that it would be more appropriate for me to answer specific points about the new clause, which is interesting in itself.

The only relevant comments on new clause 2 were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) in his short intervention, when he gave the background to the in-lieu provisions. If the House is agreeable, I will make an initial reply to the points raised by the new clause, and then deal with conditional exemption.

The clause seeks to restrict the provisions for the acceptance of works of art and land in lieu of inheritance tax to qualifying property to which the public will be given access free of charge. In the case of land, free public access would be required throughout the year. In the case of other property—mainly works of art—free public access would be required for at least 52 days in each 12-month period.

The acceptance-in-lieu scheme provides an effective means for museums and galleries throughout the country to acquire pre-eminent works of art and other objects. The special price paid for acceptances in lieu on behalf of museums or galleries will be less than the market value of the object, and the funds that are available for acquisitions by those bodies can therefore be used to buy more objects than in the open market. The scheme helps to protect our national heritage and to retain important works of art in the United Kingdom, as my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South said. It has enjoyed broad cross-party support. All acceptances in lieu are announced in reply to parliamentary questions.

The majority of acceptances in lieu are allocated to museums and galleries. Over the past five years, the amount of inheritance tax satisfied by acceptance in lieu of works of art and other objects was £31·9 million. About 96 per cent.—some £30·5 million of that—related to items that were allocated to museums and galleries open to the public. Many are open all year round, and all of them are open for more than the 52-day minimum referred to in the new clause.

Some—but not all—of those museums and galleries charge for admission. The decision on charging is for the board of the trustees of the individual institution, and the Government neither impose nor prohibit the introduction of admission charges. It would not be practicable for a museum or gallery that charges for admission to allow free access to one or two items that had been accepted in lieu of tax.

The reason for allocating an item accepted to a particular museum or gallery will sometimes be that it will augment an existing collection of similar items. It would therefore not be desirable to display the accepted item in some free-access room separate from the rest of the collection.

The Government are committed to maintaining their support for national museums and galleries while at the same time encouraging them to develop greater independence and self-reliance. It would be wrong to force a museum or gallery that received a work of art under the acceptance-in-lieu scheme to change its charging policy in the way that new clause 2 suggests.

Mr. Cormack: Will my hon. Friend confirm that some in-lieu items are in National Trust properties or even in private properties which are open to the public?

Mr. Nelson: That is certainly the case, but they are always well known cases and, as I said, they are subject to a parliamentary reply. Such matters are in the public domain.

A small number of acceptances of works of art and other objects are left on display in situ in their previous location. Public access is available to these items for not less than 30 days a year. Since 1980, 20 items have been accepted in situ, 15 in privately owned houses open to the public. The average opening period of these properties is 130 days a year, far in excess of the minimum requirement of 52 days proposed in this clause. In addition, a number of in-situ items historically associated with a property are in National Trust hands. These houses usually open from April to October, and a small number throughout the year. The owners of these properties will generally charge a reasonable entry fee which, in most cases, will be used to meet costs of public access and help towards the maintenance and preservation of the property. It would be unrealistic to suggest that these charges should be waived for at least 52 days of the year where an acceptance was made after 30 June 1992.

The acceptance-in-lieu scheme has mainly been used for works of art and other objects in recent years and little land has been accepted in lieu. Where land is accepted, it would be wrong to prescribe, as suggested in this new clause, a simple and all-embracing rule for all categories of land. The degree of access must depend on the property in question: what might be appropriate for open land will not be reasonable, for example, in the case of land immediately surrounding a house where access at night might have to be restricted. Even where land is open, it is accepted only if it has some special quality—in particualr, that includes

[Mr. Nelson]

land which is important for nature conservation. Access to such land has to be managed, which means balancing the access objective and the benefits of preserving its special characteristics. We aim to ensure the widest possible enjoyment of properties accepted in lieu of tax, but we will not achieve this by imposing an across-the-board condition to all land accepted.

Buildings and land do not maintain themselves. It has long been the practice to make a reasonable charge for admission to some buildings and land to help to meet the costs of maintenance. This is true whether the land is publicly or privately owned or placed with a charitable trust.

For the reasons that I have set out, I consider that there is already a high level of public access to items which have been accepted in lieu and that this new clause would be unlikely to add to the availability of public access to future acceptances in lieu. In the case of land which is protected for nature conservation purposes, the unrestricted access proposed could be positively damaging.

If you will permit me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall comment on what I readily acknowledge to be the related issue of conditionally exempt lands and items. The issue was raised in a different way in Committee and has been commented on more widely this afternoon. In his advocacy of public rights of access, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was prosaic, a virtue which accords not only to his colleagues. There is a general welcome for the maintenance, improvement and increase of public rights of access where that is feasible and desirable.

However, it is important to answer the hon. Gentleman's question about the cost of conditional exemption since it has been in existence. The annual cost of conditional exemption from inheritance tax and capital transfer tax of works of art alone is estimated to have averaged about £70 million from 1983-84 to 1991-92. There are sometimes significant fluctuations in the estimated cost from year to year.

The 1991-92 cost was £20 million, but the 1990-91 cost was £160 million. The annual cost of conditional exemption for land and buildings is estimated to have averaged £5 million to £10 million from 1984 to 1992. If one adds the two figures together and multiplies them by eight, one arrives at the figure of £800 million which has been mentioned and in a further two years—bringing the period to 10 years—the figure would be pressing the £1 billion mark.

At least one hon. Member—it may have been the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn)—referred to the equivalent cost of income tax. He said that it amounted to the equivalent of ½p on the rate of income tax. Of course, numerically that is correct in any one year, but we are talking about relief over a 10-year period, whereas ½p would raise £1 billion a year, so the two are not strictly comparable.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) asked how the criteria for relief would be determined. I acknowledge that that is an important issue. The hon. Member was referring not specifically to conditional exemption, but, I think, to the enhanced reliefs for inheritance tax purposes provided in the Bill.

The tax authorities already have to make a judgment about what properties fall into the various categories for the higher and lower rates of inheritance tax relief, and, of course, that will not change. In future it will, as before, be a matter of fact as to what amounts to an agricultural holding in possession and whether it attracts the full 100 per cent. rate of inheritance tax relief to be passed on as a family farming business from one generation to another. There may be problems and there may be contested assessments of whether such relief applies, but there will be no new problems because the existing definitions will continue to obtain.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) also raised that issue today and in Committee. He asked, among other things, what incentives there were for access to the prospective 25 per cent. of lands which it is estimated is not now likely to claim conditional exemption but which will instead claim the full 100 per cent. relief. It is acknowledged that in granting that enhanced relief for certain businesses there will be a disincentive—or less of an incentive—for some landowners to enter into conditional exemption agreements. Yes, that is the case, but the original fear was that it would be such a disincentive that there would be virtually no new conditional exemption agreements.

I hope that in Committee and in the House we have been able to reassure people that a substantial amount of lands will still have a very positive incentive to go into conditional exemption agreements because they will effectively obtain 100 per cent. relief from inheritance tax, whereas if they did not go into conditional exemption agreements they would be liable for a lower rate of only 50 per cent. relief, or for none at all.

The hon. Member for Attercliffe was right to say that there is still a proportion of land—prospectively 25 per cent., and I stress that it is only prospectively—which will not now go into conditional exemption and will not be available for public access as it might otherwise have been. In terms of quantity, that will not be as material as the benefits which will accrue to the businesses and farming businesses of lands which are, after all, handed on.

Much of the land that we are discussing, which will qualify for 100 per cent. relief, will be family-owned farming businesses where a large part of the land is, by its nature, farmed and therefore cannot be roamed across. Where there are rights of access to it, there are likely to be public rights of way which will continue to exist. While conditional exemption was in the past a valuable relief, the new 100 per cent. relief from inheritance tax will also be substantial. In many cases—probably the overwhelming majority of cases—there will still be public rights of way over such lands. They cannot be regarded in the same way as unfarmed heritage lands which simply would not be open to inspection by the public.

Mr. Betts: Has the Minister considered the possibility of treating differently different types of land which, under the proposals, will automatically get 100 per cent. exemption? Ordinary farming land may acquire exemption and automatically gain 100 per cent. relief. Would it be possible for SSI land to be treated in such a way that 100 per cent. exemption from tax would apply only if some form of agreement were reached?

6.30 pm

Mr. Nelson: That possibility was raised in Committee. We resist the idea because it would draw an arbitrary and improper distinction between certain lands which could qualify for the same amount of relief. It would mean, in effect, that a hill farm which had no special heritage value might, as a going family concern, be entitled to the full 100 per cent. inheritance tax relief, while another farm which had heritage features would not obtain that status without a condition being placed on it.

The hon. Gentleman may be in favour of that—indeed, other Opposition Members have spoken, some passionately, in favour of linking access to relief—but we have not sought to do that, and to the extent that it exists, it is provided through the conditional exemption and the in-lieu provisions. They are substantial and, as has been acknowledged, they have brought much land, chattels and items of heritage to the public for inspection.

We believe that it would be wrong to create such a distinction through conditionality on certain pieces of farming land and not on others. They are both farming, going concerns—businesses—to which we are trying to give relief. It would be wrong to give it in one case with substantial conditions attached and not to do so in the other.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) challenged me to give examples of conditional exemption. He knows well that I cannot do that, not because I do not wish to do so, but because I am not allowed to do so. The principle of confidentiality in Inland Revenue matters is absolute. It is an extremely important principle for the protection of the public that they should know that their affairs with the Inland Revenue are confidential.

I shall explain why, in respect of items that are made conditionally exempt, that is known and is public. The crucial difference is that it can be at the choice of the individual, because other options are open to him to obtain conditional exemption for a work of art, other than it being placed on the list. There are other ways by which he can continue to make it available, in a conditionally exempt property, for inspection to which the public already have access. It is important to maintain the fundamental principle that there should continue to be confidentiality in Inland Revenue matters.

Mr. Bennett: I question whether the Minister's logic stands up. Is there a difference between a piece of landscape and a picture? I accept that the person with a picture has a choice; he can go for exemption, after which conditions apply. Similarly, the person with a landscape has a choice. He can sell the piece of countryside to raise money to pay the tax. It seems ridiculous to have what is an obscure list of pictures, yet it is claimed that there cannot be a list of pieces of land to which the general public are supposed to have access. How on earth can the general public benefit if they do not have the access details?

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman is right in his final point, and I concur with the sentiments that he expresses, but I invite the House to draw a distinction between the issue of access—on which we can have a positive discussion about what improvements might be sought—and the separate issue of the confidentiality of dealings with the Inland Revenue. It is not necessary to break that relationship of confidentiality to have, and improve, access. They are separate matters.

One is sometimes driven to the suspicion, as Opposition Members press the matter, that they are really talking about the identification of accumulated wealth and the circumstances of individuals—*[Interruption.]* I am pleased if their reception of that statement means that I am wrong. Opposition Members—the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) was vitriolic about it—do not like accumulations of wealth. They want all such matters to be exposed.

The question of access is a different matter, and if we want to improve access for the public to heritage lands, buildings and works of art, let us try to improve the mechanisms to make that possible. But that does not require breaking confidentiality with the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Mandelson: I assure the Minister that I am not motivated by greed. I am motivated by a desire to see everyone, no matter how big or lowly, not given opportunities to cheat the public purse or wider public interest in disreputable and unlawful ways.

I ask the Minister the question that I had intended to put to him: how would he square his commitment to increase information to facilitate the access that he believes is so important with maintaining the principle of confidentiality which he believes must be upheld?

Mr. Nelson: I shall suggest some ways in which access can be improved, and discussions are taking place about that. But we need not disrupt the basic principle to which I referred—*[Interruption.]* I shall return to the subject, but I am anxious to comment on other important matters to which hon. Members have referred.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish asked where the public benefit was in the relief. The public benefit in the inheritance tax relief in the Bill is not directed principally to the access of the public. It is directed mainly to the integrity and prosperity of family businesses and agricultural farming units. The judgment of the Government—opposed by Opposition Members, who voted against the clause—is that there is economic and employment benefit to be derived from the integrity of passing on from one generation to another the aggregation of businesses and of working family farming units.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish also asked about the ability to roam freely, and I appreciate the sentiments that drove him to ask that type of question. The Inland Revenue takes expert advice from amenity bodies, local authorities and others concerned in setting up management agreements for such land with a view to ensuring that environmental management and access schemes have the proper balance of access for the public, with the right to see and roam but also to conserve the environment. I contest whether it is always better to allow people freely to roam rather than to keep to footpaths.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) referred to the Lake district and the identity of landowners there. I do not know which of us has walked more miles in the paths of Wainwright throughout the Lake district, but I have never found much difficulty there in gaining access to outstanding lands, though that is due more to the national parks than to conditionally exempt arrangements. For the

[Mr. Nelson]

same reasons that I gave to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, we must bear in mind the issue of confidentiality.

The hon. Member for Carlisle asked why his local councillors did not know about such matters. In the overwhelming majority, if not all, of cases, local authorities would be taken into consultation with the Countryside Commission and others on the management agreements that are set up to provide access. The planning committee ought to know about that. It is for the committee to determine the way in which the information is treated. It is unlikely, however, that all council members will know such confidential details.

Mr. Martlew: The information given by the Countryside Commission to the Lake District special planning board was so vague that the officers of the board believed—correctly or otherwise—that they could not pass it on to members. I tabled a question on the matter to the Financial Secretary, who answered it in a very ambiguous fashion. Is the Economic Secretary telling us that members of local councils' planning committees and national park authorities can be told the details of such agreements?

Mr. Nelson: I am saying that local authorities are involved, and have information about land that will be subject to management agreements. I cannot speak in detail about the specific constituency points raised by the hon. Gentleman, but, if he would care to write to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary or to me, we should be delighted to follow up his comments.

The hon. Gentleman complained about not being able to obtain information from the Victoria and Albert museum list. He complained about the state of documents, and about the lack of an index. I have taken his complaints on board, and I shall deal with the V and A list in more detail shortly.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) asked how many tax inspectors were employed to ensure compliance. As I have already made clear, others are responsible for compliance with the management and access agreements, but the Inland Revenue must ensure that those arrangements are monitored effectively. We are satisfied that they are being examined as they should be, but it is not the Revenue's direct responsibility to ensure compliance with such argeements, except in the case of works of art.

The hon. Member for Darlington complained that relief was being granted to the rich, while others were receiving no privileges. He described the position as a racket, and raised questions about the Duke of Devonshire and his estates. I cannot comment on such matters, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that public rights of way cannot be removed under the agreements with which we are dealing.

As I said earlier, the hon. Gentleman's comments raised doubt about his motivation. It was not clear to me whether he was in favour of extending or of curtailing such reliefs. He seemed to have grave misgivings about the whole basis of conditional exemption. He nods, suggesting that he does not like conditional exemption—unlike most hon. Members, who have called for its extension and the provision of access in other ways. The hon. Gentleman will have to resolve that problem with his hon. Friends.

In a characteristically colourful intervention towards the end of the debate, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) talked of wealth and plunder. Perhaps he, like his hon. Friend the Member for Darlington, feels that no relief should be provided for such purposes. Presumably he would have applied the same principle to the GLC silver: banning exports of all such objects would be right up his street.

I promised to mention the conditional exemption arrangements relating to the Victoria and Albert museum list. Let me make it clear that works of art that are granted conditional exemption must be made available for viewing by the public. That can be done by displaying them either in a privately owned house or in a room that is open to the public. Publicity about the object may then be included in any general publicity. Alternatively, the owner can arrange for the object concerned to be on long-term loan to a public collection—again, publicity may be included. A third option is to allow public viewing by appointment, and to lend the object to a public collection on request.

Availability for viewing is publicised by means of an entry in the register of conditionally exempt property, which is held by the national art library in the Victoria and Albert museum—the V and A list. Copies of the list are also available in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. The register is available for inspection by members of the public. Entries in it describe the object, and provide information about the county in which it is located; they also give the name and address of a contact who can arrange viewing. In many cases, the contact will be an agent. That is an important way of providing the owners of the property with some security: the inclusion of a name other than theirs is entirely for security reasons.

The existence of the V and A list is known to art scholars and researchers, but other members of the public may well be unaware of it. Recent articles in *The Observer* will have helped to increase awareness, and I welcome that; but I reject the criticism in the articles, which suggest that the system of allowing public access to conditionally exempt items is deeply flawed. The V and A list allows interested members of the public to arrange appointments to view such works of art, thus providing reasonable public access. I urge any member of the public who consults the register and encounters difficulty in contacting the person whose name is shown on the register, or who considers that unreasonable conditions are being placed on any appointment to view, to write to the Inland Revenue's capital taxes office with details. If reasonable public access is being denied, the capital taxes office will attempt to correct the position. If that is not feasible, a deferred inheritance tax charge will be raised on the owner, based on the current value of the object. That is a considerable penalty for those who fail to comply with the conditions.

6.45 pm

Let me tell the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that the Government feel that there is scope for improving publicity for the V and A list and some of the more important items on it. The Inland Revenue, with the Department of National Heritage, is considering what can be done in that regard. In particular, they are examining the scope for regular press releases about additions to the list, and increasing awareness of the list among museum and gallery curators. The latter option could lead to feature articles about some items, with wider circulation.

The review is at an early stage, and I cannot announce any decisions now; but I am sure that the House will welcome that intitiative.

I assure the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that, in discussions with officials, I have posed many of the questions that he and his hon. Friends have raised about the working of the arrangements. I, too, believe that improvements can be made, but the way in which to achieve that is to consult the parties and authorities concerned. In that way, it will be possible to make improvements that will match the mood of the House.

Mr. Martlew: How does the existence of the list in the Victoria and Albert museum help my constituents, who live more than 300 miles away? Consulting it involves a round trip of 600 miles, and then the place may turn out to be closed, as it was last week. When will there be real public access for people all over the country? After all, the vast majority of people do not live in London. Why have the Government refused to place a copy of the list in the House of Commons Library? That is disgraceful. Why can it not be photocopied?

Mr. Nelson: I am not at all sure that the V and A list would be a best seller in the House of Commons Library. As I told the hon. Gentleman earlier, however, copies exist elsewhere—in Edinburgh and Cardiff, for instance. It is not intended to be a secret document, and, if there is a better way of promulgating the informaiton, we shall try to adopt it.

For all the reasons that I have given, I do not believe that even Opposition Members will wish to support the new clause, which refers to an entirely different matter. I believe that a warm and general welcome should be given to the assurances that I have provided, and to our genuine intention to improve access arrangements.

Mr. Chris Smith: We have got something out of the Government: they have acknowledged that the viewing arrangements at the Victoria and Albert museum are inadequate and need to be examined, and that awareness of the availability of access to works of art needs to be increased.

We have heard of the potentially tough penalties that will be imposed on someone who has claimed relief but who does not provide for public access. All that is welcome. The fact that the Minister said that he was approaching the matter in a positive spirit is also welcome. However, I am afraid that the spirit was not positive enough.

The Minister was wrong on one or two points. He was wrong when he claimed that our new clause simply addresses the question of in—lieu gifts. He has obviously not looked carefully enough at subsection (3). The new clause clearly applies to conditionally exempt transfers. That has been the nub of our debate. The Minister was also wrong when he said that Opposition Members were —I think I quote him correctly—calling for an extension of conditional relief. None of us is calling for that. What we want is to get something for conditional relief, and the "something" that we want is public access.

Mr. Cormack: There is public access. Will the hon. Gentleman be a little careful about what he is doing? The policy for preserving the heritage of this country has been evolved with the help of Members in all parts of the House. Many members of the hon. Gentleman's own party have played a distinguished and constructive part in evolving that policy. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), a former Treasury Minister, is in the Chamber. He was immensely helpful when we had a Labour Government in the 1970s. We have a bipartisan policy. The National Heritage Memorial Fund and all the strands in that policy have been built on all-party support. I implore the hon. Gentleman not to wreck it for the sake of a cheap laugh.

Mr. Smith: I am afraid that that remark was unworthy of the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have considerable respect on many of these matters. I do not demur from what he says about the importance of ensuring that works of art of great quality are kept in this country and about the need to ensure that our tax provisions and our public policy are framed accordingly. However, where inheritance tax relief is made available in return for ensuring that works of art are kept in this country, we believe that there should be reasonable and genuine public access to view those works of art. It is a simple point. In no way does it destroy the consensus to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The Minister acknowledged the disincentive effect of the new 100 per cent. agricultural relief, for which provision is made in the Finance Bill. He said, however, as though it were a great concession, that there would still be public rights of way across that agricultural land. But there would still be public rights of way whether or not relief was given, whether or not the Finance Bill goes through, whether or not the provisions of the new clause are put into effect. There is no great Government concession. A public right of way is a public right of way, and ever shall it be so.

The Minister also referred to the register in the Victoria and Albert museum. We welcome the fact that there are copies of the register in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. Why, then, is it impossible to place a copy in the Library of the House of Commons? If it is possible to make copies available for three other locations, why is it impossible to make a fourth copy available for the Library?

Mr. Tony Banks: Can my hon. Friend give the House a clue as to where these additional copies are in Edinburgh and Belfast? They are big cities. We should be able to narrow it down a bit.

Mr. Smith: I should have to yield to the Minister in order to provide my hon. Friend with that information, but the Minister does not appear to be leaping to his feet to tell us. Perhaps we shall be able to pursue the matter further in the next few days by means of a parliamentary question.

Apart from the fact that there ought to be a copy of the register in the House of Commons Library, why are we unable to go to the Victoria and Albert museum and make photocopies from the register? Why do we have to sit there and write down anything that we wish to copy from it? Why is the register not regularly updated? Why are half the contact names in the register out of date? Why is the register not properly indexed, which would enable us to look up what works of art are to be found in Cumbria or in the vicinity of Hartlepool? All those questions need to be addressed in the Minister's review.

The heart of the debate is about public information and proper public access. When pressed, the Minister said that

[Mr. Smith]

he could not give examples of areas of land where access had been made available. He said that he was not allowed to do so because of the principle of confidentiality. Breathtakingly, he went on to say that this was for the protection of the public. No person who enters into a conditionally exempt transfer is forced to do so. It is his or her choice to take up that opportunity. In return for taking it up, that person commits himself or herself to make access available.

None of us asks for details of the inheritance tax relief that any individual has secured in return for a specific agreement. All that we are asking for is information about where the access is available. That does not breach any tax confidentiality. All it does is to tell us what the benefit is to the public.

Welcome though some of the Minister's points may be, I am afraid that the concessions that he has given are far too few. Unless the new clause is passed, we shall still forgo £110 million or more every year in Exchequer income, in return for very little. There will be no information on what areas of land have been made available for public access. Inadequate and out-of-date catalogues of access to works of art will remain. Lady Clarissa Collin will continue to tell people that they cannot roam freely on her land on the North Yorkshire moors. The new clause is about public access to our heritage and our landscape. That access is not properly available at the moment. I commend the new clause to the House.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 308.

Division No. 53 **[6.57 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ms Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, James
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, William
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoff
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Ms Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Ms Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Ms Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
MacDonald, Calum
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter

Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael

Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 3

STAMP DUTY (TEMPORARY PROVISIONS) (EXTENSION)

' .—Section 1 of the Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Act 1992 shall be amended, by leaving out the words "20th August 1992" in subsection (2)(b) and inserting the words "31st March 1993.".'.—*[Dr. Marek.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Dr. Marek: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Opposition have taken the Government at their word in respect of the Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Act 1992 and now propose extending the exemption from stamp duty on the purchase of homes until March 1993. We had a trailer at Prime Minister's Question Time this afternoon. I did not get to the Chamber until about two minutes after the Leader of the House, on behalf of the Prime Minister, quoted me as having said that this legislation was a racket and a gimmick. I certainly remember saying that it was a gimmick—it was an election gimmick—but not that it was a racket. If any Minister can find the report of my words, I shall be delighted to hear exactly what I said.

It is possible that this was a genuine attempt by the Government to intervene in the market with a view to encouraging recovery from recession. If so, the Government ought to accept our new clause. If they do not accept it, we can conclude only that the Act was a gimmick for election purposes, an expedient from a Government who knew that it would not have any effect in the event of our failing to move out of recession.

7.15 pm

The reality is that we are not recovering from recession. That being the case, and as the purpose of the legislation, which was to give the economy a kick start, has not been fulfilled, what objection can there be to extending the exemption until 31 March 1993? That is a simple question to which I hope we shall get a favourable reply.

On 20 January 1992 Opposition Members said that the Bill would provide little help, that there were better ways of spending money to assist the manufacturing and construction industries. We said that capital allowances could be used and, above all, that lower interest rates would be a significant advantage. But the Government are not taking any of these steps. For a number of years we have looked in vain for Government intervention in the market to get us out of recession. The Act to which I referred amounted to Government intervention in the market, and if it was not just a gimmick we should be able to regard it as an attempt to get the economy back on its feet.

But the Ernst and Young Item Club, which published a forecast yesterday, now expects the gross domestic product to shrink by a further 0·6 per cent. this year. It says that this forecast is gloomier than most recent City predictions. That is very poor. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the economy would bounce back to a level of 1 per cent. growth this year, having contracted by 2·5 per cent. in 1991. In the Budget, he forecast that the economy would expand by 3 per cent. in 1993. Patently that is not happening. If there is to be a further contraction of 0·6 per cent. this year, as the Ernst and Young Item Club has predicted, we have a serious situation in which none of us can take any pride.

We must all agree that something has to be done. The return of consumer confidence is an absolute prerequisite. If the extension of stamp duty exemption that we seek were granted, and if it were to give the housing market a kick start, the whole economy would benefit. When people move into new houses, construction is not the only industry to benefit. New carpets, refrigerators and beds are needed, and the whole engine of the economy benefits. That is why the Opposition regard this as a very important proposal.

In an interview with David Frost on TV-am on 24 July 1991, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, referring to the recovery, said:

"It may be slow at first. It will begin probably in the housing market. These are just vague stirrings, but the signs are there."

Recently the *Evening Standard* published a long list of the Chancellor's sayings about stirrings and green shoots. I expect that hon. Members know most of them by heart, but as no doubt the House wants to make progress I shall not quote any of them. I do not think that the stirrings or signs to which the Chancellor referred in his interview with David Frost existed. He may have been right when he said that the housing market might be one of the engines of recovery upon which other recovery would depend. It is a year since he made that statement, and unfortunately house prices have continued to fall. The latest Halifax price index shows that house prices fell by 0·5 per cent. in May. They are now 6·2 per cent. lower than they were a year ago.

It may be said that the Opposition are proposing that the Government give money away liberally. Yes, this measure will cost money and the Opposition, as I said in January, believe that the money could be better spent on getting the economy working again. However, as the Government are not prepared to entertain any of our ideas on how to do that which we have put forward over a number of years, the Opposition are left with no alternative but to support the Chancellor's initiative.

The Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Act 1992 could easily be extended to the end of this financial year. It could be paid for by further postponing the exemption of duty on share transactions. That has already been done once and could easily be done again for another six months if the Government did not want to increase the PSBR. That is already £28 billion, and could be £30 billion soon, which is almost 4 per cent. of GDP, so I have every sympathy with the Government if they do not want to increase the PSBR.

There is no need to do that. I do not know whether TAURUS—the transfer by automated registration of uncertified stock—will be ready by next April, but another six months will not do any harm. If there were a choice between spending the money on the abolition of duty on share transactions and on giving further relief on stamp duty on house transactions, the Government should spend money on the latter.

In January and February, when the Bill was going through the House, we said that we thought it was an electoral gimmick with which the Government were fishing for votes. This evening, the Government have a chance of proving the Opposition wrong by admitting that we are still in recession and that the other aspects of the recessionary cycle have not changed and by agreeing to continue the exemption. If they did that and accepted the new clause, I would pay full tribute to them.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am grateful to the Opposition for tabling the new clause and allowing us to debate this important issue. However, it is absurd that, having said recently that exemption is a gimmick, they should now feel that it is not a gimmick and should want to table a new clause to extend it.

In Northampton we have the Carlsberg brewery, which claims that its beer is probably the best in the world. We also have Wilcon, a well-known company, which is probably the best house builder in the country. It knows a thing or two about house building and has been successful for a long time, and is probably more successful than anybody else at the moment. Life in the building industry in general is not easy. There are two deductions to be made from that.

When I was at Cambridge university, I read engineering, and there were about 135 of us in the engineering department, one of whom had a rather disgusting beard, wore a CND badge and was obviously barking mad. All the rest had short hair and were decent, beer-drinking, women-chasing, rugby-playing, Conservative-voting undergraduates. What was true of the engineering department of Cambridge university is true, man and boy, of the building industry. It is not just that they do not read *The Guardian*—they have never heard of it. They are Tory voters to a man.

This is not a point that I am concerned about, but I suggest that the Government take it on board. There is distress in the building industry. It does not matter if industries come and go—some industries grow, other industries come up afterwards, disasters occur, bankruptcies take place and it is all part of the general gaiety of the economy. However, by and large, all these people vote Conservative.

The second point—I think it is important even if the Government do not—concerns the green shoots of recovery. Of course they are there for everybody to see, provided that one looks carefully, has a magnifying glass, and is an optimist. I am sure that they must be there. The Government wish to get the recovery moving more quickly, so they made this concession in the Budget. It was wise of them to do so. The Government will agree that it has had an effect. Houses that would not otherwise have been bought have been bought. Therefore, it has had a positive impact on the housing market and the building industry. It may be that we have not moved very far forward, but without the exemption we might have moved backwards.

Everybody knows that there are two house buying periods a year. First, when the daffodils come into bloom and the spring starts, people start to think of moving house.

Mr. Tony Banks: And of other things in the hon. Gentleman's case.

Mr. Marlow: It takes one to know one.

In most springs, there is an upsurge in the housing market. Then people go away for their summer holidays, come back in September and have a second bite of the cherry. That is the second time in the year when the housing market is active.

I know that the Government have two cases against the extension. The first is that it will cost money. That is a bad argument, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister does not adduce it. One may not get the revenue from stamp duty because people are not paying it, but by buying houses people generate activity. As the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said, they buy carpets and equipment. Those green shoots will start thrusting through, the economy will start moving more quickly, there will be more tax revenue, and the Department of Social Security will spend less money. What might be lost from tax revenue could be gained by growth in the economy.

There is a good argument. That is, if the Government give an exemption with a time bar and then keep extending it, people will feel that, with one shove or push, the whole structure will come caving in and the Government will give in again. I can sympathise with the Government on that. However, they should extend the exemption until the end of the year. Such a concession would put into people's mind the message, "Buy while stocks last". If the exemption continues until December, it will improve the second house-buying period of the year. People will feel more impelled to buy than they might otherwise. They will feel that if they do not get on with it now, they will have to pay more later. It will give the boost to the housing market that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor suggested that it would when he introduced the measure in the Budget. The moratorium should be taken on until the end of the year. The housing market and the economy need a boost. The moratorium is part of the boost that would help us to move more quickly out of recession.

7.30 pm

If the moratorium proves that assistance, it will not make it more difficult for the Government to lower interest rates—something that we all want. It is not valid for the Government to argue that they cannot reduce interest rates because they would be forgoing the income from stamp duty if they extended the moratorium.

The concession should continue until the end of the year. The housing market should not be depressed; it should be helped. People should be helped in the second buying period of the year to bring their purchases forward. That would help the Government and the country as the economy would be moving once more.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): Anyone who looks at the housing market in London, and anyone who, like me, is trying to sell a house and buy another one, would not believe that green shoots are sprouting as though springtime—although it is summer now—is about to arrive in the housing market. It is a

[Mrs. Barbara Roche]

desperate time in London for people who are anxious to buy houses. Many of those people are first-time buyers, and they are essential to ensure that the housing market picks up.

Figures released today by the Association of London Authorities show that first-time home buyers in London will be particularly hard hit when the Government's eight-month stamp duty moratorium ends on 19 August. Higher house prices in London and the south-east mean that only 6 to 8 per cent. of first-time purchases in the region fall below the £30,000 stamp duty threshold compared with 22 per cent. nationally. The average amount paid in stamp duty in the region is higher because it is levied as a percentage of the purchase price. These figures are devastating news for Londoners who will look with absolute dismay at the Government position this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) was right to question the Government's motives and the timing of the moratorium when the stamp duty proposal was introduced to the House. He said:

"If a general election were not to be held in the next four months, the Government would have shed crocodile tears and Ministers and the Prime Minister himself at Prime Minister's Question Time would have said that nothing could be done about house repossessions."—[*Official Report* 15 January 1992; Vol. 201, c. 1064.]

Given the background, the difficulties and the moratorium on stamp duty, the housing market will face worse straits if the concession is removed.

Many things need to be done for housing. There should be a proper mortgage rescue scheme. Although it is outside the scope of the new clause, I believe that the housing market also desperately requires the phased release of receipts from council house sales so that adequate rented accommodation can be provided for the thousands of families living in unsatisfactory and high-cost bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

It would be a shame and a scandal to have a debate about housing without mentioning the thousands of families throughout the country who are in the misery of bed-and-breakfast accommodation and whom we see every week in our surgeries. We deal with their cases every day and we have to tell them that basically nothing can be done because the Government do not have the heart or decency to act.

Having established the moratorium, the Government, although they claim that they do not believe in interfering with the market, do not seem to be able to leave it alone. It is worth considering the comments of the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate):

"the housing market will certainly come to a stop on 20 August. How many property transactions will take place on that day or during the succeeding weeks? Are we really contemplating cessation of this exemption in mid-August? That is hardly a practical proposition, and I ask Ministers to think again about it . . . Ministers must recognise that it is impractical to suspend a tax for eight months while applying it to sums above an artificial threshold."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1992; Vol. 201, c. 1068.]

Indeed, Mr. Melville-Ross, the chief executive of the Nationwide building society and chairman of the Council of Mortgage Lenders, has also said that the decision not to extend the stamp duty holiday beyond the August deadline could be "fatal". Ministers must deal with this and respond to it.

Given the background and the dire straits of the housing market, I urge hon. Members to support the new clause in order to make a small impact on the horrendous mess which is the housing market under the Conservative Government.

Sir Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): There is no doubt that the construction industry faces severe problems and that the housing market is depressed. The House will know of my interest in such matters.

Without any doubt, the Government's decision earlier this year was welcomed by the industry at large. Ministers have said on many occasions over many years that the construction industry is the barometer of the economy. So much depends on confidence. Whether or not the green shoots are there, as my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) said, it is generally held that the elements for the recovery are in place, but there is little evidence of that recovery taking place in substantial measure at the present time.

The moratorium on stamp duty had some effect, although I am bound to say that it did not have the dramatic effect that some of us might have hoped for. There was a slight post-election surge in interest in the housing market, but unfortunately that has fallen back. The House will be interested and, I hope, concerned to note that the figures from the House-Builders Federation for May are worse than they were for May 1991. Indeed, the June figures are likely to be worse than the May figures. The present position on stamp duty has not had the desired effect.

However, it is equally clear that if one accepts that the construction industry is capable of leading the recovery, the signals that we send to it are very important. Confidence is at the heart of the exercise. I believe that this debate is about confidence. That is what the Government are attempting to address at the moment.

If the elements for recovery are in place, it is clear that the only element that is lacking is confidence. When it resumes, people will begin to buy houses and that will have a ripple effect throughout the housing market which will be of enormous benefit.

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman referred to a surge in house buying after the general election. Does he accept that there was actually a 9 per cent. reduction in property transactions between April and May?

Sir Malcolm Thornton: I am not certain what the hon. Gentleman is basing his figures on, but the evidence from the organisations concerned showed that there was an increase in interest after the election, which reflected people's confidence in the return of a Conservative Government. Clearly, the anticipated recovery has not proceeded in the way for which we hoped.

Much has been made of the early-day motion to which I and many of my hon. Friends have put our names. It reflected our belief that the Government's policies of encouraging home ownership over the years have been right and that there is still among our fellow citizens a substantial desire to own their own homes.

The construction industry has played a major part in making available at the right price homes that people want to buy. The early-day motion said that we hoped—the words were picked very carefully—that the Government would recognise the importance of doing everything that they could to stimulate the building and construction

industry. It added that if the Government could see their way to keeping or extending the moratorium, that would help. That remains the position.

We want the Government to give every assistance that they possibly can to an industry which we firmly believe is capable of leading the country out of recession and of leading us to the confidence that we believe is necessary.

We recognise that our right hon. Friend the Chancellor has enormous difficulty in balancing the various competing claims. At the end of the day, my right hon. Friend and his Treasury Ministers must judge exactly where they can best use the resources that are available to them. I shall have no difficulty in accepting what my right hon. and hon. Friends have to say in making their judgment. They are in possession of all the facts, and they know exactly—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members can scoff as much as they like, but they cannot have it both ways. They previously regarded the measure as a gimmick and they are now seeking to try to embarrass the Government because some of my colleagues have ventured to suggest that the Government should consider something. We do that all the time. Putting one's name to an early-day motion is not a gesture of rebellion; it is an expression of opinion. The sooner Opposition Members realise that, the better.

I reiterate that the building and construction industry is capable of making a major contribution to the recovery that we badly need. It is capable of leading the economy out of recession, particularly that difficult sector, the housing market. If my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider what they can do to stimulate the industry, we shall be content that the matter has been raised. For argument's sake, perhaps they will want to consider lowering the ceiling, recognising that a large proportion —about 70 per cent.—of all housing transactions involve sums of less than £80,000.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): My hon. Friend speaks, as he has acknowledged, for the major construction companies. I should like him to accept—I am sure that he does—that his views are shared by smaller and medium-sized companies as represented by the Federation of Master Builders, whose parliamentary adviser I am. Does my hon. Friend accept that, in view of all that we have done for home ownership, one point that the Government might consider is that the time might come when the Chancellor is able to consider abolition of stamp duty altogether? It represents a tax on home ownership. What are we as Conservatives doing perpetuating a tax which has already been abolished for shares and other transactions and which remains a tax on home ownership?

Sir Malcolm Thornton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that, in the long term, that very desirable matter will be fully considered by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the Treasury team. Bedevilled as they are by advice from every quarter—many people urging them to spend money as though it is going out of fashion, yet urging them to contain public expenditure—they have some very difficult choices to make.

7.45 pm

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor received a letter from the managing director of a major construction company, the Berkeley Group plc, who said:

"I personally believe that the housing market is the barometer of the economy and until such time as it recovers and the public in general have a feeling of well being, I do not believe that the economy as a whole will recover as the Government is hoping for."

I endorse that remark. We recognise that until confidence is back and the recovery starts, we will be in a depressed period. I do not envy the task of my right hon. and hon. Friends, but I urge them to recognise the importance of that major industry and the vital contribution that it can make in leading us into the recovery that we all want.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): The hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) overestimates his importance and that of his colleagues who signed the early-day motion. It is not their credibility that is at stake; it is that of the Chancellor and the Government.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) for referring to the green shoots of recovery, as that is the background against which the matter should be viewed. I shall add a northern voice to the discussion and tell the House what is happening to the green shoots of recovery in my home city. In Leeds in 1990, the unemployment figure was 22,476. That and the other figures that I shall give are the registered unemployed figures. The House knows the difference between the real level of unemployment and the real poverty that it causes and the registered figures which totally understate the position. In 1991, when the Chancellor introduced the measure, unemployment in Leeds climbed to 30,122, a 30 per cent. increase. As we discuss this matter, the unemployment figure is 35,102, which represents a 47 per cent. increase since 1990.

Does that sound like the green shoots of recovery? If Conservative Members think so, let us consider employment in the construction industry. Unfortunately, the 1992 figures will not be available until Thursday, but the 1991 figures relating to employment in that industry both in the country and——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to relate his figures to stamp duty. He is straying rather wide.

Mr. Mudie: I hope that in a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will see the picture that I am attempting to draw.

I was dealing with the green shoots of recovery. The suspension of stamp duty was either a cynical measure to take matters relating to repossessions and so on off the front pages, or a genuine attempt by the Chancellor to bring forward the recovery by making a move in the housing sector that would help the construction industry, the retail industry, and unemployment. I give two figures to demonstrate my point. Employment in the construction industry, despite the suspension of stamp duty, continues to decline. In Leeds 95,000 people were employed in the construction industry in 1990, but that has fallen by 14 per cent. For Britain as a whole the figure has fallen by 13 per cent.

The second figure is for property transactions—Conservative Members will surely accept that they are closely related to the matter with which we are dealing. The hon. Member for Crosby challenged my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) about the figures for property transactions in England and Wales. In May last year there were 111,000 property transactions. In May this year, with stamp duty abolished, the figure was 83,000. Conservative Members may think that that is a one-off

[Mr. Mudie]

figure but the figures for the preceding months are April: 91,000; March: 90,000; February: 89,000; January: 79,000.

So if we consider unemployment in the construction industry and property transactions, the picture is bad. Unemployment continues to grow generally. Unemployment in the construction industry continues to grow and property transactions continue to fall. *[Interruption.]* You are well aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in Yorkshire that is the highest office that one can assume. So you will understand the tribute that I take from that remark.

When stamp duty was abolished the Chancellor of the Exchequer was accused of being cynical because of the closeness of the election. On 19 December he said:

"But I recognise that there is a wider concern about the depressed state of the housing market, which has consequences for home owners in general and for the wider economy. I therefore have one further announcement to make."

The announcement was the abolition of stamp duty. He continued:

"I have decided to use a portion of that additional revenue to help encourage and facilitate transactions in the housing market."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 454.]

If in those circumstances he felt that it was necessary to encourage property transactions, we must ask the Economic Secretary as we approach August, with unemployment continuing to rise, home sales continuing to fall and unemployment in the construction industry continuing to grow, why on earth he is reintroducing stamp duty.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): We take it that the Government are genuine in this matter. I have received a letter from a building firm in my constituency saying that it had hoped that the Government's measure of a moratorium on stamp duty

"would have provided a little extra confidence and possibly urgency within the house sale market. Unfortunately this has proved not to be the case".

That is a major building firm in north Wales, Cheshire and the north-west. If the Chancellor was genuine, surely he should have given the measure time to work. The Minister should therefore support the Opposition new clause. That would meet the point that my hon. Friend makes.

Mr. Mudie: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us have some tolerance in the House. We all appreciate the difficulties for new Members.

Mr. Mudie: When stamp duty was abolished the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and others said that if £410 million were available, the money could have been spent better elsewhere. That is still a valid point and that is the issue tonight. Has the Minister come to the Chamber to say that the money will be spent elsewhere or is the measure a precursor of the autumn expenditure cuts? Will the money be spent elsewhere? It will not be spent on training, research and development or any measure to help the economy. Is it simply the beginning of public expenditure cuts?

On 2 June, in answer to the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate), the Minister seemed to imply that the measure was simply to save money. He said:

"The yield costs are considerable, and we cannot afford to ignore the impact on the borrowing requirements of Government. . . . We simply cannot ignore such money in the current equations on public expenditure."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1992; Vol. 208, c. 770.]

In my constituency, as in Leeds as a whole, unemployment is growing. People look to the Government to give assistance and help. Tonight people see the answer. The money which was provided and which the Chancellor said was aimed at helping the economy, relieving unemployment and helping the construction industry and house sales is being withdrawn simply to save money in the forthcoming public expenditure round. That would lead the people in my constituency to agree with those who said that the Government were acting cynically and arranging something for the election rather than seeking to help the millions of people who faced unemployment in the city.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I have some sympathy with the new clause. I strongly supported the Chancellor when he introduced the moratorium. I do not believe for one moment that it was a gimmick. It may well have been a vote-catcher but what is wrong with that in a democracy? Listening to Opposition Members, one would think that they did not want any votes. Judging by the results of the election, they did not get many. There is nothing whatever wrong in vote-catching.

I supported the abolition of stamp duty first because I have always disliked it. It is a ridiculous tax. It is perhaps a little better than the window tax of many years ago, but it is not a sensible tax and it should always be substantially reduced. I have always welcomed reductions in it. Secondly, in the wretched recession that we are suffering, there is no doubt that the construction industry and the housing market are the most serious aspect. They were the first to suffer, and they are suffering considerably. The housing market is a major factor in the confidence on which so much depends.

Indeed, I would go further and say that a major factor in bringing back the confidence that we require to bring us out of the recession is a return to confidence in housing, house ownership and a property-owning democracy. In my time in Parliament I have been through all sorts of economic crises. There was stop-go and devaluation under the Labour party. All sorts of remedies have been suggested including monetarism and interventionism. None of them works. But the one thing that has been absolutely certain in the mind of the public throughout the ups and downs has been the thought that they owned a little bit of this country—their property. They believed in the old saying, "As safe as houses." That saying has existed for many years. To feel as safe as houses is a solid bedrock through the ups and downs of the economy and the proposed remedies.

Unfortunately, the unease which has crept in in recent years has destroyed that confidence. That is a major factor in the lack of confidence. Let me hasten to say that I do not blame my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister or my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for that. The trouble arose during the previous regime, because of the ludicrous boom stimulated by the previous Chancellor, the noble Lord Lawson, and his absurd mortgage tax relief proposals, which encouraged young people, including my

daughter, to rush into buying houses like mad. That was what stimulated a lot of this nonsense, and it was an artificial boom.

If we manage to stimulate the housing market now, it is not likely that another boom will occur for many years. Banks and building societies are not so stuffed with money, nor are people sufficiently confident that they will take on loans with high interest rates, as another shift in value might mean that they would find themselves with a mortgage which was higher than the value of their property. There is no danger of another "Lawsonian" boom. Therefore, the Chancellor can feel confident about giving a boost to the economy. That is why he should apply his mind seriously to amendments such as new clause 3 and to the words of the early-day motion in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), which also touched upon the matter.

8 pm

I recognise the importance of curbing public expenditure; I realise that it is fundamental to our economy. I am told that the stamp duty concession is worth about £600 million. Whatever it is, the sum involved is substantial. I therefore recognise that it plays a part in the public expenditure round.

Unlike the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie), I do not want the Government to cancel the concession and to spend the money instead on some folderol, which would be entirely counter to their general economic thrust. I should be happy if they used the money on the general, essential needs of the economy.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Since when has building homes for people been a folderol? We have heard what the hon. Gentleman has had to say about the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the noble Lord for Blaby. Was there a single occasion when he voted against any measure introduced by the previous Chancellor?

Sir Anthony Grant: I never said that building houses was a folderol. As regards voting, if all of us had to bow down for errors in the way that we had voted, I am afraid that we would never stand up again. At least I accept my errors as much as anyone, and at least I was not Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time.

I am strongly in support of what I understand to be the policy of curbing public expenditure. I hope that that will be done with a view to lowering interest rates, which is more important than reducing or abolishing stamp duty. That is a fundamental factor in the confidence equation. If my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary tells me in his winding-up speech that the purpose of cancelling the moratorium is not merely to fritter the money away but is a fundamental means of reducing interest rates, I shall happily support whatever he advises on the new clause. Whatever he proposes—*[Interruption.]* I have found that nearly everything that the Opposition propose is doomed to failure and disaster, so I shall also be guided by that factor.

In all seriousness, the damage to confidence and to the concept of a property-owing democracy is extremely sad. I have believed in that theory throughout my political life. The Government and the Conservative party have always believed that encouraging people to buy is essential to our way of life. It is a bulwark against the ever-encroaching power of the state which the Opposition always encourage. I therefore hope that the concept of a property-owning democracy has not disappeared and that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will express some sympathy, on behalf of the Treasury and of the Government, for the plight of the construction industry and of people who believed in such a democracy and who are now in a state of great unease. I hope that he will say something to reassure them. We shall listen with keen interest to his reply. In the words of the sergeant major who saw his junior NCO allowing a body of troops to walk to the precipice, "For God's sake say something, even if it's only goodbye."

Mr. Hoon: New clause 3 sets out a stark choice for the Government and their supporters: they either plead guilty to the charge that they used up to £400 million of public money for electioneering, on a failed policy of kick-starting the housing market, or they accept the new clause and allow the housing market time to make some sort of recovery. Either the Government believe in the policy that they so eloquently advocated in December and January or they admit to raiding the public purse to secure their re-election.

When moving the Second Reading of the Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill in January this year, the then Financial Secretary said:

> "The purpose of the measure is to encourage people considering buying houses to get on with buying their houses or flats and to prompt others to bring forward their purchases to take advantage of the moratorium."

That manifestly has not worked. The housing market remains flat, which is why I am prepared to give the Government the benefit of the doubt and to allow a little more time for the proposal to work. The then Financial Secretary admitted that that might be necessary because he added:

> "It will, of course, be a little while before the effects of the measure show up in the levels of house sales."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 117.]

New clause 3 is a modest proposal to give a little more time—as advocated by the then Financial Secretary—for the housing market to recover.

If the Government were so enthusiastic about extending stamp duty relief in December and January, why are they choosing to abandon that policy now? One answer not available to them is to say that they can withdraw the extra relief because the policy has worked. Whatever else the Government may claim, they cannot say that the extra relief has helped the housing market in any way. If we compare the figures for January to May 1991 with those for January to May 1992, we find that there was a 24 per cent. reduction in property transactions.

For the benefit of the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), who challenged the statistics earlier, I should add that those figures were supplied by the Library and are based on the Government's figures for property transactions. Those figures illustrate a steady downward trend throughout 1992, when compared with the equivalent period in 1991. Notwithstanding the availability of extra relief, which came into force on 15 January, that trend continued.

There is no evidence from the statistics that the Government's scheme has had the effect that the then Financial Secretary said that it would have, unless it is the Government's case that the decline in property transactions would have been greater but for the availability of extra relief. If that is their case, it is time that they said so. Otherwise, we risk a sudden surge at the end

[Mr. Hoon]

of August, as people understandably try to complete transactions before relief ends, followed by a chronic reduction in demand.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Could the hon. Gentleman explain why, if the measure has had no noticeable effect on the housing market, he thinks that we should continue with it?

Mr. Hoon: For precisely the reasons that the then Financial Secretary gave in January—he said that the measure would take a little time. If the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) looks at that speech, he will find that the then Financial Secretary referred to people's difficulties in finding homes, the time taken by the legal procedure and the time necessary to complete. There simply has not been enough time.

The purpose of new clause 3 is to allow a little more time, precisely as the then Financial Secretary set out. The question by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) implied that the scheme was not justified in the first place and that the Government were simply gambling up to £400 million of taxpayers' money in trying to secure an upturn in the market. I presume that the hon. Gentleman is now saying that that policy was doomed to failure in any event. Is he really saying that the policy has failed?

Mr. Tim Smith: I am hoping to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not wish to prolong the hon. Gentleman's speech.

Mr. Hoon: The Government may be tempted to tell us the truth for a change and to say that their policy was the shortest of short-term policies. It was designed to get the Government through the election but no further and is now to be abandoned, despite the evidence of a severe housing crisis throughout the country.

The current state of the British housing market has caused a record number of repossessions. One in five of the houses currently on the market is available as a result of repossession or people voluntarily giving up their keys without waiting for appropriate legal proceedings. Those houses remain to be sold and the market will remain flat until they are sold and demand picks up.

The fall in the value of houses has had a further effect on the level of demand and has led to a debt trap in which 1·8 million people are borrowing more money than the current value of their house. Their mortgages and loans against their house are much larger than its actual value, and they are unlikely to risk selling those properties and trying to move on while they are saddled with a substantial debt.

Against that background, the Government have decided to restore stamp duty to its 1991 level and the fragile housing market will be given yet another serious blow inspired by the Government's misguided policies. That is not simply my view. We heard earlier the opinion of the chairman of the Council of Mortgage Lenders, who said that such a measure would be fatal to any recovery in the housing market.

How do the Government propose to stimulate the housing market? Must we wait for another election before we can expect further action to help the housing market?

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I speak as a supporter of the Government, but as a supporter they would probably prefer not to have. When the moratorium measure first came up, I supported it out of loyalty. I now support its abolition out of conviction.

Both sides of the House have been playing at competitive populism. The British economy is deformed by the housing market. When hon. Members talk about the "barometer of the economy", the "engine of the economy" and "leading us out of recession", they use damaging phrases that have gained currency in this country. People observing the British economy have said for years that such talk cripples British economic prospects because it sustains the illusion that the economy can be run on a pile of sterile bricks and mortar.

I know exactly what the argument is about because I, too, have many small builders in my constituency. I do not need to discuss the matter because I understand it. I have been to many houses where a little van is parked outside at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, showing that the small business induced by the housing folly has collapsed and that the owner of that business has lost his job. Based on that business, he has bought an over-priced house for £90,000 that is now worth only £60,000.

The House should not sustain the bubble of that illusion, yet in some way hon. Members on both sides of the House have sustained it for years. I do not subscribe to phrases like "barometer of the economy". The housing market may be a barometer of the economy but it should not be, because this country will not come out of recession into permanent prosperity on the back of a pile of bricks and mortar, the price of which is artifically supported by Government subsidy.

8.15 pm

Dr. Marek: I listened to the hon. Gentleman with interest but I hope that he does not misrepresent the Opposition's view. It will help if we can get the housing market moving again but the Opposition have always held the belief that the prosperity of this country is based on high quality investment in manufacturing industry and the export of services as well as manufactures. That is the prime requisite of any successful industrial economy.

Mr. Walden: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman felt moved to correct himself because I sense a note of defensiveness in his remarks. In my view, it is highly justified.

When we talk about the primacy of confidence in the housing market we mean higher prices, so why beat about the bush? If the measure were to succeed—hon. Members on both sides of the House have suggested that it has not had much effect—in promoting "confidence", it would mean higher house prices and higher mortgages. All the crocodile tears about first time buyers are rubbish, because it would mean people gearing up from paying the preposterous current rate of 3·9 times of their incomes to paying even more. It is a deformity of the British economy and does not happen to the same extent in other countries. It deforms people's lives, which are geared to trying to meet that 3·9 times of their income for years, stretching to their middle age.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood) *rose—*

Mr. Walden: May I finish my emotional outburst and then I shall give way.

Those mortgage repayments will stretch across the horizon, while the people sit at home and eat baked beans and do not go out and enjoy themselves as I would prefer them to do.

Mr. Wilkinson: Whether they eat baked beans is neither here nor there. What is at issue is whether it is sound policy for the value of houses to continue to decline and the market to be so depressed that many thousands of people are in the miserable position of realising that the equity value of their property is less than the value of their mortgage. They are therefore totally locked in and face penury. Anything that can be done to do away with that misery, whether by continuing the relief or, more sensibly, by cutting interest rates, should have the support of the House.

Mr. Walden: My hon. Friend has spoken to the feeling side of the nation. I want to do the impossible and appeal to its rational sense, which I have reason to believe exists. I have met people in my surgery who are trapped by a policy for which the Conservative party bears much responsibility—leading people to believe throughout the 1980s that the be-all and end-all of economic activity was to get on the housing ladder. It was wrong of us to do so. I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) that Conservative policy is to create a property-owning democracy. Property does not mean houses, and Conservatives, especially modern Conservatives, do not tell people what to do with their money. We give them the choice. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Housing and Planning said in a recent speech, the real choice that we should encourage is between whether people want to own or privately rent their house. It is wrong of us to continue to encourage, even at the present sotto voce level, this mumbo jumbo about home ownership.

People must decide whether they want to own their homes. We must try to level the market and allow them to decide. The priority should not be to encourage home ownership, even by this relatively piddling measure—although £600 million is not piddling and could be better used than to prop up prices artificially. We do not want confidence if it means higher prices; we want stability, rationality and common sense in the housing market, and that means the minimum possible subsidies.

Sir Anthony Grant: I do not dissent from my hon. Friend's view, but he appears to think that there is some marvellous alternative—that people can either buy property or privately rent it. That is not the case. It was true before the war, but since then—because of the trembling structure of the rent Acts, because of the hostility of Labour Governments to landlords and their belief in having council house ghettos all over the place—there has not been that choice. We believe that people should have a choice and own their homes if that is what they want. The point is that there has been little choice; I only wish that there were.

Mr. Walden: If my hon. Friend is handing me arrows to fire at the Opposition, I am happy to let loose with them. The debate is relatively small stuff compared with the £6 billion to £8 billion—a third of the education budget—that we spend, most of it wasted, on propping up the housing market through mortgage tax relief. We all know the story of that. We are discussing a minor amount of taxation on house buying, yet at the other end of the scale we are giving £6 billion to £8 billion of indiscriminate tax relief to rich and poor alike. My points are directly relevant to the overall view, on which I am sure the Treasury rightly keeps an eye, of the housing market. Let us try for once to be a little rational and cool and not mislead the public, or lead them again along a path that has brought many families to the brink of financial ruin.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): My hon. Friend's case is that the purpose of the moratorium on stamp duty was to increase house prices. Surely he does not expect us to believe that. Most of us do not want an increase in house prices. The purpose of the moratorium was to improve liquidity in the market.

Mr. Walden: As I explained earlier, I supported the original proposal for a moratorium, although I was in two minds about it. My hon. Friend has eloquently expressed one of those minds. I did not want then, and I do not want now, the housing market to go into a precipitous slump because so deformed is our economy by the housing market that we cannot risk that happening. If it did, a whole series of dreadful things would happen in the City and elsewhere. Indeed, some are already happening. One reason why I supported the Government was that I wanted the housing market to be held steady rather than watch it go into an abyss.

What is now happening in the housing market looks suspiciously like stability. That is not a bad thing. We should not lead people to believe that the price of their house can grow exponentially over the years with no effort from them, and that the Government have a duty to sustain inflated house prices for all time. Some people argue—in my view, out of the back of their heads—that mortgage tax relief should be increased to boost prices still further.

I could continue like this, but I have taken enough time. I am trying to break through the collusive populism in the House on this matter, which has been so damaging to the country—especially the poorer sector—by misleading people in the economic organisation of their lives. Only a few hundred million pounds is involved, but this time the Government are getting it right.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): It is a rare event, but I could go along with about two thirds of the speech of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden). Indeed, I am more likely to agree with him than are many of his hon. Friends. He said that our economy was deformed by the way in which the housing market works. He made an important point in his comments about mortgage tax relief. I am sure that he would agree, as most economists agree, that the boom in 1987-88 was very much led by the property market, just as the recession has also been very much led by it. As prices fell, so the economy moved deeper into depression.

It is not healthy for any economy to be in that position. It is also unusual. The United States and almost all European economies do not operate in the same way as Britain because they do not have the same over-dependence on what happens in the property market, whichever way it moves.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the Government's central mistake since 1979 has been their belief that there is an automatic virtue attached to home ownership. There

[Mr. George Howarth]

is not, and nor is there anything virtuous about renting. It is just a simple transaction that people make and it should not be based on which is the most subsidised option; it should be based on what circumstances suit an individual and his family at any given point in their lives.

In the longer term, we must move away from that over-dependence on one tenure because it has such a dramatic impact on the economy. Not only is it not good social policy; it is appalling economic policy. The hon. Gentleman described the effects of that. From his tone, I suspect that he would have gone further in his point about mortgage tax relief. It does not have any economic benefit and, strictly speaking, it does not help anyone to buy a home. Most objective commentators—not generally politicians—such as the two national inquiries into housing led by the Duke of Edinburgh have said that mortgage tax relief achieves nothing in housing policy.

The difficulty, and it is not unique to the Government, is that every political party that seriously wants power—with the exception of the Liberal Democrats, who usually do not expect to be taken seriously—has a difficult political problem because so many people receive mortgage tax relief. The economic and social aspects are different matters.

At various times some of my hon. Friends, most recently my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), have tried across the Dispatch Box to interest Ministers in finding a politically acceptable solution that would break the logjam of that problem, but so far they have shown no interest in reaching any accommodation. In the long run, a Government—or, I hope, a combination of major political parties—must reach consensus because we cannot go on in this way. The problem will not wither on the vine for a long time unless action is taken. We cannot be certain that stamp duty relief has had any appreciable effect on the property market. The state of the construction industry is so appalling—with low unemployment, a small number of starts, and every other indicator depressed—that something must be done.

In the absence of a comprehensive package of measures of the kind that a Labour Government would have introduced, we must lend our support to stamp duty relief. It is not a wonderful innovation, and something more comprehensive is needed to deal with the real crisis in the construction industry. However, it is worth persevering, in the hope that that relief will eventually have some effect. I have no great enthusiasm for that policy, but in the pragmatic hope that it will have some useful effect, I will support my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Lobby.

8.30 pm

Mr. Wilkinson: Every now and then, we would do well to ask ourselves whether, especially on this side of the House, we have truly kept faith with our electors in housing matters. We have spent much of our political and parliamentary careers urging and encouraging people to realise their natural family aspiration to own their own home. By and large, we have been successful in that; but if we had been more successful, this debate would be neither so prolonged nor so intense. Nor would we have opened the *Evening Standard* a few days ago to see my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer portrayed as innocent cherubs—somewhat podgy, but surprisingly underclothed.

The Opposition's new clause is very much in the spirit of early-day motion 307, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton). The Government would have done well to use the interval between the publication of that early-day motion and this predictable debate to announce new measures to stimulate the housing market and to make it easier for people, particularly first time buyers, to purchase their own homes. They noticeably did not do so.

In that interval, I received letters from Prowting Homes, whose headquarters is located in Ruislip. It is a big company which contributes to the local economy, and it urges that stamp duty relief be maintained for some time yet. The same is said by Taylor Woodrow, which is no inconsiderable company. For Taylor Woodrow to have written in similar vein suggests that it has negated the apophthegm that he who pays the Tory piper calls the Conservative Government's tune. A similar letter came from Ideal Homes, which is not located in Ruislip, but which no doubt builds desirable residences all around the country.

The facts are—and I wish that the Government and the House would pay more attention to the facts—that average house prices in London have fallen by no less than one quarter since the peak of the boom in 1989. That is a substantial decline, and the fastest that I have experienced during my 17 years in the House. It indicates that there is a prima facie case for stamp duty relief to be extended. If the market is so depressed, any ameliorating measure, such as perpetuating stamp duty relief, should be welcomed.

That relief pales into insignificance compared with the measure that is really required—the reduction of interest rates by about 2½ per cent. Given that the Government are either unwilling or unable to do so, the next best thing must surely be to maintain stamp duty relief.

Lord Healey, when he was a Member of this House, used to remind us in his engaging way that one of the first things that one learns in politics is that if one is in a hole, it is better to stop digging. The big hole in which our economy finds itself is the result of maintaining astronomically high levels of real interest for far too long.

It was done not because inflation was out of control but because in our membership of the exchange rate mechanism a rate of 2·95 deutschmarks to the pound is some kind of totem or shibboleth. Would it adversely affect my constituents in Ruislip and Northwood—or the other people of London whose house values have declined so much and so fast—if the pound were worth instead only 2·83 deutschmarks or 2·75 deutschmarks? What matters to them is that they can service their mortgages, or can afford a mortgage to enter the property market in the first place.

Mr. Walden: I genuinely do not understand my hon. Friend's argument. He seems to be saying that the Government should provide a stimulus to the housing market—which in my terms means higher prices—so that first-time buyers can buy property.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend may not understand, but many young people who want to buy a home understand very well. The marginal extra increment on the

cost of house purchase represented by stamp duty can make all the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful transaction.

The cynical may argue that stamp duty relief represents only 1 per cent. of the purchase price, and that house values need to fall only by this amount to have the same effect. However, property values have already fallen 6 per cent. on average over the past year. Do we want them to fall further to meet the objective achieved by stamp duty relief?

Reintroducing stamp duty would be to impose a direct tax on mobility and flexibility in the employment market. At a time when substantial and dramatic changes in employment patterns—with companies in various sectors of industry feeling the pinch, and other large companies going out of business—are forcing people to sell up and to move elsewhere for jobs, the Government are making the process more difficult by their desire to reimpose the stamp duty the relief of which new clause 3 seeks to perpetuate a little longer.

Would it not be wiser to consider over the winter period whether other measures could be introduced, such as the cut in interest rates that I suggested? Or stamp duty might be abolished altogether, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) has cogently urged over the years on the basis of his professional experience. After all, there are few areas left in which the House has genuine discretion in tax matters.

It is a matter of principle that we should at least consider using it in this instance. Without the approval of the House, we forwent the right to reduce VAT below 15 per cent. in the next four years. In days gone by, the reduction of indirect taxation was one of the primary methods that the Government used to restimulate the economy. Now we have deliberately eschewed it and I find this exceedingly strange.

My distinguished and learned hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) said that it did not particularly matter whether the housing and construction industries were stimulated and that we should not look to bricks and mortar to regenerate our economy. What was he looking to? Was he looking to the export market? There is not much of a growing export market to the United States where the recession is so deep, or to Japan which is facing such parlous economic problems, or to Europe which faces recession as we do. Anyway, with an artificially over-valued currency, it is all the more difficult for our exporters to get into those markets.

What about aerospace? We all know about the difficulties of the airlines and the retrenchments in that business. What about motor cars? The motor industry is hardly the booming sector for which some people had hoped. What about defence and what about consumption? The savings ratio is so high that one cannot look to the high street to regenerate the economy. Therefore, the costs of extending the relief for a little longer are relatively small.

The Government have shown by their actions that they are not especially concerned about public expenditure: just before the election the public sector pay settlement was ahead of inflation, child benefit was uprated in line with inflation instead of introducing child tax allowances, £1 billion was allocated to the inner cities——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but we are debating new clause 3, not the entire economy.

Mr. Wilkinson: Against those examples of massive increases in public expenditure, to which I add the net contribution to the European Community, the extension of this relief is small beer. That is why I believe that the Opposition have done the House a favour in tabling the new clause and giving us an opportunity to air the arguments.

I accept that the Government said from the outset that the relief would be temporary. They are sticking to their intentions and carrying them out, and, I suppose, one should applaud that, however wrong-headed the end results. I shall not oppose the Government, but I shall not support them because I believe that the constructive criticisms which I have deployed were worth deploying, and I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will take note of them.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I shall be brief because this has been a long debate and many hon. Members still wish to contribute. I believe that the new clause should be supported because it offers a small but practical incentive to persuade house buyers to enter the property market to get things moving again.

It is extraordinary that the Government are proposing to end the moratorium on stamp duty at this time. I wonder whether they really believe that the worst is over for the housing market. Many hon. Members, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), drew attention to some of the key housing market indicators. All hon. Members will have seen them, and there is no sign that the worst is over. The latest Halifax index shows that house prices fell again in May. In the first quarter of 1992, there were more than 16,500 repossessions. In 1991, 75,500 houses were repossessed, and those figures represent a 72 per cent. increase over 1990.

All hon. Members know from their constituency surgeries and advice sessions for their constituents that the problems of mortgage arrears continue unabated. There is a massive problem in many constituencies, not least in mine, for people who are living in houses which are heavily mortgaged. Their mortgages now exceed the value of their houses. There are 1·5 million people living in such depressing circumstances.

The Government simply cannot believe that this is the right time to lift the moratorium on stamp duty because it is evident that the housing market is still acutely depressed. If the Government are wrong and believe that the housing market is set to boom, and if some of the green shoots to which hon. Members have referred are apparent in the economy—although I believe that the green shoots, if they ever existed, have shrivelled up and dropped off by now—will they assure the House that they will draw up a fresh set of proposals to deal with the serious problems with which many of our constituents have to live?

I find it difficult to appreciate and understand the argument about cost. As I understand it, the Government want to lift by 1993 the stamp duty in respect of share transactions. If my figures are correct, that will cost the Government nearly twice as much as extending the moratorium on housing purchases.

The housing market is still in the doldrums as a result not only of the recession, which continues in my constituency and many others, but of many years of very

[Mr. John Hutton]

high interest rates. Although the recent cuts in interest rates are welcome, they have not slowed the number of repossessions or reduced the extent of mortgage arrears.

8.45 pm

We have heard some eloquent and rather philosophical contributions from Conservative Members, but what underscores the issue that we are debating is the fact that the Government do not have a credible housing policy. It is not enough to trot out the rather limp and tired slogans about the property-owning democracy. For many people who accepted the advice of the Government and were encouraged to buy their own homes, the reality of repossession and high personal debt has left a bad taste. A relevant housing policy should encompass the private as well as the public sector, tenants as well as home owners. Sadly, we are some way from such a credible housing policy.

I shall say one or two brief words about the extent of the housing difficulties being experienced in my constituency. I took the trouble to consult all the estate agents in my constituency, and they have provided me with some interesting and relevant material for the debate. The local housing market is depressed for two reasons.

First, as many hon. Members know, it is depressed because of the many job losses in the past two years at Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd., which has led to a general lowering of confidence in the future. In fact, it has led to deep concern about what the future holds for people in Barrow and Furness. Secondly, and in particular, it is depressed because of the high level of redundancies among apprentices in my constituency, young men and women who have this year completed their four-year indentures. They have recently been declared redundant and, of course, they are the prospective first-time buyers in my local housing market. They now face the prospect of an uncertain period on the dole—it could be long or short, but we do not know—so there is no prospect of their considering the expensive option of purchasing their own property. Those combined effects have left the local property market in a sadly depressed condition, to which local estate agents see no signs of a substantive recovery.

In that context, all my local estate agents have said in recent days that they want the Government to extend the moratorium on stamp duty. They do not believe that we can press a button, as it were, to extend the moratorium and suddenly create a whole new climate of optimism in the housing market. It is a complex and sensitive market, but it lies at the root of confidence in the economy as a whole, and until confidence returns to the housing market we shall not see green shoots springing up anywhere in the economy.

I accept the view of my local estate agents that this is an important moment not to end the moratorium on stamp duty on house purchases. In my constituency, as elsewhere, ending the moratorium would have a negative effect on the housing market, and that would be bad news for the nation as a whole. So the Opposition proposal would be unlikely completely to transform the present state of the housing market. I wish it were possible for such a change to occur. But to end the moratorium now, when there is no sign of an end to the housing crisis—the market remains in a deep trough of recession—would be a foolish and retrograde step.

It is a novel experience for me, a new hon. Member, to hear a debate of such high quality, with a clear measure of cross-party support for our proposal. I hope that when we vote on the new clause there will be voting with us Conservative Members who have the courage of their convictions.

Mr. John Townend: I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) that stamp duty is a bad tax which should be ended. We want to increase mobility of labour. A tax that bears heavily on people wishing to move house because they want to change jobs is damaging.

On the other hand, most people accept that it is impossible to abolish now a tax which raises a great deal of money, when we are faced with a huge public sector borrowing requirement which next year will be nearly £40 billion.

The housing market is flat, as hon. Members have made clear. It is experiencing little recovery, and that is holding back the recovery in consumer spending on which a general recovery of the economy could rest.

I welcomed the Government's decision to lift stamp duty for a limited period, up to 20 August, to give a short-term boost to the property market and increase liquidity. That move has not had the impact that some might have expected, but I remind the House that there are still six weeks to go, and with any time-limited relief one would expect a surge as the last days of the relief approach.

A significant example of that occurred when Lord Lawson was Chancellor of the Exchequer. He abolished dual mortgage tax relief for couples and, instead of abolishing it overnight, he had a moratorium for several months. What occurred towards the end of that period resulted in an enormous surge in the housing market. Indeed, that was one of the principal causes of the overheating of the economy.

It is inept of the Opposition to propose a new clause that would extend the termination date of the moratorium before we have arrived at the first termination date of 20 August. That could abort the surge that we might expect in the coming six weeks. Had Opposition Members thought the issue through, they would have waited until 20 August and then, on our return after the summer recess, made the proposal, when it could have been discussed more sensibly.

Another argument against the new clause is that it would cost £430 million more this year when, as I said, the Government's finances are under severe pressure. One way to make it possible to reduce interest rates—which, above all, would help the housing market and reduce the pain felt by those locked into high mortgages—would be to reduce the PSBR. I hope that there will be strong support from Opposition Members this year as each Government Department attempts to reduce its spending and bring Government finances more into balance. The more success we have in achieving that, the faster interest rates will come down. That is why I shall support the Government in opposing the new clause.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): The new clause goes to the heart of the Conservative bogus commitment to lift the burden on home owners and the housing

industry. What reasons have the Government given for reimposing stamp duty at this time? Do they claim that the recession is over, that recovery is under way or that the housing market is beginning to boom?

Even the Government's friends are sceptical about those issues. Like other hon. Members, I receive many begging letters. Few have been as pitiful as one from the House-Builders Federation, the director of which sent me a copy of a letter he had written to the Prime Minister, saying:

"now that the euphoria has passed"—

clearly, he has been slightly unhinged—

"it must be evident to you that nothing much has changed since 9th April. The economy is still locked in recession and Treasury claims of recovery are widely disbelieved. Indeed, they are thoroughly discredited."

Commenting on the performance of the Chancellor, he says of the Treasury:

"The housing market has been one of its greatest failures . . . we built fewer houses than in any decade since the 1940s. This imbalance alone left a shortage of more than one million homes by 1990."

The House-Builders Federation, speaking for the private house building industry, as Conservative Members have done in this debate, writes:

"Despite lower house prices and interest rates. . .the continued recession is holding back the housing market. After signs of an improvement in January and February, the housing market has slowed down markedly in May and June. . .If further damage to purchaser confidence is to be avoided, the existing stamp duty moratorium should be extended beyond 20th August. . .An improving housing market, with its stimulus to retail spending and to employment through new housebuilding, can play an important role in economic recovery."

Government figures pay eloquent testimony to those sentiments. The slump has never been clearer. In my constituency and in Scotland generally, the boom in the issuing of mortgages by building societies occurred not in 1987, 1988 or 1990—although mortgage lending was much higher then—but in 1984. By 1991, lending had hit a 10-year low. That has meant, for example, that Edinburgh house prices have fallen dramatically and, as we have heard, they have fallen in London and throughout the country.

No wonder the new clause is supported by the building industry, the mortgage lenders and everyone who believes that people should not be prevented from buying a first home or from moving to a new home, whatever the reason. If the Economic Secretary does not accept it, he will find that the Government's erstwhile friends will desert them, never to return. A time of deep recession is not a time at which to drive up house prices.

If the new clause is not accepted, 20 August 1992 will go down in housing history as the day when an iron curtain was drawn, separating tens of thousands of families from their dream of home ownership for the foreseeable future. According to the housebuilders, the frosty freeze that will follow 20 August will make last year's housing slump seem like a boom. After a long, cold summer and a long and bitter winter—a winter of discontent—for milions of home owners and aspiring home owners, 20 August will come as the Government's nemesis.

There is time, however, for the Government to listen to their friends in the building industry, who donated to their election campaign the lavish sums that put them in power and gave them the power to vote for or against home owners and aspiring home owners. We wait, but not with bated breath.

9 pm

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): I entirely deny that the Government introduced the moratorium in late 1991 as a gimmick. It was a responsible gesture, aimed at injecting some life into the housing industry.

As one who has spent almost all his career as a civil engineer in housing, construction and property development, I consider the continuation of the relief immaterial: I do not believe that it will have any effect, adverse or positive, on the housing market. In the past it has exerted little pressure on the market; few additional sales have resulted. Anyone trying to buy a house anywhere in the country now is looking not for a 1 per cent. price reduction, but for a reduction of 5, 10 or 15 per cent.

I want to dispel some of the doom and gloom. In the south-east a reduction of 25 per cent. or, more probably, 30 per cent. is possible, but in the more responsible areas —the north, the north-west and the north-east—house prices never reached such crazy levels. House owners and house builders are suffering the consequences of those price rises. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) blamed the construction industry for the present parlous state of the economy, but I believe that it is the other way around: the economy is in such a difficult position that people are unemployed, fearful of becoming unemployed or worried about the falling value of their properties.

I am grateful to the Government for introducing the minor benefit of the moratorium last year, but, rather than continuing it, they should reduce the amount of public expenditure—hundreds of millions of pounds—that is involved in its perpetuation. The house building industry wants positive action. It wants lower interest rates and more action on repossessions; it wants pressure to be exerted on the insurance industry, because the present indemnity insurance premium levels are criminal. It does not help house buyers to make them pay a swingeing insurance premium for a mortgage of more than 70 or 80 per cent.

The housing industry is probably the most private-enterprise oriented industry in the United Kingdom. It does not want subsidies; it wants the real market to apply, and it is more than capable of lifting itself to its former level. So often in the past, successive Governments have used the building industry as a regulator of the economy. At difficult times they have held back public expenditure, especially on council houses and infrastructure; at boom times they have expected too much of the industry, and the economy has overheated as a result.

I signed the early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), but I told him that—along with other hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert)—I had pressed for the total abolition of stamp duty for at least 10 years. The Government should bring that about in the next few years, for I am certain that, if left to its own devices and to natural market forces, the housing industry will lift off. This minimal measure will not do much.

Mr. Betts: The stamp duty changes that were introduced last December were not, in my view, part of a coherent economic policy or of a coherent housing policy. They were a recognition by the Government that economic

[Mr. Betts]

recovery was not happening and that an election was coming. It was a matter of electoral expediency, in the crudest sense.

The problem for the Government is that economic recovery has still not happened and that the election has come and gone. The Government now feel that the measure that they introduced to try to win some popularity has served its useful purpose.

I agree with some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) about the Government's housing policy. They were very interesting. However, stamp duty is a matter not of general housing policy but of its potential impact on the housebuilding industry. If I were feeling a little more charitable about the Government's designs, I might even accept, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer said at the time, that there was recognition of the fact that the housebuilding industry could be one of the important motors for economic recovery. If the Government did recognise that fact, when they looked around they found that there were not many alternatives.

The Government looked at the council house building sector and found that it no longer existed because their bigoted and dogmatic policies towards council housing over the years had killed it off. They were not prepared to take the obvious step of releasing capital receipts—which, by any logical definition, would have had no impact on the public sector borrowing requirement—which would have allowed local authorities to build council houses. They looked at the housing association sector and saw a little increase there, but the Treasury was growing worried about the cost. The Government also looked at the private rented sector and found that, after their 13 years in power and an awful lot of talk, the private sector was continuing to decline.

Housebuilding in the private sector remained virtually steady throughout the 1980s, though the private sector had not replaced the fall-off in the council house building sector. By the early 1990s, however, private housebuilding had fallen to a record low. Stamp duty exemption was introduced against that background.

If we examine the impact of that measure so far, it is fair to say that there are real doubts about its effectiveness. It has had a limited effect on the housing market; there has been no great take-off. In Sheffield, which has not been so badly hit by the fall in house prices and the fall-off in activity as other parts of the country, there are no clear signs of a sustained recovery.

The question that we should be asking is not what has happened as a result of this measure but what the impact will be if the exemption is removed. It is just possible that the failure of the housing market to take off in the last few months was not due to the stamp duty changes. It is just possible that the housing slump would have been much worse without those changes. The real worry and concern is that the reimposition of stamp duty now will send the housebuilding industry into yet further decline. Confidence in the housebuilding sector is very delicate. The reimposition of stamp duty could have a significant impact in the wrong direction.

Before I came to the House today, I asked a few builders and estate agents in Sheffield for their views. Obviously they have a vested interest, but they also have knowledge that is worth sharing. Garton, Lockwood and Riddle, one of the leading estate agents in Sheffield, said that there is a real problem of confidence, that ending the exemption will be just another element in the equation which will be unhelpful to recovery and that the market is slow. The House-Builders Federation said that

"while the stamp duty moratorium . . . may not have had the positive effect that was hoped for, its reimposition will simply depress confidence further and delay recovery."

That point is borne out by Gleeson Homes, a major housebuilder in Sheffield. It referred to the real problems caused by the deep recession and said that the reimposition of stamp duty will further weaken any return of confidence. It said:

"We believe that by suspending Stamp Duty it will not necessarily create an early market recovery but reimposing Stamp Duty will have a further depressing factor on an already weak, buyers confidence."

Omega Homes have said that people have been rushing to meet the deadline in the last few weeks, but now it has all gone flat. Henry Boot told me that any reduction could have a detrimental effect on the housing market, which is just showing a few signs of recovering. And, of course, there are the comments by Tim Melville-Ross of the Nationwide building society, who said that the Government proposals could have a fatal impact.

It is very clear from all this that there are some doubts so far about the effectiveness of the measures taken last December and a very real worry about the impact of reversing those measures at this time.

There are two questions for the Government. Is the economic recovery so assured that the Government can afford to take any steps that might curtail it? I believe that the answer to that has to be a very clear no. Secondly, is the public sector borrowing requirement so completely out of control that the Government cannot afford another £400 million to continue the current exemption?

The real problem for the Government is that one of their economic disasters, the PSBR, is now constraining their ability to deal adequately with another of their disasters, the economic slump which they have created. My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) gave the Government a way out with some suggestions about how they could negate the effects of the PSBR increases that would come from a continuance of the exemptions. Therefore, the only question left open concerns the impact on economic recovery.

I hope that all hon. Gentlemen who spoke in favour, in principle, of the proposals in the new clause moved by the Opposition will support it in the Lobby. I do not believe that any of them, in the very delicate state of the economy, can ignore the risk that the measures that the Minister is proposing might have the very damaging effect of curtailing the possibilities of recovery. I will put it no more strongly than that. I therefore think that it is worth taking the risk, for £400 million, of supporting the new clause and giving a bit of hope to the housebuilding industry in the very difficult situation that it is experiencing.

Mr. Milburn: When Ministers announced the moratorium on stamp duty it was part of a package of measures designed to stimulate recovery in the housing market. The argument deployed by the then Financial Secretary was that the measure

"would not transform the world"

but would give a mild impetus towards housing recovery.

I have a dreadful feeling as we sit here tonight that there were two kinds of impetus towards the introduction of the moratorium. Certainly the depth of the housing crisis with which Ministers were confronted was one, but I suspect that the second was the ticking away of the general election clock sounding very loud and clear in Ministers ears, and providing a very clear incentive to tackle the problems of the housing crisis.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Cynical.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Member for Blyth Valley shouts "Cynical". Well, maybe I am.

With its sister policy, the mortgage rescue plan devised by the building societies, the stamp duty moratorium was supposed to kill two birds with one stone: first, to give a boost to the housing market; but, secondly, to give a boost to the Conservatives' electoral fortunes.

Six months on, the Government have certainly achieved one objective, but they have failed lamentably in the other. Housing and the economy as a whole remain stuck deep in recession. The housing crisis that prompted the moratorium in the first place has not gone away; arguably, in some respects, it has even intensified. Hon. Gentlemen are therefore faced with a very simple question: why is it that the measure that was so important six or seven months ago is no longer relevant? If we accept that the housing crisis is as deep today as it was in December or January last, why should the moratorium be withdrawn?

9.15 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will accept from me an answer to that question. The letter from the House-Builders Federation to which there has been reference says that the moratorium has had very little effect on the housing programme. The relief is not the primer that we hoped it would be, and it is costing £430 million. Has not the House-Builders Federation answered the hon. Gentleman's question?

Mr. Milburn: I assume that the hon. Gentleman accepts that, in effect, Ministers have wasted about £400 million of public money. I see nods from Conservative Members. And this is from a Government who accept financial rectitude and tight control of public expenditure, a Government who always have the correct financial and economic answers.

Let me tell the House what the House-Builders Federation said. I have a letter from Mr. Adamson, the regional chairman in the northern counties region, which says:

"I accept that suspending stamp duty will not kick-start the market on its own, but reintroducing it will be a further depressing factor to house purchase confidence."

The hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) made a very important comment when he said that the housing market is sensitive and very prone to shifts in confidence. It is confidence that counts, yet here we have an example of the ways in which the Government undermine confidence in the very housing market that they are supposed to support.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman seems to be implying that the Government have wasted the £400 million. If he is saying that that money has been wasted——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): He is not saying that. You are.

Mr. Milburn: You are saying that it has been wasted.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. There are many "you"s flying about. I hope that they do not refer to me.

Mr. Marlow: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that that money has been well spent?

Mr. Milburn: I refer to comments of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends—and I note the nods from Conservative Members—that the money has been wasted.

When this measure was introduced, Ministers made it very clear that it would take some time to become effective. We have now had six or seven months to test its credibility. I hope that when the Financial Secretary introduced it he did not have in mind just the period leading up to the general election and immediately after it. That would give rise to a great deal of cynicism among hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The housing crisis has not gone away. The number of families losing their homes through repossession has hit 144 per day. As is normal in these situations, Conservative Members are indifferent to the consequences of their own Government's policy. On the programme "Desert Island Discs" a few months ago the Prime Minister, with his finger on the pulse of public concern, as usual, told Sue Lawley:

"Well, we stopped, if you recall, the repossessions before Christmas."

Let the Prime Minister and other Ministers express that sort of sentiment to the 126 families in the Darlington area who had mortgage repossession orders against them in the first four months of this year—a 9 per cent. increase on the number for the same period last year. In the north-east as a whole about 1,670 families lost their homes in the first four months of the year, compared with 1,284 in the same period last year.

Mr. Marlow: A little while back, the hon. Gentleman was quite candid and straightforward. He said that the money that the Government had spent so far had been wasted. In that case, why does he want to extend the exemption to March next year?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is obviously confusing what I have said with what his hon. Friends have said. They have said that the £400 million has been wasted, and others nodded in assent.

Mr. Dickens: It may be that in terms of priming the housing market the money has been wasted, but the hon. Gentleman should not forget all those families who have been grateful for that tax concession when buying their homes. The money was not wasted because it stayed with the people.

Mr. Milburn: In that case, if the measure was important enough in the past seven months and if it has failed lamentably, as it has, to stimulate the major pick-up in the housing market for which we all hoped, why on earth, at this juncture, are the Government saying that enough is enough? Why should not the measure be given a chance to benefit other families, other owner-occupiers and young families seeking to get on the first rung of the housing ladder?

[Mr. Milburn]

By ending exemption, the Government will be seen as delivering a kick in the teeth to young families who are looking to get on the first rung of the housing ladder. Far from kick-starting the recovery in the housing market, by ending the moratorium on stamp duty, the Government will kick away the prospective recovery in the housing market. The crisis is as deep as ever and the Government, by withdrawing what paltry assistance they offered six months ago, leave us to draw no other conclusion than that the whole exercise was designed not to help people save their homes but to help Conservative Members of Parliament to save their seats. That was the cynical purpose underlying the measure.

The exemption was a cynical and crude exercise in manipulating genuine public concerns about the difficult circumstances of home owners. The mortgage rescue plan and the temporary exemption of stamp duty have fulfilled their purpose for the Conservative party but not for those who are suffering the consequences of the policies pursued by the Government. I only wish that Conservative Members would listen not only to the House-Builders Federation but to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the building societies, and to the estate agents in my constituency, whom I contacted today, who are urging that the moratorium be continued if the fragile recovery that may be around the corner is not to be brought to a shuddering halt.

As the hon. Member for Crosby said, we all know that confidence is the key to recovery in the housing market. After all, we are told that all the other ingredients are in place—prices have fallen, there is a glut of properties on the market, it is a buyers' market—but people are not buying because they lack confidence or the incentive to do so. The Government can help with both. They can pursue measures to stimulate the economy by cutting interest rates, by investing in the regions, in infrastructure and in training. They could also stimulate housing more directly. For example, they could ensure that there is a phased release of capital receipts to allow local authorities to make good use of the money that is lying useless in bank accounts around the country. Those assets should be put to use. They should not be allowed to gather dust.

The Government should not be closing options at this stage; they should be opening them up. First-time buyers are the mortar of the housing market and they must feel that it is worth their while to invest in a home. Suspending stamp duty for another nine months will not, by itself, instil new confidence. However, it will be a pointer in the right direction. The removal of the concession can only make matters worse.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) said earlier that young families who are hoping to get on to the first rung of the housing ladder will look rather askance at a Government who claim that they cannot continue the moratorium because of public expenditure concerns, but who, at the same time, are prepared to spend £730 million ending stamp duty on share transactions as from next April.

I have a direct point for the Economic Secretary to the Treasury. No doubt some Conservative Members are genuinely concerned about the ending of the moratorium, but they will not be prepared to put their money where their mouths are. They will vote against the new clause. I have no doubt that the new clause will be lost as a consequence of that.

However, what are the Government prepared to put in place of the moratorium to ensure that there is a recovery in the housing market? What are they going to do to ensure that there is new investment in housing so that we begin to house our homeless people and start to bring an end to the repossession crisis that is gripping my constituency and others around the country? What new measures will the Government introduce tonight? By all means end the moratorium on stamp duty, but let us hear from the Conservative Benches exactly what new policies the Government are prepared to bring forward to stimulate the recovery that we all want to see in the housing market.

Mr. Nelson: There are perhaps two things that we can all agree on at the end of this extensive debate. The first is the comment of the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) that this has been a very high-quality debate and the other is that stamp duty is not a much-loved tax.

I will try to persuade the House that stamp duty raises sums of money that the Government cannot ignore or forgo. I will also try to persuade the House that when introducing a concession for a time-limited period, it does not induce one to embark on further concessions unless one sticks to the conditions. That does not mean that they are immutable, but that is a powerful argument for sticking to the concession that has been agreed.

If money is available, there is a question of judgment as to how most effectively it can be spent in the regeneration of the housing market and in other social and industrial areas and priorities for public expenditure. We have debated some of the criteria and considerations to a high standard.

I want first to set out the financial parameters. The concession has cost £400 million. During that time, 540,000 housing transactions have benefited and have not had to pay stamp duty. Although the moratorium has been of limited value, it has been of real value. It has meant that a number of transactions have been brought forward, and a number of individuals have not had to incur an additional marginal capital cost on the purchase of their properties. That is still happening, for the moratorium period has not yet ended. Many people are bringing forward their house purchases, to the benefit both of the construction industry and the general liquidity of the housing market.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) asked what amount of money the delay in the implementation of TAURUS has released. The answer is about £850 million. Of course, the concession, which costs about £400 million, leaves a balance. The hon. Gentleman rightly asked, "Is not that money available?" Sadly, it is not available. The balance of those sums is included in the Budget strategy of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. It is part of the overall equation of income and expenditure of the Government; therefore, it is not money which has been released and which can easily be spent.

9.30 pm

If we were to extend the moratorium, it would be an additional cost which would have to be financed by additional borrowing, additional taxation or cuts elsewhere in public expenditure. It behoves hon. Members, principally Opposition Members, who easily call for an

extension to say where the money would come from, what additional tax or borrowing burden they would be prepared to live with, or what public expenditure cuts they would be prepared to make.

I shall complete what I was saying about the financial parameters, because they are very important. The moratorium cost £400 million. Were we to extend the moratorium, as the new clause provides, for the rest of the financial year, the additional cost is estimated to be £430 million. That is not an insignificant sum, even in terms of an addition to the borrowing requirement.

One of my responsibilities in the Treasury is to help to raise the funding requirement through national savings and through the gilt-edged markets. That is not easy. Substantial sums are involved. We are talking about very material additional amounts which would be bound to inhibit the extent to which we could further reduce interest rates at a later date or the extent to which we could further reduce taxes—objectives to which the Government have firmly adhered.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend has said quite clearly that the moratorium has persuaded people to bring forward their house purchases. Does he agree that if the moratorium were extended to the end of this year, thereby extending the house-buying season, other people would bring forward their house purchases? If they brought forward their house purchases, what impact would that have on the recovery of the economy? What impact would that have on tax revenues? What impact would that have on the reduction in the cost of unemployment?

Mr. Nelson: I was about to refer to my hon. Friend's intervention, because I listened carefully to what he said. His proposal would cost another £220 million. That money would have to be found from one of the sources to which I referred. Also, our hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) said that part of the effect of increasing liquidity by bringing forward sales would be diminished if we announced that we would extend the exemption period, because people would relax and be less keen to complete sales early.

Although it is not the intention to have an enormous bunching of house sales towards August, that would be the effect of a finite date on the exemption period. Wherever we set that, whether later in the financial year or at the end of it, we would have the same effect. The substantial answer to my hon. Friend's proposal is that it would cost us £220 million—again a highly significant sum.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) referred to the problems of first-time buyers in London. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) referred to the 25 per cent. reduction in house prices in London. The Government are very conscious of the personal problems that that imposes on many families who are struggling with mortgage repayments. We are also very conscious of the difficulties that have been faced in the construction and property-related industries because of it, but, to the extent that prices have fallen, the only group who have benefited are first-time buyers, because property prices are more affordable. Of course, I acknowledge that that depends on whether someone has a job, can afford the mortgage payments and so on. However, more affordable accommodation at least offers more hope to first-time buyers than the ridiculous, spiralling boom prices that many of them faced previously.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) made an outstanding contribution to the debate. He said that the debate was about confidence in the housing market. That point was reiterated by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant). I acknowledge that confidence is essential to both prospective buyers and people maintaining their financing commitments once they have bought a home.

However, the Government should not try to rekindle confidence by fiscal or other measures that simply inflate house prices still further. The Government already have in place a range of measures, including mortgage interest tax relief and other financial supports. We provide substantial support for home ownership. Surely the main factor that will revive confidence in the housing market is not fiscal stimulus provided by the Government but economic policies that lead to further reductions in interest rates when it is sensible and responsible to cut them. Our policies should provide a sustained basis for more liquidity and healthier prices in the market, but especially more liquidity.

Mr. Betts: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Nelson: If the hon. Gentleman will permit me, I shall make a little progress. I will come to his remarks later.

The hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) referred to unemployment in the construction industry and in his constituency. I readily acknowledge that the social and employment impact of the recession in the housing market has been serious. Those of us who represent constituencies in the south are at least as conscious of that as the hon. Gentleman.

While my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) understood the Government's position, he reiterated his long-held conviction that we should get rid of stamp duty altogether. He espoused that conviction in compelling fashion.

As I said, stamp duty is an unloved tax and abolishing it altogether is an appealing line. However, the cost of doing so would be £1 billion. Approximately £800 million is raised from transactions up to the current threshold, but another £200 million to £300 million over and above that is raised from much higher-priced properties. The total amount is about £1 billion. To abolish it would impose on us opportunity fiscal costs. Where would we raise the revenue from—extra borrowing or cuts in public expenditure?

I cannot predict in the longer term the decisions of the Government and the Chancellor on stamp duty. All such taxes are examined from year to year. But the Government and the Conservative party have a good record on stamp duty. Since we came to office we have not only halved the rate of stamp duty on property but increased the threshold twice.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): Does my hon. Friend the Minister recall that we seemed to find it relatively easy to get rid of stamp duty on all exchange dealings and share transfers, at a cost of almost £1 billion yet we seem to find it incredibly difficult to get rid of it for the much worthier matter of house purchase? Many of us find it extremely difficult to walk through the Lobby in support of stamp

[Mr. Roger Moate]

duty—a tax to which most of us have objected for decades. Can he at least tell us that there is some prospect that in years to come, sooner rather than later, we will consider getting rid of stamp duty altogether?

Mr. Nelson: We can always consider it. However, it would be improper for me to hold out false hopes to my hon. Friend. I am not in a position to say that we anticipate or intend to abolish stamp duty. The considerations that led to that decision for paperless transfers in the TAURUS system had as much to do with the new technical systems that were being imposed and the attractions of the London market for international share dealings as anything else. Stamp duty is a duty on documents and it extends to not only financial transactions and house purchases but other documents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West said that reassurance about the Government's commitment to home ownership was required. I am happy to provide that reassurance, even though my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) is not in the Chamber, as he also made an interesting speech, which questioned the import of the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West.

The Government are committed to maintaining and encouraging home ownership, and the range of measures that we have already implemented should stimulate it. The stamp duty concession was designed to promote and encourage home ownership, as were many other measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. A testimony to that is the £600 million worth of payments to people on income support who are having difficulty with their mortgages.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West said that the boom went too far, too fast, and that, as there was no prospect of its being repeated, we could afford to extend the concession. Large sums of money are involved and, as he rightly remarked, it is much more important for us to pursue policies designed to reduce interest rates and to maintain restraint on public expenditure.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) dismissed the moratorium, but then called for its extension. That paradox was also implicit in speeches by the hon. Member for Wrexham and others. They called the moratorium a political ploy and described it as being of marginal benefit, if any, but also called for its extension. I have mentioned the cost involved. That is real money and it is a substantial amount of money, which remains in the private, rather than the public, sector.

In a brave and interesting speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham said that housing should not be a barometer of the economy and that high-priced property is a deformity of the economy. I acknowledge the intellectual persuasion of much that he said, but it is a question of "where you are at" and not "where you come from". For many years, substantial support has been given to the ideal and the reality of home ownership and the Government are not about to abandon that or to undermine it in any switch of policies.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) supported an extension of the moratorium, in the absence of other Government policies. I have sought to explain that the Government have other policies—notably on the broader economic front—which are designed to return a healthier degree of liquidity in transactions to the property market.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood was right to remind the House that owning one's home is a family aspiration and that for many people in London ownership has had to be deferred because of the difficulties that they face. As mortgage liabilities have in many cases exceeded the value or properties, following the fall in prices, home ownership has also become more difficult for those who have mortgages on their homes to realise.

My hon. Friend said that stamp duty was a tax on mobility. The substantial reduction in house prices has reduced the differential between prices in the north and south of England. During the boom, prices spiralled up in the south. Although the fall in price has been injurious to many home owners, it has meant that the differential has narrowed. If anything, that should encourage mobility rather than discourage it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington was right to concentrate on public expenditure. It is essential that the Government are mindful of the impact of public expenditure on their ability to deliver lower interest rates and lower taxation in years to come. I am sure that all my hon. Friends agree that the Government have an essential early responsibility to get a grip on public expenditure if we are to deliver the sort of political promises with which we gained the trust of the electorate at the general election. We shall not do so if we grant extensions and engage in expenditure of this order.

Stamp duty is but one of many items on which the Government will rightly be pressed for concessions to bring personal relief, but we have a greater responsibility. We must bring the benefits of lower interest rates, lower inflation and lower public expenditure to our economy.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) gave an apocalyptic, theatrical description of his predictions for Scotland. I acknowledge that there have been serious problems with the depth and severity of the property recession in Scotland, but that alone is not a reason for extending the relief, given the cost for the country as a whole.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover), whose considerable knowledge and experience in these matters is acknowledged throughout the House, also supported the case for total abolition, about which he has spoken on many occasions. I am sorry that I cannot offer him that prospect tonight, but I hope that he understands why we must reintroduce stamp duty in August.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) said that as the market would have been much worse without the moratorium, now is not the right time to abolish it. However, although the market is still low and there are serious problems, there are also some positive signs. The figures for housing starts and completions in May were up by 4 per cent. and 1¾ per cent. respectively. Many building society predictions show substantial increases in the turnover of property transactions as well as prices in the remainder of this year.

9.45 pm

The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) accused us of a cynical political ploy. It would have been a cynical political ploy if the Chancellor had announced the abolition or the substantial raising of thresholds permanently, won the election and then reneged on that.

[Interruption.] No, it was always clear that the measure was for a finite period of time to bring much-needed relief, liquidity and some support to the property market during a difficult time. The fact that we have been able to reduce the average mortgage interest rate from 15·4 per cent. to less than 11 per cent. shows that the Government's policies are working and we are moving in the right line. To abandon those policies with public expenditure commitments that would derail us would be imprudent and the Government could not responsibly offer such a course to the House.

Therefore, although I understand the concerns and representations of all my hon. Friends, I hope that they will understand that, for public expenditure and other reasons, it is essential and important that we revert to the imposition of stamp duty on the date originally given.

Dr. Marek: We have had a good debate and, in some ways, its nub was when the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) intervened in the Minister's speech and presented him with the option of cutting the duty on share transfers or extending the moratorium on stamp duty. Presented with such an option, I should have thought that share transactions could bear tax for a few months longer so that the Government could find the extra £220 million necessary for them to accept the Opposition's new clause. That would be straightforward because, ultimately, getting the economy right and lifting the country out of recession are far more important than allowing shares to be exchanged without tax for a few more months. No harm would befall the City or the international capital markets if the Government chose to do that.

The Minister tried to muddy the waters a little by implying that the Government had a good record on interest rates because they were already down to 11 per cent. So they were from the high of 15·4 per cent. that we experienced for a year and a half a few years ago. Interest rates were above 10 per cent. for some 20 per cent. of the time in which the last Labour Government were in office, whereas they have been below 10 per cent. for only 20 per cent. of the time in which the present Conservative Government have been in office. When hon. Members compare the record of the past Labour Government with the present Conservative Administration they will see that, by and large, interest rates are high when a Conservative Government are in office and much lower under a Labour Government. There was a secret agenda for the Conservative Government to have high interest rates so that they could have high real interest rates.

I agree with the Economic Secretary that this has been a good debate, in which many different views have been expressed. It was nice to hear speeches from seven or eight Conservative Members and eight Labour Members. The Labour speeches were all individual and targeted at the problem. My hon. Friends made the case for the new clause. Although it will not solve the problems of the recession, if the Government are not prepared to do anything else at least it will do something to help the country when it comes out of recession.

We were treated to amazing pirouettes by a number of Conservative Members. I shall start with the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton). He said that it did not matter what is contained in an early-day motion because it is simply an expression of opinion. He invited us to believe that if the House did not like a particular set of opinions, it did not matter because he had plenty of others. I wonder what his constituents in Crosby will think. It is hardly worth him putting his name to an early-day motion if, at the slightest pressure from the Whips, he says, "I do not really mean it, or if I do, I do not mean it that much. I shall exercise my beliefs in the right Lobby in the interests of my constituents—but I shall be persuaded by the Whips to go elsewhere."

That was not the view of the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who made a principled speech. He did not say that he would support the Opposition, but he said that he would not support the Government. He was the only Conservative Member to say that and he has my respect for doing so.

The hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) said that, as there are still six weeks to go before the relief from stamp duty ends, there is still plenty of time. He implied that we should ask for a recall of Parliament on 21 August to debate the issue. I do not think that there is much chance of that. Although there are six weeks left, people cannot suddenly buy a house. They have to exchange contracts, proper searches have to be made and the conveyance procedure must be carried out. Indeed, moving from one house to another depends on many agreements in a chain. All that takes time, but there is no more time. The Government now know what removing the exemption from stamp duty will mean to the housing market. Six weeks may appear to be a long time, but it is not.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) made a very different speech and I agree with the Economic Secretary's analysis of it. Most Labour Members felt that the hon. Gentleman made some good points. However, as the Economic Secretary said, it is not a matter of where we want to start from, but where we are now. I have a great deal of sympathy for what the hon. Member for Buckingham said. He spoke his mind and added to the debate.

We believe that there are better ways of spending £220 million—such as helping manufacturing industry or, if possible, reducing interest rates. The Government either cannot or will not do that. Because of that attitude, the new clause would help when the economy eventually begins to move out of recession. That has not begun yet, which is why the exemption from stamp duty has not really been successful—but it would be when we do begin to move—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) has not been here during the debate. I hope that she has dined well. Making silly noises and signs does not help or add to a debate in which about eight Conservative Members and eight Opposition Members have spoken—and which, by and large, has been one of the best debates in the House for some time.

Madam Speaker: Order. The House is not giving the hon. Member a fair hearing. Right hon. and hon. Members who want to hold conversations must either do so quietly or remove themselves from the Chamber so that the rest of us can hear the hon. Member.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sure that we are all extremely keen to hear the hon. Gentleman, but I am not sure that his microphone is working. He is almost inaudible to those of us seated on these Benches.

Madam Speaker: I am not surprised that the hon. Lady did not hear. I was watching her closely, and she was engrossed in conversation.

Dr. Marek: That has enlivened the debate a little. I am reaching the end of my remarks.

The continuation of stamp duty relief would be useful if we move out of the recession. The cost of £220 million could be budgeted. The duty on share transactions can be delayed if the Government so choose. That presents them with a clear choice, but I understand that they have decided to terminate the relief in August.

We will see how many Conservative Members turn on their heads and vote for the cessation of stamp duty relief and for a continuing crisis in housing. I urge my hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby in voting for new clause 3. It is not the complete answer. There are better ways of spending the money and of helping manufacturing industry, which is absolutely necessary if we are to survive as an industrial nation. However, I invite the House to join me in voting for the new clause because it will provide some help in alleviating the crisis in housing that we all want to see come to an end at the earliest opportunity.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 281, Noes 311.

Division No. 54] **[9.57 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ms Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, James
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, William
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoff
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Ms Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Ms Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Ms Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
MacDonald, Calum
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry

Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr. Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham.
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael

Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, MADAM SPEAKER *interrupted the business.*

MADAM SPEAKER *then put forthwith the Question which she was directed to put pursuant to paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.).*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1992-93

Resolved,

That a supplementary sum not exceeding £833,362,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges for Defence and Civil Services which will come in course of payment for the year ending on 31st March 1993, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 44 and 45.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing resolution relating to Supplementary Estimates 1992-93 by the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Michael Portillo, Mr. Stephen Dorrell, Sir John Cope and Mr. Anthony Nelson.

CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr. Stephen Dorrell accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the year ending on 31 March 1993 and to appropriate the supplies granted in this Session of Parliament: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 40.]

Points of Order

10.12 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, relating to the manner in which Secretaries of State present reports to Parliament. You may be aware that, last August, the Secretary of State for Transport published a report by the marine accident investigation branch into the "Marchioness" tragedy. It precipitated some controversy, because of the nature of the report and its failure to mention six accidents involving the dredger "Bowbelle". Subsequent parliamentary questions and requests led the Secretary of State to appoint a Mr. Hayes to report on river safety in general.

That report was published today. I had given evidence, and had tabled a question asking when the report would be published. This afternoon the Secretary of State for Transport published an extensive press release relating to the report, a copy of which is in the Library. I understand that the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, Lord Caithness, has given television and radio interviews on the subject.

According to the press release,

"Mr. Hayes recommended that there should be an early review of the rescue arrangements and equipment on the Thames. The Government has given careful consideration to the recommendation but has concluded that further review of this kind would not be justified."

My point of order is that, having asked the question as to when this report would be published and having submitted evidence to the inquiry, neither I nor the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who is the constituency Member concerned, was informed about this report, or about the press conference, or about the statement that is in the Library. We were told about it by, ironically, Thames Television. If a report is made to Parliament, it is surely made to Members of Parliament. In particular, it should be available to those who have some concern about and knowledge of this matter, as well as to the generality of hon. Members. I ask you, Madam Speaker, so to rule.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I confirm everything that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) has said. He and I have discussed the issue since these matters were drawn to our attention early this evening. There is no difference between us.

The points that I should be grateful if you would also consider are these. First, when any hon. Member tables a question that specifically asks about the publication of a report that is either known to be or is believed to be imminent, is it a proper procedure or an abuse of procedure for a planted question subsequently to be tabled so that the question is then asked by somebody who has no constituency or previous interest in the matter? That appears to be a breach of the traditional link between a constituency Member, or a Member with a wider interest, and the Department concerned.

The second matter relates to the sequence of events once a decision has been made to produce a report to Parliament. I understand that there may have been an appropriate time of day when that report could be published, but, like the hon. Member for Newham, South, the first knowledge I had that the report had been published today was a telephone call to my office at about

5.30, two hours after it had been confirmed by Thames Television that it had been published. I was out of the House. I asked that inquiries should be made of the Department as to the contents of the report. The anwer that was given to my assistant was that that information could not be divulged because a press conference was at that very moment going on. I had to wait until after the press conference was over before I was allowed to have the information contained in the press release that had been issued earlier in the day.

There have been similar sequences of events on other issues. I hope that you, Madam Speaker, will feel it appropriate, either now or at an early opportunity, to rule on the proper procedure so that all Departments and all Members can believe, on behalf of those whom they represent, particularly in the case of tragedies such as this, that the proper procedures have been observed. I hope, too, that an appropriate apology will be made regarding what has happened today.

Madam Speaker: I take the view that those Members who are directly involved in such incidents should be the first to be informed when there is any statement to be made, but I also take the view that I am biased in favour of this House in its entirety being informed when the Government have something to say to the House and that statements of such a nature should not first be made outside it. We in this House have the right to know first.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I do not know whether you witnessed the quite disgraceful incident that took place on the previous vote. What I saw—it may be confirmed by a large number of colleagues—was two Opposition Members trying to get through the door after you, Madam Speaker, had ordered it to be closed. What then followed was the attendant—doing his duty as the servant of the House—trying to hold the door closed while those two hon. Members tried to force it open. They were not able to do so, but only after a protracted struggle and, no doubt, a great deal of energy having been expended by the servant of the House who was following your orders. One of the most disgraceful aspects of this incident is that those hon. Members who are sitting on the Opposition Front Bench saw this incident, but have not seen fit to come to the Dispatch Box and apologise for the behaviour of those two hon. Members. I respectfully ask, Madam Speaker, that, having seen that incident yourself, you will do something about it, because it is totally wrong that such an incident should go unredressed.

Madam Speaker: I sit here very quietly and watch what goes on at the door once a Division is called. I saw precisely what happened tonight. Members who were going through the door did so in a very leisurely fashion, and I feared that they would not get through in time. However, hon. Members know the rules of the House, and there is nothing I can do about that, other than, when I instruct the Doorkeepers to close the door, to see that they obey my instruction. I deprecate the incident that occurred tonight when two Members forced their way through the door. I hope that this is the last time that I shall sit in this Chair and see anything like that happen. The Doorkeepers are, like me, servants of the House. We all know the rules. Let us now proceed with our business.

Finance Bill

Not amended in the Committee and as amended (in the Standing Committee), again considered.

New clause 5

Additional Relief for Developing Country Debt

'After section 88C of the Taxes Act 1988 to insert the following section—

"*Additional relief for overseas Government debt*

88D—(1) Where in relation to a debt to which section 88A(2) above applies, a company has included a provision in its accounts for any accounting period ending on or after 30th June 1992 which exceeds the aggregate amount which has been deducted under section 74(j) above in relation to that debt for that and any previous accounting period, then it shall be entitled to additional relief under subsection (2) below, subject to the clawback provided for by subsection (3) below.

(2) The additional relief shall be a deduction from profits chargeable to corporation tax for that accounting period equal to the difference between the aggregate amount mentioned in subsection (1) above and the lesser of

(a) the provision mentioned in subsection (1) above and

(b) the maximum provision which would have been made in relation to the debt had the company followed the recommendations contained in the Bank of England's guidelines for overseas debt provision in force at the end of that accounting period;

and for the purposes of subsection (1) above any relief given by virtue of this subsection shall be regarded as an amount deducted under section 74(j) above.

(3) The additional relief granted by subsection (2) above shall be withdrawn to the extent that, at a date one year from the end of that accounting period, the company has not made a relevant release of the debt; and an assessment made to give effect to this subsection (or subsection (5) below) may be made at any time up to six years after that date.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (3) above, a "relevant release" means

(a) a release of the debt in favour of the Creditor Overseas State Authority for no consideration, or

(b) a disposal of the debt to the Creditor Overseas State Authority for a consideration equal to or less than its book value at the end of that accounting period, or

(c) a disposal of the debt by the company under a development plan or an environmental protection plan approved by the Treasury;

and the Treasury shall be empowered by this subsection to issue regulations demonstrating the criteria which it will use in deciding whether or not to approve under this subsection a development plan or environmental protection plan submitted to it for approval.

(5) Nothing in subsections (1) to (4) above shall cause the aggregate profits charged to corporation tax of any person for the accounting period in question, and all previous accounting periods in relation to which he was chargeable to corporation tax, to exceed those which would have been so charged had this section never been enacted, and this section shall have no effect to the extent that it would otherwise cause such excess to be charged to corporation tax.".'.—*[Mr. Boateng.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

10.20 pm

Mr. Boateng: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

This clause is debated in the aftermath of the Rio summit, where the disparity between the nations of the north and of the south was revealed in all its reality and we

[Mr. Boateng]

saw the impact, not only in terms of poverty and life expectancy but in terms of environmental degradation, of the ever-growing burden of third-world debt.

This clause seeks to focus the attention of the House on that issue and to put forward a practical proposal to encourage banks and those commercial lenders who currently require from the developing world a degree of interest, a degree of repayment, that all too often has the effect of crippling those countries to forgo the debt and to see that it is applied in such a way, in the alternative, as to promote environmental and development objectives.

No one should be under any illusions as to the extent of the global crisis in debt. The figures speak for themselves. In 1989, the figure was $1·3 trillion—44 per cent. of the gross national product of the developing world. Money paid to developed nations in interest was $77 billion; money repaid, $85 billion; net flow from poor to rich countries, $50 billion.

The figures are enormous and they speak for themselves. What they do not reveal, however, is the enormous burden of human suffering that flows from those figures. In the last decade debt has emerged as the main cause of hunger and misery in the world. One thousand children are estimated to die every day from its effects alone. That is a clear indication of the extent to which the matter with which the House is concerned tonight has an immediate impact on the world outside the House.

If we take one example, the impact on one country, Ghana, of the burden of overseas debt, the position becomes very clear. In Ghana, the current position is that to meet its crippling burden of debt it devotes one half of the foreign exchange earned by its cocoa farmers to servicing that debt. The cocoa farmers provide the countries of the north with drinking chocolate and chocolate to eat, at a time when, Oxfam informs us, more than half of the children in Ghana do not have enough to eat. That is an indication of the extent of the crisis.

But it does not end there. No doubt we shall hear that some measures have been taken by the developing world to address the problem. The Trinidad terms that were proposed by the Prime Minister when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer were welcome so far as they went, but they did not go far enough.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): They have not been accepted.

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. The Trinidad terms, limited though they were, were not accepted by many of our partners in the European Community or, indeed, by the United States. The result is continued failure to address the problem of world debt.

When one peels away the rhetoric of Rio—and, indeed, when one examines the rhetoric itself—one sees that a great deal was said about the importance of at least aiming for the United Nations target of the expenditure of 0·7 per cent. of gross domestic product on overseas aid. That fact is not insignificant. But the target was dismissed by President Bush as being unrealistic, and the British Government regarded it as a dim, distant objective. However, at least there was talk about the matter; at least the objective was focused upon.

How much time did the participants at Rio devote to discussion of the issue of debt?

Mr. Chris Smith: None.

Mr. Boateng: Indeed—none. But a good deal of time was devoted to keeping it off the agenda, to ensuring that it was not given the negotiating position that it merited as a matter of urgency to the developing world. Indeed, the action programme for Governments managed to reach it only as agenda item number 21, at which point it was said that a reduction of up to $80 billion in debt should be given consideration. That is the extent to which the Rio programmme of action was prepared to take this matter on board. We seek to give the banks some kind of incentive to address the issue. That is modest enough, but it should be welcomed by all and every hon. Member, on whichever side, who cares about development.

It is interesting to note how this is being addressed through the current tax provisions—a matter that was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) in a recent question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Economic Secretary responded to my hon. Friend's question about the amount of corporation tax that had been forgone from British banking institutions through the writing down of developing country sovereign debts in the past five years. My hon. Friend asked:

"how much sovereign debt has *(a)* been cancelled or *(b)* been made available for debt-for-environment or debt-for-development swaps, in each of the last five years as a result of this writing-down."

The answer was:

"Provisions for doubtful sovereign debt by banks operating in the United Kingdom are estimated to have reduced corporation tax receipts in the last five years by the following amounts:

	£ million
1987-88	240
1988-89	550
1989-90	360
1990-91	720
[1]1991-92	190"

—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1992; Vol. 210, c. *278*.]

10.30 pm

The last figure is provisional. It was not possible to provide the information requested and to show the benefit in terms of debt for environment or debt for development swaps, and how the forgoing of corporation tax had benefited the developing world.

The most commendable feature of this modest new clause is that it at least begins to make a start in that direction. At least it requires, through subsection (4)(a), (b), and (c), that there be a notion of what the objective of the "relevant relief" is. We shall be able to recognise to what end reliefs are directed. That important aspect of the new clause should commend itself to the House.

We do not hold out this modest new clause as being the whole answer to the problem, but at least it makes a start towards encouraging the banks to resume an attitude towards such debts that is conducive to development and makes a start to recognising the link between the burden of debt and environmental degradation. The developed countries of the north have condemned the developing countries of the world to a labour of Sisyphus in which, day in and day out, their agricultural and industrial

production, such as it is, is used to service an ever-increasing mountain of debt. That crushes their efforts and has a devastating effect on their environments and peoples.

We hope that the House will give a warm welcome to this new clause, which will make a small start in the right direction.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): In May of this year, a report was published by the Washington-based Population Crisis Committee in the form of an "International Index of Human Suffering". It pointed out that almost three quarters of the world's population live in conditions that tax human endurance, and that the gap between the rich and the poor countries is massively widening. It pointed out that more than 430 million people live in conditions of extreme suffering and 3·5 billion in conditions of what it terms high suffering. We do not recall often enough in the House or in our society that we live in a world in which 1 billion people have less than the equivalent of £1 a day on which to live.

Economic distress, national disasters, persecution and war are turning millions of people into refugees and migrants. This year we need only consider the evidence of drought in sub-Saharan Africa. Zambia set out at the beginning of last year with a new planting programme. It managed to plant 130 per cent. more of the land than had been planted the previous year. In other words, it was on target for a better harvest than ever before. The spring shoots came through, but people then had to sit and wait for the rain, and it did not come. The crop failed and the lack of sales of that crop to other countries will mean hardship and economic distress in Zambia.

Some development bodies, including the World bank, are referring to the 1980s as the lost decade of development. Since our previous debate on the issue in 1990, the burden of third-world debt has increased. When we last debated the issue in a Finance Bill debate, the debt figure was $1,180,000 million. In 1992, the projected figure is $1,223,000 million. Some 55 per cent. of the debt is in the poorest 46 countries.

The debt that has built up is equivalent to half the developing countries' combined gross domestic product and nearly twice their annual export earnings. In 1991, the debtor nations paid out $24 billion more in debt payments than they received in new loans. For example, Peru is now paying $50 million a month back to the International Monetary Fund and the World bank since Mr. Fujimori took office. In other words, the net flows of funds are clearly from the south to the north specifically as a result of the volume of debt.

Debt servicing is continuing to transfer wealth from the poor to the rich countries. In April, the United Nations development programme report spelt out how the gap between rich and poor had doubled in the past 30 years with the richest one fifth receiving 150 times the income of the poorest. Even the author of the report, a former Minister in Pakistan, said that he was shocked by that figure and that the international community should be shocked by it as well. Some 1·2 billion people live in acute poverty and suffer grossly inadequate access to resources such as education, health, infrastructure, fresh water, land and credit. That number has been increasing annually.

The restrictions in the global market—otherwise known as trade barriers—cost developing countries about $500 billion a year. Farm and industrial production protection cost third-world countries $55 billion a year in lost earnings.

Although that protection is in place and although, even today, we are told that the Prime Minister has not managed to make any breakthroughs in the GATT third-world trade talks, third-world countries are being told by the World bank, the IMF and northern Governments that, conditional to their getting aid and trade, they should liberalise and open up their national markets, precisely when the world will not do that when it is not in its interests. Apparently, it is fine for third-world Governments to have open and fair trade, but it is not fine for the world system to open up so that there is some justice in the trade system for third-world countries as well.

We need to remember that only 17 per cent. of global capital is available to poor countries in the south. Only 0·2 per cent. of global commercial credit goes to poor countries. Africa, which now has to be the most marginalised continent from the world economy, now accounts for only 1 per cent. of world trade. In the 1960s, it accounted for 4 per cent. In other words, in terms of trade, Africa is being marginalised even further.

In practice, the World bank and the IMF have become institutions for recycling debt, rather than sources of new resources. Again, the United Nations Development Programme report spelt out that the IMF is now taking $6 billion a year out of the south and that the World bank is taking $0·5 billion a year out of the poorest countries. What is being done to tackle the debt burden? The United Nations Secretary-General, in his acceptance speech, commented:

"tackling the crippling problem of international debt is central to achieving a healthy world economy."

We have had the Brady plan and we have had the Prime Minister's Trinidad terms initiatives. Of course, they related only to Government official debt relief, especially aimed at the poorest. We would have pressed for them to be extended certainly to middle-income countries as well, such as Peru, but not even they have been accepted at the G7 summit. At the previous summit, the issue of international debt was pushed off the agenda by the new east-west negotiations with what was the Soviet Union. It would be helpful if world debt were even on the agenda of the G7 summit which is now meeting.

On commercial debt, in 1990, the Government changed the rules, as we know, on corporation tax relief, but only in relation to how much relief could be claimed in any one financial year. In practice, tax relief in Britain has not meant debt cancellation in third-world countries. Many middle-income countries and many Latin American countries owe most of their debts to commercial banks. At present, if a commercial bank has a developing country debt in its portfolio, it can claim corporation tax relief when it writes down that debt in its books. It does not, however, have to cancel the debt to the country concerned. In other words, provision seems to be set aside in the accounts of the bank but it does not necessarily benefit third-world countries.

The new clause would insist that in order to qualify for relief from corporation tax, a bank must cancel the debt to the debtor nation or transform it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) has suggested, into a debt-for-development swap, for example. The new clause would grant immediate tax relief to overseas debts if the banks released or disposed of the debt to the country

[Mr. John Battle]

concerned. At present, British taxpayers are subsidising the banks, but without much relief to the world's poorest. The subsidy is said to have been worth £650 million last year. My hon. Friend gave the table of figures that were available for each year from 1988 to the present. It strikes me that that relief alone is worth more than half of what the Government are currently giving in aid to third-world countries.

Debt has fundamentally undermined the value of trade earnings and flows of aid to developing countries. In the immortal words of Michael Manley, it seems to third-world countries that they are trying to go up an escalator that is coming down against them and speeding up in the process. What chance do they have of going up the down escalator? Two thirds of the world is being drained of capital by the industrialised world. External debt is a major obstacle to economic development and social progress in the poorest countries of the world.

10.45 pm

The way in which our corporation tax operates is crucial. We ought not to pretend that it contributes to the alleviation of world poverty when nothing of the sort happens in practice. Ministers tell us that aid has to be tied for third-world countries. Countries are told that the aid must go to certain projects and according to certain conditions. The same rule should apply to the banks. If tied aid is good enough for third-world countries, it ought to be good enough for banks in the western world. The tie should be that if banks are to receive corporation tax relief on debts, those debts must be cleared.

The new clause would be a minor measure in the Bill, but we do not have too many opportunities to take practical, political and economic action on the problem of world poverty. It is important that the attention that the world paid to the Rio summit is not simply dissipated with words without any action resulting. Tonight, the Government have a chance to support the new clause and carry through a tiny measue which might make some difference.

Sir David Steel (Tweddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I rise to support the amendment on behalf of my party. When I spoke in the post-Rio debate in the House, I dwelt at some length on the symbolism of our aid programmes and their failure to meet the United Nations target. But I said in parenthesis that I recognised that the aid target was less important to the developing world than the terms of trade and debt write-off. The figures that were given by the hon. Members for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) justify the observation.

The developing world owes in total approximately $1,300 billion to the developed world—to the Governments and banks of the industrialised nations and to the international financial organisations. The blunt truth—public opinion does not seem to have grasped it—is that the amount of debt repaid from the developing world every year in capital and interest to the developed world exceeds the amount of aid that we give every year. So there is a net flow of resources every year from the developing world to the developed world.

As the hon. Member for Leeds, West said, the new clause is modest. However modest, such measures would be warmly supported by the public if people knew that they existed. I welcome the opportunity on the Report stage of the Finance Bill to give a small nudge towards encouraging the write-off of debt.

One problem that the developing countries face in tackling debt repayment is that there is no single effective body to which they can turn for assistance. They have to cope with several organisations separately—the IMF, the World bank and the individual creditor nations. It is because the thinking of creditor nations is of such importance that when he presented his plan as the United States treasury secretary, Mr. Brady said:

"creditor governments should consider how to reduce regulatory, accounting or tax impediments to debt reduction where these exist."

I assume that that is what the new clause seeks to do. I say that because I am honest enough to admit that the clause is so technical that I do not fully grasp how it will work. I am comforted by the thought that nor did the official Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Brent, South. Certainly he did not explain how it would work.

In all seriousness, it is important that the House should register its support for any measure, however technically complex, that will have the effect of assisting the banks in relieving third-world countries of some of their debts. That is the object of the new clause, and accordingly it has my support.

In 1990, as the hon. Member for Leeds, West said, the Prime Minister, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, responded to pressure from the House and outside organisations and took a small but significant step in the direction of using tax incentives to encourage debt reduction. Two years later, we are asking the Treasury to take a similar step. I know that the Financial Secretary, who will respond to the debate, was a member of the board of Christian Aid, and I know also that he is genuinely concerned about the issues which have been raised. Perhaps he is more concerned than a standard Treasury Minister. I hope that he will respond positively. It is—*[Interruption.]* I do not understand why the Minister smiles; I am paying him a tribute.

The United Kingdom's record on debt repayment is not all that good. We all cheered in October 1991 when the Trinidad announcement was made. We were told that there was to be a 67 per cent. write-down of all official debt. My party believed that that pledge should be upheld and implemented in full. Two months later, in Paris, it was quietly downgraded to 50 per cent. of the amount falling due in the next three years. Unfortunately, we have gone back on the excellent statements of the Prime Minister when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. I hope that the Treasury will redeem itself, at least to some extent, by accepting the new clause.

Mr. Tim Smith: The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) was honest enough to say that, because the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) did not explain the new clause, the right hon. Gentleman does not understand it. I do not understand it either, but I understand the general objective behind it.

Does it make sense, whatever one thinks about the growing disparity between the poverty of developing countries and the wealth of developed countries, to use or manipulate the corporation tax system to try to alleviate the debt problem of developing countries? That is the question which the House must consider.

Much of what the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said was irrelevant to the new clause. I agree with his remarks about the terms of trade between developing and developed countries, but they are not relevant to the clause. I agree with his comments about the poorest countries, but they are not much affected by the clause. On the whole, the banks did not lend to the poorest countries. Largely, they lent to middle-income countries. Implementation of the Trinidad terms, to which the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale referred, would benefit the poorest countries the most.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said that.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Member for Leeds, West said it all, and I am repeating what he said, but it was all irrelevant to the new clause. That is the point that I am trying to make. The new clause is about lending by commercial banks, largely to middle-income countries. The question that the House must consider is whether it is right in principle to make a distinction in terms of corporation tax between the allowances that companies can have in the ordinary course of lending to domestic borrowers as against overseas borrowers.

Mr. Boateng: It is not true that some of the poorest countries do not have a high proportion of commercial debt. Somalia and Mozambique, for example, have above average debt, even for sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, more than the proportion of debt attributable to Governments is owed to commercial creditors or multilateral institutions. That is the position in Somalia and Mozambique, countries which have been ravaged by the burdens of famine and continual war as well as the burden of debt.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman said that those countries are indebted to commercial banks or to multilateral institutions. The bulk of the debt, however, rests with South America and Latin America. That is a well-known fact. I do not want to become involved in a debate about the particulars, because, as I have said, the question of principle is whether it is right in terms of corporation tax to distinguish between domestic and overseas borrowers. I see no reason to make that distinction. To me, there is no distinction. If a lender makes provision against his profits because he does not think that he can recover a debt and the Inland Revenue accepts that, there should be corporation tax relief. If the lender subsequently recovers the money from the borrower, the relief is clawed back. That would happen in the unlikely event that one of the debtor countries repaid the banks, but we should recognise that large sums of money were lent to those countries and they have not been repaid, for whatever reason. In those circumstances, I see no reason to distinguish between that kind of debt and the debt that arises at home in a recession.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): Whether or not the hon. Gentleman feels that it is right to distinguish between different categories of debt for the purpose of tax treatment, the Government established that principle in the Finance Act 1990. We are not arguing about that principle tonight because it is already enshrined in the law. We are discussing how the principle is further developed.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the provisions of the Finance Act 1990, which do not deny banks the relief but simply deny them the relief in a particular time scale. It is a question of when, not whether, they receive the relief. A formula in the Act means that, whatever the provision in the accounts, the relief is phased over a period of years. I take no exception to that as it seems to be a reasonable arrangement, but it is not right to try to use the tax system to influence our policy in relation to poorer countries. That should come through our aid programme and the establishment of better trade relations through the GATT negotiations.

Those measures would benefit the poorer countries much more than what was described by the hon. Member for Brent, South as a relatively modest new clause. Although the new clause's impact would not be great, it would distort our corporation tax system.

Mr. Denham: The tax treatment of banks' third world provision constitutes one of the biggest but least known public financial scandals for many years. Billions of dollars of tax income have been forgone by Governments not just in this country but across the industrialised world. Banks have been allowed to avoid tax liabilities by claiming relief on provisions made against third world debt but, at the same time, they have largely avoided any commensurate action to mitigate the burden of debt on developing countries.

If we take stock of the international debt strategy in 1992, we must conclude that its whole thrust has been to cushion commercial banks, as far as possible, from the effects of imprudent lending at the expense not only of people in developing countries but of taxpayers in the developed world. The root cause of that scandal is simple. The regulatory systems may vary to some extent in the different industrialised countries but in most of the OECD countries banks have been able to claim tax credits on provisions made against sovereign loans, even though no loss was incurred by them and no reduction in the heavy burden of debt was enjoyed by the developing countries.

The sums involved are huge. A conservative estimate would be that $40 billion of tax credits were generated by banks in the OECD countries by mid-1990, with little debt reduction to match. That is 55 times the annual budget of UNICEF—the respected organisation that estimated that half a million young children were dying each year as a result of the debt crisis—and twice the annual OECD development aid to low income countries. It is about eight times the extra money pledged in Rio to save the planet, about which we have heard so much in recent weeks.

Christian Aid estimates that, by 1990, United Kingdom banks received some £1·6 billion in tax relief. If my mental arithmetic is correct, on the figures given earlier about £1·8 billion has now been received. But the tax relief that will ultimately be received by those banks will be about three times that figure.

11 pm

Of course, once the debt crisis had been created through imprudent lending, bad borrowing and even worse regulation, it was inevitable that the citizens of northern countries would have to pay a fair part of the cost of resolving the crisis. With the record of generosity of the British people, I believe that they would have happily accepted that burden. It is not acceptable that vast sums of

money should be used to pad out the banks' balance sheets without any benefit to the debtor countries or their peoples.

For years up to 1990, the Government tolerated, endorsed and even encouraged that financial scandal. Year after year, they insisted that nothing could be done to treat sovereign lending differently from other loans, despite the obvious difference in the nature of those loans and the global urgency for a solution. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) missed the central point, which is that the Finance Act 1990 clearly showed that third-world debt provisions could be treated legally in a different category and manner from other provisions. The Government swept aside their pretence and the 1990 Act proved that such loans could be treated differently. The tragedy is that the action was too little, too late.

In the first stage of the financial scandal, the problem was one of allowing banks to claim tax relief on provisions on loans that they still held at face value. We are now in a second and rather different stage of the same scandal. Many banks, certainly many British banks, have disposed of a large part of their loans. They have taken some losses, so what was originally tax relief against provisions is now tax relief gained on the actual losses on the banks' balance sheets. The problem is that those losses and that tax relief are still, in most cases, unrelated to any real debt relief for developing countries. The British banks' balance sheets may look cleaner, but there has been little benefit to the developing countries.

Most of the disposal of United Kingdom bank loans has been through sales on the secondary market. In 1989 and 1990, Midland reduced the debt on its books by almost $2 billion, but only $365 million was through out and out debt reduction—the remainder was through debt equity swaps, which merely transforms one form of foreign obligation into another, or through simple trading on the secondary market. Other banks such as National Westminster appear to have disposed of virtually all of their third-world debt through secondary market sales.

The truth is that having padded the banks to the hilt, the Government have now allowed them to get away with the loot. At that moment in time in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the provisions were high, had the Government chosen to link tax relief to direct debt reduction they could have ensured not only that the banks received the tax relief, but that there was a commensurate benefit in the developing countries.

Internationally, the value of commercial bank debt reduction under the Brady initiative is perhaps at best $30 billion—less than the amount of tax credits that OECD banks appear to have generated. That is appalling. Of course, that is not the only way in which the taxpayers in the north have been asked to help the banks at no benefit to developing countries. In addition to the tax relief, it took vast sums of new official loans and new publicly underwritten loans to developing countries to enable them to maintain debt service payments to the commercial banks throughout the 1980s. The taxpayer has paid twice —through tax relief and through the advance of new official loans.

The sums involved amount to maladministration on a massive scale. The concern of Governments in the north to protect the banks, irrespective of the cost to their own citizens and the damage done to developing countries and their people, is truly scandalous.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). I welcome the work that he has done, and will no doubt continue to do, in exposing the scandal of banks fiddling around with third-world debt in order to enjoy Government tax write-offs.

When the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) rose to speak, he first professed not to understand the new clause, and then went on to say that we should concentrate on overseas aid rather than worry about debt problems. He made one useful admission, which *Hansard* will obviously record—that there is a growing disparity between the rich and poor in the world.

All the aid increases that are suggested, projected, sought, or demanded will be eliminated at the stroke of a pen by the debt repayment system, underpayment for commodities produced by third-world countries, and the repatriation of profits by multinational corporations. That occurs to the extent that last year the poor in the poorest countries in the world transferred $50 billion to the economies of the richest countries in the world. That wealth went not to the people who are sleeping in cardboard boxes along the Strand tonight, but to the banking systems of this country, the rest of Europe, and north America.

The new clause of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) takes a useful step forward in exposing what British banks have been up to over the past few years. They pretended to the public that they were doing something about the debt crisis of developing countries, when in reality they were enjoying a handout at the expense of British taxpayers.

A new approach is needed. For all the honeyed words at Rio and the other statements that have been made, unless there is a fundamental change in the relationship between the richest countries and the poorest people in the poorest countries, we will be heading for a massive ecological and social disaster.

In many cases, people who are seeking asylum in neighbouring third-world countries are the victims of the debt crisis. They flee to seek a living elsewhere because they have been forced off their land, have nowhere to live, and can get nothing to eat. They are the initial victims.

The debt crisis has its origins in the oil price rises of the 1970s and the funding of inappropriate development programmes. The two crucial elements in any developing country's economy are the prices paid for the commodities that it produces and the interest that it pays on borrowings to develop its agriculture, social infrastructures, or industry.

Neither of those two important economic levers is in the hands of third-world countries. The prices of cocoa, coffee, tea, and other commodities are set not by the producer country but in London, Frankfurt, Chicago—everywhere except in the countries that produce them. Similarly, interest rates are set not by those who must meet them but be greedy bankers in western Europe and north America.

The debt crisis reached its height in the early 1980s, when, basically, Mexico declared itself bankrupt. The response was swift and, in some ways, very clever in the interests of north American bankers in particular. They sought to divide the indebted nations by making one-off agreements, to persuade them to borrow yet more money to pay the arrears on interest payments on existing loans and to accept an alternative economic package.

If one studies the economics of Latin American countries over the past 15 years, one finds a steady reduction in public spending on the social infrastructure and on social needs. One also finds a steady increase in the repatriation of profits by multinational capital and in the amount of money paid as interest on debts. Very little of the principal has been paid. Mexico, for example, has paid more than all the money it ever borrowed, but it is still a heavily indebted country.

In a sense, they are technical points. The reality is that expenditure on the health service, social services and education is cut in countries which cannot afford any reductions of expenditure on such vital services. When we read of increasing infant mortality rates in third-world countries and of the growing cholera epidemic in many parts of Latin America, we should realise that there is a direct connection between those horrible and horrifying facts and the economic restructuring programmes which have been forced on those countries by the International Monetary Fund and by the World bank.

This process cannot continue. Tonight we are considering one aspect of that process, in which the British taxpayer is expected to support the British banks in their attitude—their mistaken attitude—towards third-world countries. The issue is enormously important. Unless there is a serious programme of writing off public and private sector debt in its entirety and of restructuring payments for commodities and trading arrangements with third-world countries, the future will involve nothing but more and more experts stepping off planes from Washington——

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): And London.

Mr. Corbyn: And London, telling third-world Governments that they must cut down their rainforests because they are a source of export earnings, that they must produce more coffee, tea and cocoa while, at the same time, the world price for those commodities continues to fall. They must repay increasing sums in debt, sell state-owned enterprises and cut public expenditure programmes. Such countries face horrific prospects.

While I obviously support an increase in the aid programme and support the non-governmental aid programmes, unless we deal with the basic issues of debt, fair trade and commodity prices, the outlook for 1 billion people around the world is not one of improved living standards or increased life expectancy but of the very opposite—of seeing their economies collapse, their life expectancy fall, and infant mortality rates rise.

As a developed country which has made millions or billions of pounds over decades and centuries from the poorest people in the poorest parts of the world, we have a responsibility to play an important role in trying to restructure the world's economy and to base it on social justice, on environmental protection and on paying the people who produce the goods that we consume a reasonable price for them. Instead, we have a cock-eyed financial system under which those who have made the most out of the third world now seek to make the most out of the British taxpayer.

The new clause is a useful step forward, but I hope—indeed, I am sure—that we shall return time and again to such an important issue as the world situation gets worse and more people suffer because of the rapacious attitudes of the banking systems of western Europe and north America.

11.15 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): At this late hour, I shall confine myself to asking the Financial Secretary three questions. First, can we be clear about whether the £100 million talked about in relation to Rio is new money or whether some or all of it will come out of existing Overseas Development Administration funds? I see my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) indicating that she, too, wants that question answered. Few people know precisely what is the Government's position in the matter. I went to hear the Secretary of State for the Environment make his big statement at the natural history museum in South Kensington and it was far from clear to the roomful of experts just what had been committed by the Government.

As another part of the same question, may we be told what money has been given to the Darwin initiative? Is it £2 million or £5 million? I am all for that initiative, but a sign of how little it was thought out is the fact that neither the head of the Royal Botanic gardens in Edinburgh, whose institution was named by the Prime Minister in Rio, nor the head of Kew gardens, Ghillean Prance, knew anything about it beforehand. Dr. David Ingram learned about it from a reporter from the *Edinburgh Evening News*. Not since Harold Wilson dreamt up the Open university on the night train to Glasgow has such a thing happened.

Secondly, what does the Financial Secretary consider the responsibility of the Government to be in this area? I listened carefully to everything that my hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), said, and I agree that there is a big problem. One or two banks cannot be expected to operate by themselves in the matter.

I went to the rally of the Amerindians in February 1989 and I was in Brasilia at the same time as Sir Kit McMahon, who had briefed me when I was a member of the indirectly elected European Parliament, when he was an official of the Bank of England. He subsequently became chairman of the Midland bank. It was clear that the Midland could not unilaterally take on the responsibilities involved. Indeed, the Midland and Lloyds could not take on those responsibilities, and one could not in those days expect Sir Jeremy Morse and Sir Kit McMahon to take on total responsibility. What does the Treasury now see, in those circumstances, as the responsibilities of the British Government and the responsibilities of the EC as a whole?

My third question, asked in the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), is about Libyan sanctions. I hope that in the Consolidated Fund Bill debate one of us will be lucky enough to raise at length the folly and—dare I use the expression—ignorance of the Foreign Office in relation to that issue.

I am as concerned as anybody about Lockerbie. I saw it. But I also saw, in the company of my hon. Friend, the bombing of the working-class areas of Benghazi and Tripoli. It is a complicated matter. It is generally accepted who were the main instigators of the worst crime against civilians in the western world since 1945, the bringing down of the PanAm airliner over that Scottish village. The police from my constituency had to help clear up the mess, and it was a terrible mess.

We want to know the cost of the sanctions. We talk about the third world, but, frankly, the Gadaffi regime, for all its shortcomings in the middle and early 1980s—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Member has been in the House long enough to appreciate that he is straying from the subject matter of the new clause.

Mr. Dalyell: I always accept the Chair's ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I leave the matter there. What is the cost of the Libyan sanctions, imposed against a regime that is one of the most ecologically imaginative in Africa?

Mrs. Roche: As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) has said, the new clause constitutes a modest attempt to set Britain in the right direction in regard to the debts of the south of the world. It is not nearly enough, but it is a start.

In 1992, UNICEF published its "State of the World's Children" report, which stated:

> "A new slavery has shackled the African continent and its name is debt. The countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, including most of the world's least developed countries, now owe a total of approximately £150 billion. Each year, Africa struggles to pay about one third of the interest which falls due; the rest is simply added to the rising mountain of debt under which the hopes of a continent lie buried. The total inhumanity of what is now happening is reflected in the single fact that even the small proportion of the interest which Africa does manage to pay is absorbing a quarter of its export earnings and costing the continent, each year, more than its total spending on the health and education of its people".

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) pointed out, the 1970s saw the beginning of many problems for developing countries. Following the first oil shock at the end of 1973 and the subsequent world economic slump, many developing countries faced financial disaster, and borrowing was one temporary way out. Many of the debts then fell due in the late 1970s, at the same time as oil prices quadrupled for a second time and interest rates began to rise. As we have seen time and time again, it is always the poor who pay the price.

For as long as I can remember, we have periodically seen on our television screens terrible pictures of famines and droughts, and of politicians saying that this must never be allowed to happen again. Yet, time and time again, we see the same pictures and hear the same words.

There were many fine words to be heard at the recent conference in Rio. Of course something must be done. It is frequently said, not only by Opposition Members, but in the House as a whole, that we are not three worlds but one world. As Susan George so ably pointed out in her book "A Fate Worse than Debt":

> "The reality is we are all aboard the same ship steaming towards the iceberg. Even if those of us in the developed countries are travelling first class, and the people of the poor countries are travelling in the most miserable steerage, we all have the same need to navigate away from disaster".

If Brazil is crippled by bank loans and debts, the one world's ecosystem is destroyed and its rainforests are flattened. If India is defenceless against unscrupulous corporations, the one world's atmosphere is polluted by chemical plants.

Our one world is a small world, and the new clause goes only a tiny part of the way towards putting things right. Without action to reduce debt substantially, any form of development in the 1990s simply will not be possible for many developing countries. Of course small steps such as the British Trinidad terms initiative are to be welcomed, but they need to be greatly expanded. Faster and deeper reductions in commercial debt must be achieved. It is

deplorable that while the Government were proposing the Trinidad terms, they were blocking proposals in Brussels to reduce debt owed to the European Community.

British tax regulations encourage commercial banks to set aside provisions against possible default on third-world debts in the accounts, but not to translate these provisions into debt relief for the countries concerned. Many British taxpayers resent the fact that they are subsidising the banks without providing any relief for the world's poor —especially when the tax relief is to the tune of £650 million, as it was in the financial year 1990-91. According to the Government's figures, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), that is about half of what Britain spends in aid a year. The new clause seeks to offer banks more relief, but it would be conditional on using it for the reduction of debt, either through the sale at a loss of the debt to the debtor country or a swap that had environmental or developmental gain.

When the Opposition tabled a new clause similar to this one during the proceedings on the Finance Bill in 1990, the then Economic Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), told my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South that the relief proposals in the new clause could be very costly. Rather than considering these proposals as costly, we should consider them as a first faltering step which we cannot afford not to take.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The purpose of the new clause is to extend relief against corporation tax to relief, in certain circumstances, of world debt. Two separate issues are tied up in that proposition, as the debate has made clear. That is best illustrated by looking at the transaction from two different perspectives.

First, there is the perspective of the banking supervisor or the banking manager whose proper concern is to ensure that if a debt is in the bank's balance sheet and is unlikely to be serviced or repaid, proper provision is made against that debt within the bank's accounts. The second perspective is what one might broadly term the borrower's perspective: never mind what is going on in the bank's accounts, is the bank going to demand repayment of the debt, whether or not it has been provided against?

There has been a tendency during the debate to assume that the banker's or the banking supervisor's viewpoint is the private concern of bankers and that it need be of no concern to hon. Members, and still less of concern to developing countries. That is not a proper proposition for any hon. Member to accept. The fact is that every hon. Member and everyone working in our domestic economy has a clear and important vested interest in ensuring that banks have stable balance sheets so that they are able to undertake their proper activity of providing credit for the purpose of ensuring the efficient functioning of both the home and the overseas economy. It is not, therefore, something that is an abstruse concern of banking regulators.

What is also striking is the hostility that has been articulated, not so much by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) but certainly by his hon. Friends the Members for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), towards the role of private capital in financing trade and economic activity in the developing world. They made it absolutely clear that they saw no legitimate role for servicing the capital provided to third world countries through private banking institutions. In taking that view, they are being left far behind by those in the developing world whose day-to-day responsibility it is to ensure the development of those third world economies and who have moved on from the world of 20 years ago when they regarded every private sector company from the developed world as a multinational company whose sole purpose was to rape their country. That is not the role or the perspective of those people within the developing world who are now interested in ensuring the development of their countries.

It was striking to hear the hon. Member for Islington, North rightly stress the importance of ensuring proper and fair terms of trade between developed and developing countries and then, in the next breath, to make clear his hostility to the provision of finance to allow that trade to take place. That seems to me a difficult argument for the House to accept.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman may not have heard all that I said very clearly. Perhaps he has a problem with hearing. The point that I was trying to make was that the money paid for coffee, cocoa, tea and other commodities is less now, in real terms, than it was 20 years ago. The more coffee that is produced at the behest of advisers from the World bank and the International Monetary Fund, the lower, in effect, is the resulting price. Thus, more land is taken up producing export crops, and there is less land available to produce food for the people in the countries concerned. I want the Government and the Minister to address the serious problem of the prices paid for basic commodities produced by poor countries.

11.30 pm

Mr. Dorrell: The one thing I will certainly not do is export on an international scale the kind of intervention price system which is causing us so much difficulty in the context of the common agricultural policy. The interest of those who want proper development to take place and full participation of developing countries in the international trading system, among whom I include almost all the responsible Governments in the developing world, is to see a proper financial structure that allows a free interchange of goods and services between all countries, developed and developing, and to allow that trade to be properly financed.

The Opposition, during this debate, have, not surprisingly and not improperly—I make no complaint about it—concentrated on the borrower's perspective. They have been concerned—it is not fundamentally controversial between the two sides of the House—to ensure that if a debt continues to be shown and to be enforceable against a particular country there should be the realistic prospect of that developing country being able to service and repay that debt. That was, indeed, the point of view that motivated my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he promulgated the Trinidad terms, which have been mentioned in the debate. It was also the perspective which motivated Treasury Secretary Brady when he launched his initiative to encourage the banks to recognise in the Brady plan the proper limits on the likely collectability of their debts. He was concerned to make the reduction of the debts outstanding between the banks and the developing countries conditional on the necessary

[Mr. Dorrell]

reforms, to make the economic benefit of that debt reduction tangible within the developing country in question.

It is easy to dismiss, as some hon. Members have done, the practical results of the Brady plan, but I think that it would be wrong to do so. Let us look, for example, at the most publicised headline case of the Brady plan in action—Mexico. Whereas in the 1980s the average rate of growth of the Mexican economy was 1·1 per cent., it has now been projected to over 3·5 per cent. as a direct result of the changes negotiated in the context of the Brady plan. That plan has seen the debt outstanding from Mexico fall from 74 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1988 to 29 per cent. of GDP this year. The Brady plan has seen the Mexican economy relieved of $400 million a year in interest costs. So it is not true to say that the Brady plan has been disappointing in action. It has been quite impressive and has delivered, tangible benefits to those countries where the banks have been involved in a discussion about the future economic well-being of their borrower clients.

I move now to the specifics of the new clause and the proposal that is being pressed upon the House in terms of an amendment to the provisions of the Finance Act 1990. It was precisely that recognition of the importance of ensuring that we do not insist on the repayment of irrecoverable debts that motivated the changes to the corporation tax provision that we introduced into the Finance Act 1990. There were three important changes. First, the Finance Act 1990 made it clear that provisions by banks against irrecoverable sovereign debt were indeed tax allowable. Secondly, it made provision to fix the quantum by which allowable reliefs would be decided. Thirdly, it included phasing of that provision to ensure that the tax relief would not all fall in a single year. But the important point that the supporters of this new clause miss is that there is no phasing in terms of the 1990 Act if the debtor is to be released immediately from the obligation to repay the loan.

The clause would simply remove the phasing requirement in three circumstances that are identified in subsection (4). The first of those relates to the release of debt in favour of the creditor state, and the second concerns the reduction of debt in favour of the creditor state. In both those cases phasing is already waived under the terms of the 1990 Act. Therefore, the new clause would only provide the tax relief a year earlier than the present law allows—in effect, a one-year, interest-free loan from the Government to the bank provided that the bank then went ahead and made a "relevant release" of the debt in question.

Mr. Boateng: That is the purpose.

Mr. Dorrell: The Opposition now say that that was their purpose. It was not the tenor of their speeches, which indicated greater concern with the introduction of a new principle into the law. But the principle that if a debt is written off, and the debtor is exempted from servicing or repaying it, there should be no phasing requirement is written into the 1990 Act. The only provision of this new clause that is not in the 1990 Act is the third one in subsection (4)—that the phasing requirement should be waived if an environmental and development plan that has been approved by the Treasury is undertaken. That shows a touching faith in the environmental and developmental expertise of Her Majesty's Treasury, and I gratefully recognise it.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Rio £100 million new money? The question of Treasury approval is very unclear.

Mr. Dorrell: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister does not make commitments to put money into the global environmental fund without securing the prior consent of the Treasury. This does indeed have Treasury consent.

The proposal is that there should be exemption in the case of development plans approved by the Treasury. I prefer to encourage the banks to agree to release the borrowers, provided that they undertake the reforms that are necessary to the efficient functioning of their economies. That principle underlies the Brady plan, which has been effective in practice, and I commend it, rather than the one espoused by the Opposition, to the House.

Mr. Boateng: In his speech, which was clearly prepared before the debate, the Minister has not in any way answered the points made by my hon. Friends. He has not addressed the central issue that has dominated this debate—the need to ensure that where relief is given it actually relieves the countries that are so desperately in need. The Minister has not addressed the importance of ensuring that relief given to commercial banks has an environmental and developmental focus. These issues, which are incorporated in the new clause, remain crucial. They are central to the modest proposals intended to lighten an intolerable burden on developing nations, and we intend to press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 101, Noes 254.

Division No. 55] **[11.39 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Dowd, Jim
Alton, David	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Barron, Kevin	Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Bayley, Hugh	Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Beckett, Margaret	Fyfe, Maria
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	George, Bruce
Benton, Joe	Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Bermingham, Gerald	Godman, Dr Norman A.
Betts, Clive	Golding, Mrs Llin
Boateng, Paul	Graham, Thomas
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*	Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Gunnell, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Hall, Mike
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Hanson, David
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*	Heppell, John
Chisholm, Malcolm	Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Clapham, Michael	Hinchliffe, David
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*	Hoey, Kate
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Home Robertson, John
Cohen, Harry	Hood, Jimmy
Connarty, Michael	Hoon, Geoff
Cryer, Bob	Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence	Hoyle, Doug
Dalyell, Tam	Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Davidson, Ian	Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*	Hutton, John
Denham, John	Illsley, Eric
Dewar, Donald	Kilfoyle, Peter
Dixon, Don	Llwyd, Elfyn
Donohoe, Brian	McAllion, John

MacDonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
O'Neill, Martin
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Roche, Ms Barbara
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Strang, Gavin
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and
Mr. John Battle.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 8

VANS PROVIDED TO EMPLOYEES FOR PRIVATE USE

'After Section 156 of the Taxes Act 1988, there shall be inserted the following new section—

"156A(i) This section shall apply where a van is provided by an employer to an employee for private use.

(ii) In these circumstances, no benefit shall arise under section 156 above.

(iii) Instead, the scale benefit that will apply to a van will be £200 for each year.

(iv) The above scale benefit will be reduced proportionately when the van is available for private use for less than the whole tax year.

(v) The van will not be regarded as available for private use when it is a pool van (to be determined in like manner to a pool car as is set out in Taxes Act 1988, section 159).

(vi) For the purposes of this section, a van means any mechanically propelled motor vehicle constructed primarily for the conveyance of goods or burden of any description.".'.—*[Mr. Beith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Beith: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Hundreds of thousands of employees who are provided by their employer with a van in which they drive home at night now face additional income tax charges. That is also a problem for their employers because they have much paperwork associated with it. It results from the Inland Revenue treating the provision of a van for private use as a benefit in kind, so thousands of employers, from the largest such as British Telecom to small businesses such as plumbers, shopfitters and joiners, face the prospect of a bureaucratic nightmare in maintaining the records necessary to fill in form P11D, which is the form on which benefits in kind are included.

The tax charge applies whenever an employer makes a van available for the private use of an employee, and that will include private motoring on evenings or weekends, travel from home to either the main base of work or to the first call of the day, and travel to home from the main base of work or from the last call of the day.

Let us consider a plumber's employee who is provided with a van which he uses to make his calls and to carry his heavy equipment. He takes the van home each evening, partly because he has secure parking here, partly, perhaps, because it is a way of carrying his tools home and not leaving them around, and partly because he can then proceed to his first call the next day. The Revenue will regard as private use that private journey home, plus any use that he may make of the van at the weekend, and a tax charge will be raised on that.

It is well known that the provision of a car to an employee triggers an income tax liability computed with reference to a scale of charges in the tax legislation, but, because of the precise definition of a car in the legislation, the provision of vans for private use is not caught by the car scale charge provisions. The legislation enabling a tax charge to be levied on vans has been around since 1976, but until recently it has not been invoked by the Revenue.

The Inland Revenue finds out about benefits in kind from form P11D, which has to be completed by the employer in respect of every employee earning more than £8,500 a year, which is increasingly most people who would have the use of a van. The pre-printed form issued by the Revenue lists all the main tax benefits, and the employer fills in the details. Although technically the provision of a van for private use should in any event be filled in by the employer in the other section on the form, there was no specific box on the form to record the provision of vans. Largely because of that, most employers did not bother. Apparently, that was allowed by the Revenue by default. The result is that people have not faced a tax charge on the availability of a van.

The Revenue appears to have changed its policy during the tax year 1990-91, and it started to raise the matter during inspections. During a form P11D inspection, a member of the Inland Revenue visits an employer and looks into the background documentation on the basis of which the form has been filled in. In some recent investigations, it appears that the Revenue took the view that it would regard the provision of a van for private use as a benefit from 6 April 1990, although not apparently from any earlier date. That approach of apparently ignoring previous tax years is completely non-statutory. It illustrates that there has been a change in the Revenue's policy.

For the employees the change means that they have to pay more tax. For the employers it means an awful lot of paperwork. Records need to be kept of individual vehicle costs right down to the last gallon of petrol, which employee has the use of the van in each year and each mile travelled by the van, differentiated between business and private use. Guidelines have to be established on what is business and what is private use. It is a complex task for employers. In many cases, small businesses have just one or two vehicles. Several employees may switch around and have the van for private use at different times in the tax year.

The only way to avoid the charge is to require the employee to return the vehicle each night to the employer's depot and hand in the keys and demonstrate that he did no private mileage during the day, for example, at lunch-time. That is an extremely elaborate procedure for the relatively limited benefit of the private use of a van.

Therefore, in the new clause we suggest a simple annual scale charge of £200. That would avoid the employer having to keep the records. It would fix at a limited point the liability of the employee to tax—that is the tax raised on the £200. The charge would be analogous to the car tax, but would be at a lower level. It seems reasonable to put it at a significantly lower level. First, the private use of a van has not been taxed in practice until recently. Secondly, the use of a van for private motoring is not exactly a luxury motoring perk.

I can speak with some authority and experience on the matter because, before we were married, my wife came to meet me on many occasions driven in a van which her father used to drive home from work. Sitting on a cushion in the back of a van for transport is not by any means an opportunity for luxury motoring. I must stress that I no longer have a financial interest in the matter because the events took place more than 25 years ago.

Not many employees who have the use of a van for private motoring would regard the imposition of a detailed charge justified mile by mile as a reasonable way of computing a tax liability. It does not make sense to the man who has the use of the van when he compares his pay slip with that of his mate who he drops off on the way home from work, who does not have the use of the van but gets a lift home in it. One of them pays a higher tax charge than the other because he has the van available. The procedures are wholly bureaucratic and could be easily remedied by the use of a small scale charge such as I have proposed.

Mr. Dorrell: The new clause proposes to set a scale benefit of £200 for the purposes of charging tax under schedule E on the benefit of a van provided by an employer to an employee for private use—one might add, of whatever kind. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) justified his proposal on the ground of the undoubted complexity of the present position because there are no special rules governing the provision of a van to an employee. Such provision is consequently covered by the general rules which, as they apply to a van, can be complex.

I have some sympathy with the principle of the new clause. But the crucial question is whether the proposals should be added to the Finance Bill this year and whether the hon. Gentleman wants to go down as the Member of Parliament who introduced the tax charge on vans used privately by employees.

Of course, the use of scale charges is not new. It applies to the majority of company cars. It has been applied more recently to mobile telephones. The £200 charge that the hon. Gentleman proposes is, of course, the same as that which applies to a mobile telephone. I am not sure that it is reasonable to say that the value to the employee of the availability of a van is the same as that of a mobile telephone. The most obvious difference is that the capital and running costs of a typical van—they must be taken into account in setting a scale benefit because it is an approximation of the value of the benefit—are considerably higher than those of a mobile phone. A charge of £200 would seem rather low when set alongside the scale benefit of just over £1,000 for the smallest company car with a high business mileage, even bearing in mind the intrinsic difference between the two levels of benefit to which the right hon. Gentleman drew attention.

12 midnight

I do not want to rule out the idea of some scale benefit for company vans. The Inland Revenue reminded employers last year that the provision of vans for employees' private use should be returned on P11Ds. That leads, undoubtedly, to the complexity that the right hon. Gentleman has described. I invite him to consider withdrawing the clause on the basis that we recognise that the present position causes unnecessary complexity and that it is something that we undertake to consider.

Mr. Beith: I am glad to know that the Minister understands that from the employers' point of view complexity leads to problems, and that many employees might have to pay a larger amount of tax because their employers have not calculated carefully and accurately the relevant charges, because of the time involved. A scale charge, although perhaps a rough-and-ready method, is probably—the same applies to a car—a much simpler approach from an employee's point of view.

I recognise the willingness of the Minister to consider the issue with greater care between now and the next Finance Bill. On that basis I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the new clause be withdrawn?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Question is, That the clause be read a Second time. As many as are of that opinion say Aye. To the contrary, No.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Noes have it.

Question negatived.

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The initial pressing of the matter to a Division—it did not proceed—was not my doing because I was happy to accept the Minister's undertaking.

New Clause 11

TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR CERTAIN SPORTING AND RECREATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

'(1) Where—

(a) an Association which has as its object the encouragement, development and governance of any sport or other form of recreational activity (or which has as its objects the representation of such Associations) is approved for the purposes of this section by the Secretary of State, and

(b) the memorandum of association of other similar instrument regulating the functions of the Association precludes the direct or indirect payment of transfer to any of its members of any of its income or property by way of dividend, gift, division, bonus or otherwise howsoever by way of profit,

there shall, on a claim in that behalf to the Board, be allowed in the case of the association—

(i) exemption from tax in respect of income, and

(ii) exemption from tax in respect of chargeable gains.

(2) In sections 338 and 339 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, "qualifying donation" shall include a payment under a disposition or covenant made by a company in favour of an Association approved for the purposes of this section under subsection (1) above.

(3) The conditions specified in paragraph (b) of subsection (i) above shall not be deemed not to be complied with in the case of any Association by reason only that the memorandum or other similar instrument regulating its functions does not prevent the payment to its members of reasonable renumeration for goods or facilities supplied, or for services rendered, of reasonable interest for money lent, or of reasonable rent for any premises.

(4) In this section "recreational activity" means any activities in the fields of physical recreation conducive to the health or welfare to those participating in them.'.—*[Ms. Hoey.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms. Hoey: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) first raised this issue in the House in 1980. Since then, many all-party attempts have been made to convince the Treasury of the strength of our case. Those of us who persist in pushing the new clause hope that reason and justice will eventually prevail. As a relatively new Member, I have made various speeches on the subject. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) must have filing cabinets full of speeches that they have made on it.

The only thing that changes each year is that the debate on the matter gets later. I apologise for holding up the House on this issue, but it is important and hon. Members should listen with a little more attention——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If hon. Members want to leave the Chamber, they should do so quietly. I am having

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

great difficulty in hearing the hon. Lady and a lot of patter is also going on behind me. I hope that hon. Members will take note.

Ms. Hoey: The new clause is simple and I hope that hon. Members will not be taken in by Treasuryspeak, which usually seeks to make the issue seem difficult. The new clause seeks to obtain tax exemptions for governing and representative bodies of sport and recreation, such as the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the Sports Aid Foundation and, most important in this Olympics year, the British Olympic Association.

The proposal is not intended to benefit private sports clubs and associations that operate for private profit. Corporation tax is paid by 81 national governing bodies of sport, which are members of the Central Council of Physical Recreation. That amounted to almost £3 million in 1980-90, which is approximately 6 per cent. of the Government's direct funding to the four sports councils.

The all-party new clause would give the Secretary of State for National Heritage a duty in addition to the many duties that he is adding to his new Department. He would have the final decision on whether the governing or representative body met the objective that is stated clearly in the new clause: to encourage, develop and govern sport or other forms of recreational activity.

Another purpose of the proposal is to enable sports governing bodies to benefit in a similar way to charities, so that those who wish to give donations will find them tax-attractive. They could benefit from the tax advantages of the gift aid scheme introduced by the Prime Minister in his former role of Chancellor.

Although the amount of tax lost to the Exchequer would be relatively insignificant, the benefit to sport and recreation cannot be overestimated. It would be substantial, not just because there would be some financial help to the beleaguered finances of many of the governing bodies of sport, but because of the moral boost that it would give, at a stroke, to some 6 million volunteers in sport. They are its backbone, providing thousands of hours of unpaid work to run the 150,000 registered sports clubs in the country.

Last week I attended the sports day of an inner-city school in my constituency—Charles Edward Brook. Many of the pupils were enjoying competitive sport at every level in that deprived area. The enjoyment that the youngsters were getting out of that sports day was evident, but more important was the voluntary work that the school's physical education department did after school hours and in the evenings, and the work that the instructor in charge, Steve White, does to encourage many youngsters who show talent to get involved in a sports club in the evening.

It is those sorts of voluntary works that we want to encourage through the new clause. It would be a clear signal from Parliament that it recognised the importance and the beneficial contribution to our communities of the voluntary sports governing bodies.

Without the burden of corporation tax, more money could be made available for grassroots sporting development at a time when there is so much concern about the welfare of schools' sporting arrangements. There is no reason why some of the exemptions could not be tied to specific development projects, which the governing bodies of sport would have to undertake as part of an overall strategy for sport and recreation.

I wish to say a few words about the British Olympic Association. It is incredible that in an Olympics year the association is virtually unique among the 166 national Olympic committees in that the British Government tax its Olympics fund-raising efforts. All the effort of many people throughout the country to help the association to ensure that our team has the best when competing with other countries is bitten into by Government taxation.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Does my hon. Friend find it as odd as I find it that, while she is fighting the good fight on behalf of sport and the British althletics and Olympic movements, the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) is not with us?

Ms. Hoey: The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne is a sponsor of the new clause. He has apologised for not being able to be here for personal reasons, which will probably appear in the newspapers tomorrow—*[Interruption.]* He has rather pressing personal problems tonight—or rather, his wife has.

The British Olympic Association bears sole responsibility for the cost of the British team at both the winter and summer Olympics, including transport, maintenance and equipment. It also funds injury research and pre-Olympic training and it maintains the Olympic library. That expenditure has increased substantially during the past 10 years. The association receives no direct Government grant. In 1988, the year of the last Olympics, it raised more than £4 million towards the cost of the participation of the British team. In 1989, just after the Olympics were over, it paid back £750,000 of that revenue in tax to the Treasury.

The association is wholly dependent on appeals to raise money every year. Relief is now needed. It would be an important gesture, not just to the association but to sport generally, if some attempt were made immediately to consider specifically the position of the association. Will the Minister agree to meet a deputation within the next week from the governing bodies of sport? Will he consider the immediate position of the British Olympic Association? Depending on his answer to those questions, I shall decide whether to press the new clause to a vote.

We have had enough excuses. Each year the matter is raised time and again. Last year, it appeared that there was some give from the Treasury; there was a feeling that something might be done in the Budget. In fact, because of various deals being struck with the pools companies—ironically, unsuccessfully to try to stave off a national lottery—any plans were dropped.

I hope that the Treasury will reconsider and that the Secretary of State for National Heritage, rather than just talking and attending sporting events, will show that his Department has muscle. I hope that he and his officials will get back to the grassroots of sport and serve our youth and British sport well.

12.15 am

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): This debate has become something of an annual event in the British sporting calendar, though it is not always attended by as many spectators as it is this evening. It gives the Government an opportunity to demonstrate whether their

public profile of support for British sport is buttressed by a realistic understanding of the consequences if new clause 11 were to pass into law.

The Olympic games will shortly commence in Barcelona. If previous performances are any yardstick, the United Kingdom will undoubtedly win several medals. When Britain's competitors return they will be received at No. 10 Downing street. There will be considerable expressions of pride at their achievements, and it will be said how much the United Kingdom's reputation has been enhanced. Some may even find themselves figuring in the next honours list.

The truth is that that will do nothing to assist sport's various governing bodies in helping others to achieve the standards of Olympic medallists. Nor will it do anything to help sports men and sports women of all standards, or to provide recreational facilities for the increasing number of people who, for sound and sensible health reasons, consider sport to be an attractive pastime.

As the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms. Hoey) made clear, the House has debated tax exemption on many previous occasions. In a debate on new clause 15 of the Finance (No. 2) Bill on 13 July 1988, beginning at column 454 of the *Official Report*, a similar proposal attracted the support of Sir Eldon Griffiths, the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), who I am glad to see in his place, Mr. Denis Howell, as he then was but now ennobled, and the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). Previous proposals for making sports associations exempt from tax attracted considerable support in all parts of the House. It would be to the great advantage of British sport and British sports men and sports women if new clause 11 were added to the Bill.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall hopes that the Government will respond positively, by meeting a deputation representing those with an interest in the subject. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer were willing to meet such a deputation, he would be doing no more than reflecting his remarks in the debate to which I referred. Replying to the amendment moved by Sir Eldon Griffiths, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"I have noted the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths). There are difficulties with the new clause, but I am prepared to review the issues raised in it and to meet hon. Members to discuss it."

He concluded:

"I have just outlined a number of difficulties, but I recognise that there is keen interest in this subject. I shall review it, and I shall be happy to talk to hon. Members about it at their convenience."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1988; Vol. 137, c. 460-62.]

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): There could be a meeting in Barcelona.

Mr. Campbell: We could meet in Barcelona, if we could persuade the Fees Office that was a legitimate purpose for Members of Parliament. If the Minister is concerned about making what might appear to be a concession in being willing to meet hon. Members who have expressed an interest, he can take comfort from the fact that as far back as 1988 the Chancellor of the Exchequer—albeit when operating at a different level of responsibility—thought that a meeting about and further discussion of the subject was well justified.

I am happy to support the new clause, which was moved so ably by the hon. Member for Vauxhall, and I hope that it will commend itself to the House.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I rise briefly to support the cross-party new clause. I agree with the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms. Hoey) and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) that it is about time that my party said something other than it will consider the issue and that it really did so.

As the hon. and learned Gentleman said, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer occupied the post now held by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary he gave an undertaking that he would examine the matter seriously and I take him at his word. This year we were pleased to be joined in tabling the new clause by my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe). I reiterate his regrets that he is not here because his wife is expecting an imminent happy event. I am sure that the House will understand why he is not here to lend his considerable support as one of the greatest athletes this country has ever produced and to urge my hon. Friend the Minister to give the issue some serious thought, especially with regard to the British Olympic Association.

As the hon. Member for Vauxhall said, the association is merely seeking relief in line with all other Olympic associations across the world. It seeks tax relief once every four years to allow our teams to be better supported and thus to perform better in the Olympic games.

We now have a Prime Minister with an avowed and very visible interest in sport. Although we did not hear him say that he would consider the issue when he was a member of the Treasury team, I am sure that in his heart of hearts he wishes to see our Olympic team going into the field properly supported and equipped. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to say something more and will at least agree to meet a delegation so that the hon. Member for Vauxhall will not be forced to press the matter to a vote.

Mr. Wilson: I shall be brief, as I spoke in the debate last year. I think that the arguments have been well made and I shall merely support them rather than prolong the proceedings.

As a matter of courtesy, I express my best wishes to the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe). It is generally a sound rule not to make impromptu references to hon. Members' non-presence in the House and I regret the fact that I broke that rule.

Mr. Dorrell: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) will be grateful to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) for the retraction of his ill-judged comment.—*[Interruption.]* Indeed. Perhaps we shall see the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) there too.

Several hon. Members have said that this debate has become an annual event, and my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) was good enough to offer me a little career advice by suggesting that the Prime Minister will take a keen personal interest in the examination of the issue so it behoves the holder of my office to consider it particularly seriously. I gladly assure the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms. Hoey) that if she wants to discuss it in depth with me and my officials, I should be very pleased to see her and any delegation she may wish to bring. The issue has aroused interest in all parts of the House over a number of years, so I gladly commit myself to looking at it in detail and from a sympathetic background.

[Mr. Dorrell]

However, I should in honesty tell the House that there are some reservations. I put them to hon. Members not in a spirit of saying, "That is why I shall conclude, as a result of the examination, that the system must go on as before," but in the spirit of saying, "Those are the questions that the hon. Lady and her delegation will find confronting them when they come to see me, so those are the issues that their representations will have to address."

The new clause is generous and wide ranging. It would give complete exemption from corporation tax to any association that was involved in the promotion of physical and recreational activities. That would include a very wide range of activities. That generosity should be compared with the present position, where the only bodies in British tax law that are wholly exempt from corporation tax are local authorities and health service bodies. Even the exemption enjoyed by charities is conditional on the charity's income being applied solely to charitable purposes, which does not include sport. That is not to say that there is no way round the problem, but it is the problem that we face in the current structure of corporation tax.

If such an exemption were granted carte blanche to the bodies that the hon. Lady and her supporters have in mind, it would confer an unfair advantage on those bodies where, for example, they sold sports equipment or refreshments or indulged in any other trade activity in direct competition with other local traders who did not enjoy similar tax privileges.

Further, although there is a common-sense perception of the meaning of the word "sport", it is not a word which lends itself easily to the sort of tight definition that would be necessary if it were to be written into tax law in such a way as to avoid others free riding on the hon. Lady's proposal in a way that she would be the first to deprecate. So if we are to make any progress, we must consider a definition of "sport" that delivers the hon. Lady's objective without including a wide range of activities which she would not wish to include.

The clause contains provisions designed to allow companies to receive relief for covenanted donations. Again, I am prepared to examine that, but we must remember that the covenanting system is currently associated with the concept of charity. It is well understood in charity law, as I said, that sport is not a charitable activity, and it is legitimate to ask whether we want a significant share of money now provided to the charities world through the covenanting system diverted to the sports world, remembering that the sports world benefits to a significant extent from company sponsorship, which in many cases is tax allowable.

The hon. Lady asked for a meeting. I shall be glad to hold a meeting to examine the issue carefully and to see whether those questions can be answered.

Mr. Skinner: When?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman, tough inquisitor that he is, asks when. When the hon. Lady seeks a meeting, I shall be glad to arrange it as quickly as may be.

Ms. Hoey: The Minister has said nothing about the British Olympic Association. Will he please dwell on that?

Mr. Dorrell: I think that the fact that the Olympic games start in the next couple of weeks is a coincidence of timing which concentrates hon. Members' minds on the application of a general principle. I did not gather that the hon. Member for Vauxhall was seeking special treatment for the Olympic movement; I understood her to be citing it as a particularly acute example of the operation of tax law in Britain and contrasting our treatment of our Olympic association with the treatment of such associations in other jurisdictions. I consider that a less powerful argument than the arguments that the hon. Lady advanced about the generality of sporting bodies. To consider the impact on the Olympic association of a specific aspect of our tax system is to avoid, or ignore, a range of support arrangements that are available to our Olympic movement and available—or not, as the case may be—to other such movements. I think that the hon. Lady's case is stronger when she concentrates on the principle, rather than on its specific application to the Olympic movement.

As I have said, I will gladly meet the hon. Lady to discuss the subject further, but I hope that she will then address her representations to the concerns that I have expressed this evening—concerns that my predecessors have expressed on similar occasions in the past.

12.30 am

Ms. Hoey: I thank the Financial Secretary, who has been a little more positive than his predecessor. It may be a coincidence that his predecessor is no longer a Member of Parliament. His predecessor did meet a deputation last year, and we considered the meeting very useful; unfortunately, nothing came of it.

I should be happy to meet the Financial Secretary with a deputation, but I hope that his powers of persuasion are a bit stronger than those of the previous incumbent; otherwise, we shall be wasting our time. The hon. Gentleman said that he would consider the wider issues carefully. I hope that that will happen as a result of our meeting, and that we shall not have to come back next year for the same sterile debate. I hope that we shall make progress during the coming year.

There is strong agreement, and a wish to find a way forward. I realise that the issue is complicated; we all realise that. What I do not want, however—and what sports governing bodies do not want—is a continuing failure to consider the matter seriously because of the gobbledegook of Treasuryspeak.

I shall take up the Financial Secretary's offer, and hope to see him next week. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Hon. Members: No.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 22, Noes 161.

Division No. 58] [12.32 am

AYES

Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Hoey, Kate
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Home Robertson, John
Connarty, Michael	Hood, Jimmy
Donohoe, Brian	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Dowd, Jim	McAllion, John
Ewing, Mrs Margaret	MacDonald, Calum
Godman, Dr Norman A.	Pendry, Tom
Graham, Thomas	Salmond, Alex
Heppell, John	Welsh, Andrew

Wilson, Brian
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'rtfordshire)*
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Richards, Rod
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made, and Question put, That further consideration of the Bill be now adjourned.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

The House divided: Ayes 132, Noes 14.

Division No. 57] **[12.43 am**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Bates, Michael
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Hawkins, Nicholas
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Monro, Sir Hector
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Richards, Rod
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*

Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

NOES

Chisholm, Malcolm
Connarty, Michael
Donohoe, Brian
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Hood, Jimmy
McAllion, John
MacDonald, Calum
Morley, Elliot
Salmond, Alex
Welsh, Andrew
Wilson, Brian
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill, not amended in Committee and as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered this day.

The Naze

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

12.53 am

Mr. Iain Sproat (Harwich): I am extremely grateful, at this early hour of the morning, to have the opportunity to put to my hon. Friend the Minister the important case of the Naze at Walton-on-the Naze. I do so because I seek the Government's help in efforts to protect and preserve the Naze. Before I go into further detail on this matter, perhaps I should give a description of the Naze because I do not know whether my hon. Friend has seen it.

The Naze—I believe that the name is etymologically connected with the word "nose"—is a grassy promontory that sticks out into the North sea. It is extensive, being about 159 acres, and it has a sea line of three miles. The important thing about it is that it is an extremely beautiful, open, natural space. It is unspoilt countryside and a real bit of old England. It is absolutely central to the life of the community, and that is easily proven by the fact that the attractive and picturesque seaside resort of Walton-on-the-Naze takes its name from the Naze.

We have 150 acres of beautiful land. However, it is not just a beautiful coastline, and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should consider several other factors when, hopefully, he agrees to approve the scheme which lies with his Ministry and grants the money to execute the scheme. As well as being a beautiful landscape, there is a listed building on the Naze called the Naze tower. It was built in 1720 and is a very dramatic and romantic building.

The area is much visited by tourists and the prosperity of Walton-on-the-Naze depends to a considerable degree on the tourist trade. However, most important of all is the natural amenity value. My hon. Friend the Minister will recall that, when there was a public inquiry on a previous occasion about the Naze, the inspector said that it was a natural asset whose high amenity value could not be measured simply in monetary terms. That is part of the essence that I wish to put to my hon. Friend the Minister.

We have a beautiful area, so what is the problem? Very simply, the problem is that that very beautiful area is being destroyed by two factors: first, by springs at the top of the cliffs; and, secondly, by the fact that the cliffs, which run for well over 1,000 yds along the seaward side and which are very substantial, being about 70 ft to 80 ft high, are being worn away by the action of the sea. When I say "worn away", I am not talking about a slow erosion.

I received a reply from my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 22 June which stated that the erosion over the past 12 months was on average about 6 ft a year. Of course, if there is a violent storm, a huge chunk of the cliff—much more than 6 ft—may fall away. Perhaps I can give an example that may strike the imagination of my hon. Friend the Minister. In the days when his grandfather was Prime Minister, a number of block houses were built on the cliffs of the Naze to resist the German invasion. If one walks on the cliffs today, one can hardly see those concrete block houses because they are so far out at sea with the waves washing over them. That is what will happen to the whole of the Naze.

I mentioned earlier the Naze tower, a beautiful and romantic listed building that was built in 1720. The Naze

tower now stands some 60 yds from the cliff edge. One does not need to be a profound mathematician to work out that it will not take many years with an erosion rate of 6 ft or more a year before that listed building topples into the sea.

We have a beautiful amenity area with a listed building standing on it, and it is a prime source of tourist attraction for the area. However, it is being steadily destroyed. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to provide the funds to preserve it. As he will know, on three occasions over the past 15 years, plans have been put to the Government for groynes, rebutments and other ways of stopping the sea smashing up against the base of the cliffs. Those plans were rejected on every occasion. I shall refer to the reasons for the rejections in a moment, but now a fourth plan is being laid before the Ministry.

The fourth plan is not very expensive—indeed, it is so cheap comparatively that I wonder how much good it would do in the long term. None the less, those who are more expert than I in such matters say that it is desirable. At 1992 prices, it is costed at £400,000, of which my hon. Friend's Ministry will be responsible for only 70 per cent., 15 per cent. being the responsibility of the local Tendring district council, and the other 15 per cent. being the responsibility of Essex county council. My hon. Friend has it in his power to enable a comparatively small amount of money to do an enormous amount of good.

My hon. Friend, with his usual robust common sense, may ask, "Why are we even having the debate? We have that beautiful area, that listed building, that tourist attraction, and something which is central to the locality. It is being destroyed. Why should there be any argument about it?" Of course, it is a natural asset of this country, and it should be preserved. There have been a number of reasons in the past why previous Governments have rejected plans to preserve and protect the Naze as it should be preserved.

The first argument which my hon. Friend's predecessors have put forward is that that kind of protection against the sea is normally given only when houses are in imminent risk of being washed away. I gladly tell my hon. Friend that, on this occasion, no houses are in imminent danger of being washed away. There are certainly houses on the Naze, but it would take many years before the land on which they stand is in danger of crumbling away, although considerable apprehension is felt by the people who live there. They feel that a blight has descended on their houses because the defences are not adequate to protect the Naze against the sea. None the less, I am not maintaining the argument that it is to preserve houses that are in imminent danger of destruction, but surely the point of saying that the danger to houses is an argument to be taken into consideration by the Government is that houses are an important asset. We have another important asset, and that is the Naze itself. That is what, on this occasion, should move my hon. Friend.

The second argument that has been put on previous occasions concerns the economic benefit of the Naze. I wrote to my noble Friend Earl Howe two weeks ago, and he sent me a letter which I received yesterday. I thank him and his officials for sending me a duplicate copy this morning. However, when I read the letter I was disturbed by it, first, because my noble Friend said that, as entry to the Naze is free, it is very difficult to make any economic judgments and that we must find an indirect way of judging it.

Of course, although it is true that access to the Naze is free to pedestrians, one must pay if one goes in a car. The least charge that one pays is £1·20. In spite of that, 16,000 cars a year go to the Naze. If there is an average of three people in a car, and that is almost 50,000 visitors already, I guess from my own observation of the Naze that at least that number arrive on foot. One hundred thousand people a year think that the Naze is a sufficient tourist attraction to visit.

Even more worrying about my noble Friend's letter and his not realising that cars have to pay to go to the Naze and that therefore we have a direct economic index of the popularity of the Naze is his description of how the Ministry proposes to make an indirect judgment of the economic benefits of the Naze. My hon. Friend the Minister, who might not have seen the letter, will hardly credit that his Ministry proposes that tourists should be stopped at the top of the Naze and asked what monetary value they place upon visiting the Naze at this moment and what monetary value they would place on the Naze next year if it were to be reduced by 6 ft. That is absolutely barmy. The Ministry proposes to aggregate that sum, multiply it by the number of visitors, and say that the difference between the two is the value which people put on having the Naze protected. I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Minister will want to take into account the economic value of the Naze. However, the extraordinary ivory-tower academic absurdity of the letter will give people living in the constituency little confidence that a proper economic evaluation has been made.

The third reason why the Naze has not attracted Government help in the past is almost more absurd. It can be described as "the fossil case". The Naze is built in part of a type of earth, if I may speak in layman's language, known as London clay. London clay is an old substance —some 50 million years old. Many ancient fossils are found in it. Of course, fossils are extremely interesting, but the argument has been made that the more the sea is allowed to wear away the wonderful natural beautiful asset of the Naze, the more fossils will become apparent.

The value placed on studying the fossils is given priority over the value to the people who enjoy the amenity of the Naze. I hope that my hon. Friend will not use that argument again, as it has been used in the past. I understand that agreement has been reached with English Nature—the quango which deals with such matters—on finding a way for the fossil hunters to continue to find some of the fossils without the whole of the Naze having to be destroyed.

So far the plan which the Tendring district council put before my hon. Friend the Minister has found only one objector out of the many thousands of local inhabitants. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that it would be an abuse of democracy if we had to go through the rigmarole of a public inquiry, which would cost money that could be far better devoted to saving the Naze, simply because one person had objected. I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that any application made by one person for a public inquiry should be overridden.

If my hon. Friend the Minister says, "I agree with everything that you say. You have persuaded me. I am about to give approval to the plan and to give funds to execute it", I will accept with alacrity and gratitude. But if he is minded to say no to the splendid plan, I hope that his refusal will not be set in concrete. I hope that he will agree

[Mr. Iain Sproat]

to meet me and perhaps a delegation so that we can bring more persuasion to bear in private than perhaps I have been able to bring this morning.

1.7 am

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): May I first congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat) on being selected to debate this topic on the Adjournment of the House. Without being over-familiar, I congratulate my hon. Friend on presenting such a persuasive and authoritative case without using a single note. He was obviously in command of his subject and knowledgeable about it.

My hon. Friend represented the interests of his constituents with great knowledge and feeling. He has written to my Department on several occasions about the matter and has tabled no fewer than nine parliamentary questions. The issue is of considerable importance to him and his constituents. Naturally, we take it seriously. I assure my hon. Friend that, whether or not he is satisfied with the answer that he receives tonight, the Parliamentary Secretary in the House of Lords, Earl Howe, will, of course, be delighted to receive my hon. Friend at a suitable time, together with whatever delegation he may choose to bring with him.

Coastal defence is an important and often controversial issue. It is right that such matters should be subjected to careful scrutiny, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, before any decisions are reached. Before I respond to the particular points that he has made, I shall explain a little of the background.

The Ministry that I represent has policy responsibility both for the alleviation of flooding, whether by rivers or the sea, and for the protection of the coastline from erosion. The Government set the national priorities, provide substantial sums in grant aid for flood and coastal defence works and give guidance on the engineering, environmental and economic factors that should be taken into account.

Operational responsibility for the construction and maintenance of defences in particular locations rests with local bodies. For sea defences against flooding, this generally means the local committees of the National Rivers Authority. For works to protect the coast from erosion—as, for example, at Walton-on-the-Naze—this usually means the district councils. These local bodies decide whether to put forward schemes of coastal defence work to the Ministry for approval and for grant aid. The system is essentially one of partnership between central and local government.

In considering applications for grant aid, the Ministry expects the operating authorities to have examined a range of options for tackling flooding or erosion at a particular site, and also to have assessed the implications of taking no action whatever. The no-action option provides an essential benchmark against which to judge the advantages and disadvantages of attempting to resist the forces of nature at a particular point. Naturally, much depends on the nature of the land immediately behind the coastline.

Proposals for coastal protection work are considered first by the Ministry's regional engineers for the relevant area, who have the necessary professional expertise. Essentially, there are a number of yardsticks against which all such proposals will be judged. Planned schemes must be sound in engineering terms, environmentally acceptable and economically worth while.

It is essential that these works should fall into the criteria that I have described. Above all, they must represent value for money for the taxpayer. My hon. Friend is an experienced parliamentarian and had been a Member before being elected to represent Harwich, so he knows that value for money must be a critical judgment and assessment. That means that all of the costs and benefits of a proposal must be extremely carefully quantified. Put simply, unless it can be shown that the benefits are at least equal to the costs, there must be a presumption against a particular scheme being approved for grant aid.

It is self-evident that coastal defence works must be properly engineered to undertake the task that is required. There are often a number of different ways of achieving the desired result, and the local authority must be able to demonstrate that its design and construction plans, and its choice of materials, are sound. The Ministry's engineers are well qualified to undertake the task of verifying the propositions.

Proposed works must be properly engineered and environmentally acceptable, and that is inevitably a more subjective assessment. All coastal engineering work involves some interference with the natural environment, and sometimes a balance will have to be struck between the protection of life and property and the protection of the environment. All proposed schemes are, therefore, passed to English Nature for comment. Local authorities are strongly encouraged to consult both statutory and voluntary conservation bodies from the earliest stages when planning work. Wherever possible, conservation and amenity features are incorporated in modern coastal defence schemes. We now try to work with, rather than against, nature.

I should stress that these cost-benefit analyses are not undertaken in a crude or simplistic manner. It is, of course, easier to quantify the so-called "tangible" costs and benefits of coast protection schemes. By that I mean that we can fairly readily measure benefits in terms of prevention or mitigation of damage to domestic and commercial property and transport links, for example. We have made progress in recent years with the much more difficult job of quantification of the so-called "intangible" benefits of coastal defence schemes, such as amenity, recreational and environmental benefits.

A number of techniques are available for the quantification of amenity or environmental benefits. Of those, the contingent valuation method is best suited to valuing the benefits of preserving cliff-top recreational sites like those so graphically and admirably described by my hon. Friend. That involves asking members of the public to place a monetary value on their enjoyment of a site as it is and as it would be if no action were taken to preserve it. The differences between the two values can then be aggregated to give a value for the amenity benefit of any scheme that preserved the site. There is clearly an element of subjectivity here and it is clear that this and similar techniques must be used with scrupulous care if credence is to be given to the results. But such measurements can help us to put a figure on intangible benefits when carrying out a cost-benefit analysis. There are examples of schemes in which the costs outweighed the benefits when only

tangible factors were looked at, but which became eligible for grant aid once the intangible benefits were brought back into the scale.

I now come to the particular problems of the Naze. As my hon. Friend graphically pointed out, the Naze is a site of special interest and concern for his constituents. It is a site of special scientific interest, a nature reserve and a popular area for recreational pursuits. The cliffs contain important bird fossils and the Naze tower, a disused lighthouse, is a listed building. The area suffers from severe coastal erosion as the cliffs are cut away.

Tendring district council, the responsible coast protection authority, submitted schemes to protect the Naze from erosion twice in the 1970s and once in the 1980s. Those schemes were either rejected by the Department of the Environment—which had policy responsibility for coast protection against erosion until it passed to MAFF in 1985—or were withdrawn by the council itself. That was because the costs of the proposed schemes outweighed the benefits and, in the most recent case, because of objections from conservation bodies that the fossil deposits would be damaged.

The present scheme from Tendring district council was submitted to the Department last year and has been redesigned in consultation with English Nature. The scheme does not seek to prevent erosion at the Naze altogether, but rather to slow the rate of erosion. The scheme would change the appearance of the coastline by turning it into two small sheltered bays. But I am advised that English Nature is satisfied that it would permit sufficient residual erosion to allow the important bird fossils to be released for study.

The present position is that officials have assessed the council's proposal and found it to be sound from an engineering and environmental point of view. However, I understand that, as my hon. Friend said, a private individual has lodged an objection which, if unresolved, may necessitate the holding of a local investigation by the Ministry. Leaving that on one side for the present, the other main area that remains in contention is the economic justification for the scheme, with which my hon. Friend dealt at some length.

On the basis of the information so far provided by the council to officials, the costs of the scheme are likely to be considerably in excess of the benefits. Residential properties to the rear of the Naze are not expected to be at risk from erosion for 100 years and so do not have a significant effect on the calculation. The main benefits from the scheme, as my right hon. Friend rightly said, would be amenity benefits, and I have already acknowledged, as he does, the difficulty of quantifying those. But if we are to justify the expenditure of public money, we must quantify those intangible benefits as best we can. It is also essential that we do that if we are to assign priority as between different schemes competing for scarce resources. Competing schemes elsewhere in the country may involve a much more direct threat to life and property than is the case at the Naze. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that the Naze case is by no means an open and shut matter.

In the last financial year, the Government spent around £19·5 million in grant aid on coast protection works against erosion, out of a total of £56 million on flood and coastal defence overall. We are therefore investing very considerable sums of public money, and rightly so. However, the resources available are not infinite in this or any other area. I hope that my hon. Friend will also accept that the cost-benefit analyses which the Department rightly insists are carried out help to provide a broad indication of the types of coastal defence project that are likely to represent the best return on that capital investment.

In conclusion, I assure my hon. Friend that I and my ministerial colleagues will give very careful consideration to the points that he has raised. When he sees my noble Friend, he may wish to elaborate on other points. We have yet to reach a final decision on the Naze proposals. I have been entirely open with my hon. Friend about the rules to which we work and the potential difficulties we envisage with the district council's present scheme. However, I shall not prejudge the eventual decision tonight. I think that we have had a useful and constructive debate in which my hon. Friend has raised with considerable skill and care some very important and fundamental issues. We will want to reflect on them before reaching a final view, but I assure my hon. Friend that we hope to do that in the very near future. I assure him that he will be the first to know when we have done so.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 8 July 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Exports

1. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he proposes to boost British exports.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): The Government, through their overseas trade services organisation, provide a wide range of help, advice and financial support which is highly regarded by United Kingdom exporters. The plans announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last Friday for reshaping the Department of Trade and Industry will enable us to build even closer ties with exporters.

Mr. Etherington: As we have lost so much of our manufacturing base since 1979, is it not about time that the Department of Trade and Industry seriously considered the long-term outlook and sought to expand the export potential of manufacturers in Britain? When will the President of the Board of Trade use some of the imagination and verve that he is purported to have to take action on exports? Or shall we continue to see developments such as in Sunderland, North, where the possibility of expanding shipbuilding and marine services is sterilised by the building of yuppie housing and by other so-called prestigious projects, such as a business school which will not create one extra job but looks rather good?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman could assist in the promotion of jobs in exports in the north-east of England by welcoming and supporting companies that came to his area, such as Nissan, rather than, as a delegate of the National Union of Mineworkers, supporting the Trades Union Congress resolution that said that Japanese projects were alien organisations. Perhaps he should tell his constituents which are the alien organisations—Japanese projects or trade unions such as that which he supports.

Mr. Madel: One way to boost exports would be for the Department of Trade and Industry to allow AWD (Bedford) Trucks to export civilian lorries to Libya. Given the unemployment difficulties in my constituency and the difficulty that that company is in, could my hon. Friend help me and the people of Dunstable and grant the company an export licence to export civilian lorries to Libya?

Mr. Needham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter. As he knows, he is coming to see me tomorrow to discuss the issue. Obviously, I am as sympathetic as possible to any company that wishes to export. Nevertheless, Libya is a country to which United Nations sanctions apply and there are obvious complexities. I look forward, however, to discussing the matter tomorrow with my hon. Friend.

Ms. Quin: Does the Minister recall that the President of the Board of Trade pleaded with the Conservative party conference three years ago not to dismiss the trade deficit as unimportant and fully to recognise its seriousness? As we have had a trade deficit for five years, when does the Minister expect the trade balance to be in surplus?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Lady knows that we never give that forecast. When her party left office in 1979, the visible trade deficit was 4 per cent; it is now 4·7 per cent. Her hon. Friends operated an industrial strategy, which cost the Government £6 billion a year, to pick and back losers. Compared with that figure, the deficit that we have now is insignificant.

North Sea Oil

2. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his policy for encouraging the extraction of marginal oil from North sea fields.

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): The Government are committed to maximising economic recovery of North sea oil and gas. The fiscal regime is designed to achieve this.

Dr. Clark: Is my hon. Friend aware that many companies currently operating in the North sea find little incentive to extract the marginal oil from their fields? Will he therefore undertake to examine the obstacles in their way, including present and planned superfluous legislation, so that investment continues to flow to projects in the North sea rather than to the former Soviet Union, where investment may go if there are no profit and incentives in the North sea?

Mr. Eggar: I completely agree with my hon. Friend that we need a sympathetic legislative and fiscal framework for the North sea, and it is part of my job to ensure that. I am sure that he would agree that we must ensure that safety considerations are paramount, that the expenditure incurred in connection with the Cullen report is taken through and that the necessary measures are improved and implemented by the oil companies.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister accept that the level of investment in the North sea is reaching a plateau, albeit at a high level of £5 billion, and that this is an appropriate time to consider the fiscal regime to ensure that there are adequate incentives for developing marginal fields, not merely to benefit the oil companies but to maximise the market for British-based service and supply companies?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman is right. Investment is at a high level and the chances are that it will level off. That is the nature of investment in the North sea—as the hon. Gentleman realises, even if other hon. Members do not. On his specific point, different oil companies have different

tax cases, depending on their problems and the nature of their fields. I have told a number of companies that we shall consider their cases if they put them to us.

Mr. Duncan: In recognising the tremendous success story that has followed investment in the North sea, does my hon. Friend agree that the industry must bear down on its production costs if it is to maintain its competitive advantage? Will my hon. Friend work with the industry to achieve that aim?

Mr. Eggar: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. If North sea production is to remain competitive, we must get control of capital costs, where the industry has been successful, and current operating costs, which need more attention, especially in view of the cost of operating in Aberdeen.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it not deeply unsatisfactory that, under the new set-up, this is the only reachable energy question on the Order Paper? Where precisely in the fiscal regime is there any item of legislation that encourages companies to get that last drop of marginal oil?

Mr. Eggar: I am happy to answer as many of the questions on the Order Paper as we reach, and I encourage the hon. Gentleman and others to ask their questions. On the hon. Gentleman's specific question about the fiscal regime, as he well knows, it is extremely complex. The way in which it operates depends on the fundamental tax regime of the oil company, the nature of the field, the length of time that the field has been operating and so on. The way forward is for each company to consider projects to establish whether they make sense in pre-tax terms, but not in post-tax terms. If that is the case, and if they have kept costs under control, they should make representations to us.

Mr. Colvin: Is my hon. Friend aware that the cost of abandoning the 155 structures in the North sea, in whole or in part, may well exceed the cost of building them? What talks has he had with companies or oil organisations such as BRINDEX, which represents the British independent oil exploration companies, and the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association about the fiscal regime, to encourage them to set aside the capital required to meet the cost of abandonment when that moment comes?

Mr. Eggar: I recognise that that is a concern. For that reason, changes were introduced in the Finance Acts in the past two years. If there are specific additional worries, I should be willing to hear about them. Additional complications, which relate to prospective suggestions about how field structures should be abandoned and the environmental implications, also concern the industry and I am considering them.

Engineering

3. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet representatives of the Engineering Employers Federation to discuss the effects of the recession on the engineering industry.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I met the Engineering Employers Federation last month. I have no plans for a further meeting.

Mr. Hughes: Does the President appreciate that unemployment has increased for the 26th consecutive month—an increase of more than 1 million—and that a further 70,000 jobs, again in engineering, are expected to go soon? Overall, the prospects seem very grim, so why does the right hon. Gentleman not discuss with the engineering employers the Chancellor's so-called "green shoots", because many people believe that he has been using weedkiller instead of fertiliser?

Mr. Heseltine: The most effective support that we can give to the engineering and all other industries is to maintain our current counter-inflationary stance, keep interest rates coming down and maintain the thrust to provide increased international competitiveness in this country. Nothing that we do will be influenced by the Opposition trying to get us to abandon the policies on which ultimate success depends.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that many members of the Engineering Employers Federation believe that he must work hard on the Treasury to make it understand the needs of engineering and manufacturing? Does he further accept that many members of the federation would be prepared to accept a modest increase in corporation tax if the Treasury would introduce 100 per cent. capital allowances?

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I are at one on those matters and all others. On the basis of that happy partnership, we shall look forward to the recovery of the British economy.

Mr. Olner: When will the rhetoric finish and engineering employees get the same action from the Government as Germany and all other European countries get to assist their industries? The recession has gone on for far too long. It will never be over without investment in industry.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman takes a rather more pessimistic view of the Government's approach to the engineering industry than the employers themselves. I welcome the constructive response that they gave last Friday to the announcement that we would restore sectoral dialogue between the industry and my Department.

Mr. Marlow: What rate of interest is appropriate at the current stage of the recessionary cycle? Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer agree with my right hon. Friend?

Mr. Heseltine: The rate of interest is that which the markets will accept, and the markets will accept the rate that reflects the level of inflation in this country, which is still more than the levels in many competing economies. Nothing would be more counter-productive to the recovery, which all hon. Members want, than indicating that the Government were to abandon their counter-inflationary strategy.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Given the President's stark admission on Monday that this is the most difficult recession since the war and given the figures that came out today showing a 92 per cent. increase in bankruptcies in engineering and elsewhere, foreshadowing a summer and autumn of further closures, redundancies and job losses, why is he failing to implement his well-publicised ideas for

export, regional and industrial policy reform? Why, at the same time, is he presiding over cuts in support for industry and jobs in those very areas? Has he changed his mind or has the Cabinet changed it for him?

Mr. Heseltine: The real dilemma from which the hon. Gentleman suffers is that he is incapable of understanding what I have been saying all these years. In no conceivable way will I abandon my support for the recovery of the British economy based on a highly competitive improvement in performance, on which our competitiveness must depend.

Deregulation Unit

4. **Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for the future of the deregulation unit in his Department.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): Deregulation is one of the Government's most important initiatives—at local, national and European level. We aim to abolish unnecessary regulations——

Mr. Skinner: Why does the Minister not light up his tie?

Mr. Hamilton: Why does the hon. Gentleman not switch off?

We aim to abolish unnecessary regulations and licences, to make them as clear and effective as possible where they remain necessary, and to ensure proper compliance cost assessments in the case of new proposals.

The deregulation unit helps to co-ordinate the work of units in all Departments and we intend to continue with a vigorous programme of cutting red tape.

Mr. Davies: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is much more difficult to get rid of restrictions and regulations than to dream up new ones and that, therefore, a continuous effort is required by Government to redress the balance? In that context, will my hon. Friend give some thought to asking the deregulation unit to produce an annual report of its performance as a spur to and measurement of achievement?

Mr. Hamilton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his interest in the subject. We have an annual programme of reform in that sector. I report from time to time, usually by way of a parliamentary question, on the progress that has been made. I shall certainly give sympathetic consideration to my hon. Friend's request.

Mr. Hain: Is the Minister's definition of deregulation taking on a new meaning? I ask that question as his Department decided to strip the Royal Mail prefix from the Post Office's parcel force business. It seems as though that move may be an initiative to privatise that section of the Post Office.

Mr. Hamilton: I hope that you will agree, Madam Speaker, that that supplementary question was wholly irrelevant to the main question.

Madam Speaker: Order. As the Minister is responsible for the deregulation unit, the question was probably appropriate. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Order. If that is the Minister's answer, so be it. The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) will probably table a substantive question in future.

Free Enterprise

5. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the initiatives taken by his Department to encourage free enterprise in Poland, Romania and the former Soviet republics.

Mr. Needham: My Department can best encourage free enterprise by promoting trade with, and investment in those countries and ensuring that they have markets for their exports. My Department also provides advice and encouragement to potential British exporters and investors in many ways in those countries.

Mr. Field: My hon. Friend will be aware that an application for some of the funds made available by the Government to promote free enterprise in eastern Europe was refused on the ground that the installation and assets to be acquired were to be used for a military purpose. I believe that British taxpayers expect that swords will be turned into ploughshares. Will my hon. Friend ensure that, in future, the rules are more transparent so that business men do not waste time applying in such circumstances?

Mr. Needham: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. The four sectors for which the know-how fund is available are energy, financial services, food distribution and small business creation. As my hon. Friend says, defence conversion is not one of them, and that information has been published. I assure my hon. Friend that the Government will do all that they can to raise awareness of sectors covered by the know-how fund when that is possible.

Dr. Kim Howells: The Minister will know that, when it comes to creating a viable commercial market in eastern Europe, no commodity is in greater demand than a secure and safe supply of electricity. Many nuclear power stations in the Soviet Union play a vital role in producing electricity but are far from safe and far from reliable. Will the Minister therefore ensure that the huge accumulation of experience and expertise in this country is deployed in helping the operators of those nuclear power stations to make them safe so that we may avoid a catastrophic decline in electricity production and a disaster such as that which occurred at Chernobyl?

Mr. Needham: I certainly accept what the hon. Gentleman says about our expertise and the need for something to be done. I assure him that the Government will do what they can to that effect.

Mr. David Atkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that those who run the former communist countries today are the same people who ran the state-controlled, centralised, bureaucratic communist economies that they once were? Does he agree that those people should be encouraged now to encourage those in exile in the west, who already understand the free enterprise system, to return home to their countries to apply the principles of which they have already had experience?

Mr. Needham: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Engineering

6. **Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what the trade balance for the engineering sector was in 1979; and what it is at the current time.

Mr. Needham: In 1979, there was an engineering trade surplus of £2 billion. In 1991, the last full year for which figures are available, there was a surplus of £500 million. However, in the first five months of this year there was a deficit of £1·6 billion.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The President of the Board of Trade is a former Minister with responsibility for Merseyside and will be well awsare of the collapse of all forms of engineering on Merseyside—indeed, in the north-west—since 1979. That has resulted in large numbers of job losses and plant closures by companies such as Plessey, Lucas, Marconi and Cammell Laird. Does the Minister agree that the declared intention of Ford to transfer research and development engineering functions from the United Kingdom to Germany presages another downward twist for British engineering, and its future?

Mr. Needham: Ford has plans to rationalise much of what it is doing in the United Kingdom. It increased its purchase of United Kingdom components to about £2·7 billion worth in the past year—that figure was £1·3 billion less five years earlier. A whole queue of companies is lining up to get involved in component production in the United Kingdom, with the arrival of the new Japanese inward investors and because of the improved quality and competitiveness of British component suppliers. I was near the hon. Gentleman's constituency on Monday opening a new Japanese factory which will produce a large number of automated components. What the hon. Gentleman says is just not true.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that Honda, Nissan and Toyota, apart from providing direct employment in the United Kingdom, will become major exporters of British cars to the Community?

Mr. Needham: As my hon. Friend says, the effect will be that by the mid-1990s this country will be a net exporter of cars. That could hardly have happened under the previous regime and it would not have happened if the Opposition had had anything to do with it because, as they have said, they regard Japanese investors as alien organisations.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister tell us what the reaction of the Department of Trade and Industry is to the fact that the privatised electricity industry has virtually abandoned its formerly substantial research and development commitment? What impact does he think that will have on our engineering imports? *[Interruption.]* In case Conservative Members are not aware of this fact, if we do not manufacture things here and we want to build power stations here, we will have to import the plant and equipment to do so.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman may not have been fully awake when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was at the Dispatch Box. He may be aware, as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is, that we are organising the Department in a sectoral fashion, so perhaps he should pose his question to the Minister responsible.

Mr. Dunn: Is it not a fact that our engineering sector would do much better abroad if a number of Governments, such as that of the empire of Japan, took our goods on the same terms as we take theirs?

Mr. Needham: I quite agree with my hon. Friend that it is important to have the same credit guarantee arrangements across the world. Through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the British Government are striving to achieve that objective. We hear Opposition Members knocking British engineering's achievements a great deal—although most of them have never run a business in their lives—whereas the record of the engineering industry in this country is second to none.

Trading Standards Officers

7. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the shortfall in the number of trading standards officers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Edward Leigh): There is a shortfall of about 300, 14 per cent. of the total.

Mr. Callaghan: I hear what the Minister says. Does he agree that there is an inadequate number of inspectors? Is he aware that car-clocking fraud is costing the general public £200 million a year? Why does not he implement the recommendations of the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club and introduce a national car mileage registration scheme to stop fraud?

Mr. Leigh: Trading standards officers already have adequate powers to deal with these matters. The hon. Gentleman should remember the old adage about glass houses. His borough of Rochdale has fewer trading standards officers than the complement allows for: it has nine but should have 13—despite the fact that we have given Rochdale a massive increase in its block grant, from £19 million to £28 million, to cover trading standards officers. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman addresses his remarks to his borough council.

Mrs. Peacock: My hon. Friend will be aware of the importance of trading standards officers in many different consumer sectors. Has he had any representations from them about the misleading advertising of Global Marketing Europe (UK) plc, a timeshare company?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend will know that we are concerned about timeshare practices. We approached the Commission before the last election. As a result, it is drawing up a directive now. We also fully supported the Timeshare Act 1992 introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), which instituted a cooling-off period for timeshare purchases. We are making progress, but we recognise that trading standards officers will have an important role to play.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Is the Minister aware that his failure to implement the Borrie report has cost car buyers more than £1,000 million in fraud and that his inaction has led to a car clocking epidemic, with one in five second-hand cars being clocked and 400,000 people being swindled this year?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman spent the 17 months before the general election grossly overstating his case, and

he is plainly continuing in the same vein. He knows perfectly well that we shall address these matters in a general review of consumer affairs in the new informed markets Bill. The directive on unfair terms in consumer contracts was agreed only last week. Despite the fact that my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms is a former racing driver, she cannot move that quickly and introduce legislation within a week.

Mr. Sproat: Does my hon. Friend have any plans to strengthen the powers of trading standards officers so as to prevent companies from setting up businesses, starting to trade, running up debts, not paying those debts, declaring themselves insolvent and then starting up again in the same businesses with almost the same names?

Mr. Leigh: That is a matter for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, who no doubt has heard what my hon. Friend has said.

Trade Descriptions Acts

8. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had with the Institute of Trading Standards Administration about updating the Trade Descriptions Acts.

Mr. Leigh: There have been no recent discussions, but the institute was fully involved in the 1990 review of the Act.

Mr. Hutton: Is the Minister satisfied with the present range and scope of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 or does he agree with me and with the trading standards officers that it needs to be extended to include false statements on services, particularly mis-descriptions, and bogus claims about professional qualifications?

Mr. Leigh: I agree that the Act is old and needs updating. We want to make sure that it covers services as well as goods. There are a number of concerns about green claims, for example, so the hon. Gentleman is right. In our review of the Act, on which we have already consulted, we shall address those points. I hope that we shall be introducing the informed markets Bill fairly soon. That will deal with all these points and update the Trade Descriptions Act. The hon. Gentleman has made a fair point.

Mr. Rupert Allason: While I welcome the action that the Government have taken on timeshare, there is still concern about the related practice of pyramid selling. Has my hon. Friend had any representations from trading standards officers or from members of the public who have entered into what amount to almost legalised pyramid selling organisations?

Mr. Leigh: We have had representations on terms of selling and we keep these matters under review, but at present we have no plans to change the legislation on this.

London

9. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to improve the attraction of London as an international centre for trade.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: London is already the location of many international businesses and remains one of the world's leading financial centres. Our policies, including the recent establishment of a ministerial committee for London, will help to ensure that London maintains its position.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is it not ironic that that segment of our capital city and principal trading centre which is closest to our new home market of continental Europe is the least developed? What contribution is my hon. Friend making towards ensuring the success of London docklands and the survival of that strategically vital project, the extension of the Jubilee line?

Mr. Hamilton: As my hon. Friend will know, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade played an important part in getting the docklands project going—*[Interruption.]* It is a highly imaginative project, which in due course will lead to the regeneration of the whole of that east London corridor. Some 50,000 jobs have already been created in docklands this year, compared with a much smaller number 10 years ago. Although the recession has resulted in difficulties for docklands, the project will not collapse. In due course, other companies will come in to complete this huge project, which will be the best news for east London that it is possible to hear.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister clarify the Government's attitude to London's bid for the Eurobank? Is he aware that press reports from the Lisbon summit suggested that the Prime Minister was engaged in a futile rearguard attempt to protect London's claim, while the Secretary of State for Scotland, on a boat in the River Forth, was simultaneously hinting that the Government were reasonably sympathetic to Edinburgh's claim? Are the Government backing London, Edinburgh or nowhere for the site of the Eurobank?

Mr. Hamilton: I can assure the hon. Gentleman of one thing: if Scotland were independent, nothing would go to Edinburgh.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that London is one of the pre-eminent financial services industry centres in the world? Is he aware that the Lloyd's insurance market contributed £8·5 billion to invisible exports in the past five years and supports some 80,000 jobs? Does she agree that the Walker and Morse reports published last week will lead to a strengthening of London's position as a major insurance centre?

Mr. Hamilton: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that Lloyd's is an important flagship for the insurance sector of London as a great financial centre. It does not help when Members such as the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) make irresponsible and unwarranted claims on the basis of half-truths. Last week the hon. Gentleman denounced the Walker report as whitewash before it was even published; he then had to retract after he had read it. It would be better for us all if Labour Members would make supportive noises about an industry which employs large numbers of people and is a major earner of foreign exchange for this country.

Exporters

10. **Ms. Eagle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he proposes to assist British exporters.

11. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the steps he is taking to back British exporters.

Mr. Heseltine: The Government, through their overseas trade services organisation, provide a wide range of help, advice and financial support which is highly regarded by United Kingdom exporters. I announced last Friday my plans for reshaping the DTI, which will further enhance our understanding of exporters' needs and our ability to communicate with them.

Ms. Eagle: I am grateful for that response. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the existence in Britain of Stone Manganese Marine—the last remaining maker of propellers with its own foundry—is being threatened by unfair foreign competition from Poland and Korea? Is he further aware that that company is the holder of three Queen's awards to industry and that 80 per cent. of its turnover is exported, which helps our export effort? What steps will he take to ensure that such high-quality, strategically important companies are not killed off by unfair foreign competition and Government negligence?

Mr. Heseltine: I share the hon. Lady's concern that no British company should be threatened by unfair foreign competition. If she or the company concerned will let me have the details, she may be assured that they will be carefully examined.

Mr. Heppell: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the table in the publication "European Economy" showing that the United Kingdom has the lowest average annual export growth between 1979 and 1990 of any country in the European Community? Does he believe, as I do, that part of the reason for that abysmal record under successive Conservative Governments is the cuts that they have made in export support services?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman knows that our exports of manufactured goods are at an all-time high and have grown by 4 per cent. in the past 12 months. I very much hope that when Labour Members set out across the world on their holidays in a fortnight's time they will stop peddling a message of gloom about this country.

Sir Michael Grylls: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, despite the very good export record of British firms, some 70 per cent. of companies still do not export? Most of them are small and medium-sized concerns. Will my right hon. Friend pay particular attention to that sector, which needs help and encouragement to penetrate new export markets and thus give assistance to Britain?

Mr. Heseltine: I am very sympathetic to my hon. Friend's view and I hope in the near future to set out our plans to improve the service that we give to small and medium-sized companies. I should add that we export a higher proportion of our gross domestic product than virtually any other comparable nation.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is my right hon. Friend aware of Proyecto Venezuela, which involves the imaginative packaging of opportunities for British firms to export a wide range of products and services to that country? Have we learnt lessons from that, and will there be many opportunities to operate similar products in other countries in the future?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing my attention to the need to search world markets and explore every avenue to put together the most attractive package for companies exporting from Britain. I hope that we shall be able to build on our already formidable reputation.

Mr. Morgan: The Government should be providing measures of substance, rather than the shadow that the President of the Board of Trade with his new title tends to provide. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if he really wants to get rid of the doom and gloom being cast over British industry he should insist that the electricity companies charge less to key British industries? The chlor-alkali industry, for example, has approached the right hon. Gentleman. That industry, which is very important in the north-west, has been crippled by a 40 per cent. rise in electricity prices. Steel, aluminium smelting and many other heavy strategic industries are also being crippled by rising profits in the recently privatised electricity industry. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that those profits are accompanied by big losses in the industries that electricity serves?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important point. We have established a regulatory system to keep the position under constant review. It is important for us to do that, but it is also important to realise that if we are to have a flourishing manufacturing economy companies must be allowed to make profits commensurate with the need to invest as a consequence of their success. Every time a company makes profits, Labour Members immediately attack it, because they fail to understand that profitability leads to investment and growth.

Mr. Page: Does my right hon. Friend agree that what is needed to help British industry is an evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of our foreign competitors, and that feeding that information through to British industry will enable it to become more competitive? What will the Department do to help British industry in that regard?

Mr. Heseltine: That question goes to the heart of the announcement that I made last Friday. I believe that it is essential for Britain, as a trading economy, to search the world constantly to assess its standards of competitiveness and—even more important—to establish what those standards will be in the decade ahead. I have set up a special division in my Department to advise us in that process.

Coal Privatisation

13. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade by what means he proposes to implement his pledge to protect the pensions and concessionary coal of retired miners and widows after privatisation of British Coal.

Mr. Eggar: I have already made it clear that the pension and concessionary coal entitlements of the current and former employees will be safeguarded. The detailed implementation of those assurances will be announced as soon as possible.

Mr. Foulkes: Surely the Minister relises that such vague assurances will not reassure miners and miners' widows in my constituency and throughout the country. Miners have sacrificed their health and in some cases their lives to the

industry, and their widows are entitled to pensions and concessionary coal. Will the Minister give an assurance that he will set up a pension trust to protect miners' pensions from the predatory purchasers who will want to take over the pits?

Mr. Eggar: I give the hon. Gentleman and the pensioners a clear, unequivocal commitment that there will be no rip-off of the British Coal pension funds.

Mrs. Currie: Is the Minister aware that it is highly likely that after the privatisation of British Coal the new company will entirely lose interest in such issues as the social clubs for retired miners and miners' welfare? There are some of these clubs in my constituency, in areas where there are now very few miners and no mines whatsoever. Will my hon. Friend take those issues into account and ensure that the facilities which exist can continue, preferably with some kind of support from what remains of British Coal, so that my constituents will not face a more difficult time in their leisure?

Mr. Eggar: Certainly I will.

Mr. Eric Clarke: Can the Minister give a guarantee that if there are any changes arising from privatisation the Government will not give those people an ultimatum and that failure to reply will not be taken as agreement, as has happened before in the case of British Coal? That would be intolerable because many people, due to eyesight and other difficulties, cannot fill in forms. Will the Minister give a guarantee that he will consult pensioners associations and others in those villages and communities before any changes are implemented?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman made a very fair point in Committee, and I will certainly bear in mind what he has said, but it would help if some Opposition Members did not go around raising unnecessary scares.

Manufacturing Output

14. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the level of manufacturing output in 1974, 1979, 1985 and 1991 with 1974 as 100.

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): Ninety-seven in 1979, 92 in 1985, and 103 in 1991.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: That is a fairly appalling record. I wonder whether the Minister knows of any country that has had a lower increase in manufacturing output, particularly in the past 13 years. How are we to recover? We have lost more than 500,000 manufacturing jobs since we joined the exchange rate mechanism. With the Government crippling manufacturing by high interest rates to keep the pound up, is this not a case of running the country on the basis of Maxwell economics—raiding the pension fund to support the share price?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman seems to be joining his Opposition colleagues who spend their time running down the achievements of British manufacturing industry. It might help if he would read the CBI report, "Competing with the World's Best", which says:

"UK based manufacturers are well placed in some of the key growth markets of the future".

Mr. Batiste: Is it not clear that British manufacturing output benefits greatly as a consequence of Britain's having the lion's share of inward investment into the European Community from the United States, Japan and all other countries? Will my right hon. Friend dissociate himself from Opposition Members who take every opportunity to discourage inward investment from Japan and other countries?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in dissociating myself from the remarks of Opposition Members, to which reference has already been made. The scale of inward investment in this country proves that we have created the sort of environment which encourages manufacturers and entrepreneurs. It is disheartening to industry that the Labour party would seek to reverse all the progress that we have made in trade union law, taxation and deregulation, and would do its best to discourage British manufacturing industry.

Manufacturing Trade

15. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has of the size of the manufacturing trade deficit for the current financial year.

Mr. Needham: In the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1992-93, the manufacturing trade deficit for 1992 was forecast to be £5 billion.

Mr. Mullin: How is that possible after 12 years of Conservative government?

Mr. Needham: As I said earlier, the percentage deficit on visible trade, at 4·7 per cent., is 0·7 per cent. higher than it was in 1979.

Mr. Dickens: Faced with a world recession, British companies have had to take a close look at their management and work forces, as well as their overheads, other costs and production techniques. As a result of this, am I right in saying that our businesses and manufacturing industries are streamlined and efficient, and well ready to take off now that the world recession is starting to ease?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the past three years the volume of United Kingdom trade has increased, rather than decreased as it did year after year when Labour was in power.

Mr. Skinner: As we have had a recession for about three years and as it is accepted that when consumer demand is much lower the balance of trade falls, is it not remarkable and dangerous to have to accept that our balance of trade deficit will probably be about £9 billion when we get the autumn statement? If that is correct and if there is an upturn in the economy, which I doubt, the danger is that the balance of payments deficit will soar well above £20 billion. Included in that deficit is £1 billion worth of coal coming into this country, when we ought to be exporting coal. We have 300 years of coal, so why is it not mined instead of the industry being run down?

Mr. Needham: Industry is hardly being run down when our volume of exports is at an all-time high. As to the balance of payments deficit, as a percentage of gross domestic product it is not very different from that of many other industrial countries which are also in recession.

Mrs. Angela Knight: Is my hon. Friend aware that the report published this week by the Institute of Directors shows that business volume is up and optimism is good?

Does he agree that that survey of people who are involved in business paints a far more realistic picture than that which the gloom merchants opposite like to portray?

Mr. Needham: I agree. We have heard speaker after speaker on the Opposition Benches continue to run British exporting down instead of promoting it.

Mr. Henderson: If everything is so rosy in Britain, can the Minister explain why the trade deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product is the highest of all the G7 countries?

Mr. Needham: I did not for one moment say that everything was rosy in Britain, because we are part of a worldwide recession. What I did say, and what I continue to say, is that British exporting performance ranks alongside that of any other country in the world. So long as we promote and advertise that fact, we shall restore confidence instead of knocking it, as Opposition Members try to do.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend will know that the telecommunications industry has benefited greatly from the deregulation and denationalisation of our industries. Industries throughout the world have benefited from Britain's freeing up. What is my hon. Friend doing to ensure that European and other countries free up their telecommunications industries so that we can sell our excellent products to them?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend knows that one of the foremost objectives of our presidency is to ensure that in the Internal Market Council we obtain enforcement and compliance in opening up the markets of Europe, particularly the public sector markets, to the sort of competition which has benefited our consumers here and has benefited suppliers in the telecommunications industry in this country.

Assisted Areas

16. **Mr. Harvey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recognition he will give in conducting his recently announced review of assisted areas boundaries, to the cases made by black spot areas within or overlapping travel-to-work areas.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Government made it clear in the consultation document that the assisted area map will continue to be designated on the basis of travel-to-work areas. We will, however, take full account of the problems of any black spot areas within these travel-to-work areas or overlapping their boundaries.

Mr. Harvey: Does the Minister accept that travel-to-work areas are a useful guide, but should not be a straitjacket for this process? Does he also accept that travel-to-work area boundaries are long overdue for review, in that separate communities can be thrown together artificially and bear no relationship to true patterns of travel to work? Is he aware that the town of Ilfracombe in my constituency is a long-term unemployment blackspot, with unemployment higher than Liverpool and, indeed, higher than all but two of the existing development areas? Can the Minister confirm that those problems will be recognised, either by making entire travel-to-work areas which include blackspots into development areas, or by fragmenting the travel-to-work area map?

Finally, will the Minister take this opportunity to comment on suggestions in *The Guardian* that the Government intend to use the review to featherbed marginal Conservative parliamentary constituencies at the expense of those held by Opposition parties?

Madam Speaker: Order. I caution hon. Members that this is Question Time and they should not make such long speeches.

Mr. Sainsbury: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The hon. Gentleman's last remark was unworthy of him. I am, of course, aware that travel-to-work areas are not a perfect measure, but they are an indication of the areas within which people move around to seek employment opportunities. The areas will be reviewed when the data from the most recent census become available, but that will not be until 1994 and I do not think that we should delay the review of the assisted area map until then.

Replacement Parts

17. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the replacement parts industry concerning the European Commission's green paper on industrial design.

Mr. Leigh: I have met representatives of the Association of British Insurers and of the Consumers Association to discuss the possible effects of the European Commission's green paper.

Mr. Atkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the European Commission proposals, if implemented, would devastate many thousands of small businesses in this country involved in the manufacture of spare parts for motor cars and specialised body panels? Is that not a travesty of the principle of subsidiarity, and will it not lead to a monopoly for motor vehicle manufacturers, which can only increase prices and reduce choice? Will my hon. Friend totally oppose the proposals?

Mr. Leigh: I confirm that I shall, indeed, totally oppose the measures, which are ill thought out, hasty and anti-competitive. Clearly it makes sense to have some sort of design harmonisation throughout the EC, but that should be done on a deregulatory basis. It makes no sense to insist on design harmonisation for spare parts, which could drive many small firms out of business. I confirm to my hon. Friend and to the House that we shall fight the proposals in the Council and before the Council.

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister confirm that our influence on industrial design will decline as a result of his Department's inactivity and failure to defend the INMOS jobs about to be exported to France and Italy, and will he tell me now whether the Department has been in touch with Michel Carpentier, the director general of DGXIII? Mr. Carpentier says that the Government have not been in touch with him, and that if they had, the jobs could have been saved. He described the move of those British jobs to Europe as stupid. I know that the Government have been in touch with one department of the Commission, but has the Minister been in touch with DGXIII and DGXVI?

Mr. Leigh: The simple answer to that question is yes.

Price Marking

18. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the proposed new price marking order.

Mr. Leigh: I have received representations from the British Retail Consortium and from trading standards officers.

Mr. Alexander: Have those representations included the fact that people selling small high-priced items such as cosmetics and pharmaceuticals could be severely disadvantaged by the proposed order? Is my hon. Friend aware that if people have to be able to see items and their prices without assistance, that would be impossible for sellers who keep goods being the counter, or under the counter? Will my hon. Friend take that concern on board?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is right to be worried about that. As with so much that comes from the Commission on such subjects, it is sensible in principle to insist that shopkeepers should display prices in shop windows and on goods displayed behind the counter, but things go wrong when the Commission tries to be far too prescriptive—laying down, for example, as does the lengthy document which I have here, that hair care products, bath products, lacquer shampoos and rinsing products should all have their prices displayed as decreed in the memorandum. That is a regulation too far. It is too prescriptive. In our negotiations with the Commission we must seek to extend it, and we shall do precisely that.

End User Certificates

20. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will review the arrangements made by his Department to check the authenticity of end user certificates.

Mr. Needham: Export controls in the United Kingdom are strictly enforced. My Department and other Departments involved keep under constant review the measures necessary to ensure their continued enforcement.

Mr. Alton: The Minister will have seen the disturbing allegations in *The Independent* concerning the illicit use of equipment manufactured in the United Kingdom. Given the scale of the problems illustrated in the articles, will he assure the House that he will undertake an overhaul of the existing end user arrangements as they are clearly not working satisfactorily?

Mr. Needham: I understand the hon. Gentleman's question, and his concern, but some 56,000 licence applications on military goods have been presented by the purchasers of those goods in the past five years. Those certificates form only a small part of the information on which the Department relies.

I wrote in reply to the article in *The Independent*, asking about Mr. Kelsey's sources of information, but so far I have heard nothing.

Mr. Churchill: Is my hon. Friend aware of recent reports in the *Sunday Times* suggesting that a major British defence contractor falsified documents to export items which would help a third world country to achieve nuclear weapon status? Should that not be cracked down on most firmly, and should not such firms be put on notice that they cannot expect Government defence contracts if they circumvent our laws in that underhand way?

Mr. Needham: If our laws are so circumvented and information is supplied which is knowingly incorrect, it is a criminal offence.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Should not the principle of end user certification be extended to the export of food products for humanitarian purposes? Will the Minister confirm that under arrangements approved by the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry it is possible for British food producers to export food to Iraq —where the client is Saddam Hussein and his agencies —for consumption by the republican guard? Is that not the position now being implemented by the Department?

Mr. Needham: The Department acts as the agency for issuing licences. Food which goes to Iraq must be accepted by the UN sanctions committee and must pass the humanitarian causes requirement before it is allowed. If the hon. Gentleman is aware of a particular case, I shall be only too happy to look into it.

"Health of the Nation"

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): With permission, I should like to make a statement about better health.

I am publishing today a White Paper, "The Health of the Nation", copies of which have been placed in the Vote Office. Last June, my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, published a Green Paper on the same subject, since when we have consulted extensively.

We made it clear before and during the election that a White Paper on health would be one of the first priorities of the new Conservative Government. Today, we honour that pledge.

The Government are committed to improving the health of the nation. The White Paper is the latest, but not the last, step in our strategy. The response to the Green Paper was impressive. More than 2,100 individuals and organisations responded directly. There has been a wide and productive debate at specially organised conferences and workshops, in newspapers and journals, and on television and radio.

That response reflects the growing interest in health matters as a whole. Hon. Members will know that people have become more conscious about what they eat, how much exercise they take and how they can generally improve the quality of their lives by becoming healthier.

We wish to build on that healthy trend. No responsible Government can be a disinterested observer of an unhealthy nation. There is an enormous cost to the national health service and to our economy of avoidable illness. It includes working days lost and expensive treatment given. We should prevent illness wherever we can. Prevention is better than cure. We shall be able to target health resources where they are really needed.

We are spending record amounts on the national health service. We must use resources to improve health as well as health care. We are seeking to improve the quality of life, and of individuals' lives, in the most cost-effective way.

One central message has emerged from the consultation exercise on the Green Paper—the wide backing for the overall strategic approach that it proposed. There is support from among policy makers, practitioners and politicians of all parties. The World Health Organisation welcomed our strategy, describing it as a model that other countries might follow. I am particularly pleased to launch the White Paper just one week into the United Kingdom presidency of the EC.

At the heart of the White Paper is the setting of targets in key areas. We have selected five areas—coronary heart disease and stroke, cancers, mental illness, HIV-AIDS and sexual health and accidents.

In each of these key areas we have set challenging but achievable targets. In some areas they are tougher than those proposed in the Green Paper. Those targets include a 40 per cent. reduction in deaths from coronary heart disease and stroke by the year 2000; a 30 per cent. reduction in deaths from lung cancer for men by 2010; reducing the number of people who smoke from one third of the population to one fifth by the year 2000; and cutting childhood accidents by a third by the year 2005.

Our task was to choose areas of greatest concern: where there is the most serious avoidable loss of life or handicap, and where the work needs to be done and can be done. The Department's chief medical officers have been closely involved in the work. We have drawn on a wide range of medical and other expert opinion.

Other areas do not cease to be important. In some cases, well developed initiatives to improve health already exist. For example, I announced last week that we have now achieved our 90 per cent. national target for immunisation against childhood diseases. We are now working to a new target of 95 per cent. by 1995.

In other areas, more development and research will be needed before national targets can be set. What we are proposing are not short-term measures. The strategy will grow and develop. To provide the knowledge and methodology for this to happen, the research and development strategy launched by my Department in April 1991 will play a crucial role. The White Paper identifies other possible target areas for the future. This underlines the fact that it represents a beginning, not an end.

I hope that the House will recognise and welcome the strategy. Coronary heart disease and strokes are the biggest causes of premature death and disability in this country. We have made considerable progress, but there is scope for more. Cancers account for a quarter of all deaths. Many of them can be prevented. Mental illness affects millions of people, with a high cost to the nation. There is still too often a taboo associated with it. Accidents are the most common cause of death in people under 30. Often they can be avoided. AIDS is the most significant new threat to public health this century. In improving sexual health generally lies the greatest scope for preventing HIV infection and the spread of this terrible disease.

We need targets for three reasons: they give us something real at which to aim, they provide a common focus for action, and they allow us to measure progress. To be respected, however, targets have to be tough. To be credible, they have to be realistic. It would be folly to set a target so out of reach that we would never get there, or one which is simply an extrapolation of existing trends.

Our comprehensive approach is unique. We have identified the broad strategies and the practical machinery needed to achieve targets. Everyone is involved. The White Paper is more than just the work of the national health service, vital though that is. It takes in the activities of every Department in Whitehall. It is for private companies and voluntary bodies, for local authorities as much as health authorities, for employers and trade unions, for organisations of every kind, and for individuals of every age.

Working together, forming healthy alliances, is one of the central messages of "The Health of the Nation". The White Paper demonstrates the Government's commitment, first, by addressing a range of health issues which go well beyond the responsibility of the Department of Health; secondly, by highlighting the central role of the Cabinet Committee set up by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to oversee the development and implementation of the strategy—no other country has set up a similar structure at such a high level to take forward a health strategy—and, thirdly, by setting out a range of actions to improve health, which only Government can take.

While recognising the role of others, the national health service must be at the centre of the strategy. The

publication of the White Paper today marks a major new landmark in the development of the NHS. It is the next logical step in the process of health reform. It provides new opportunities to raise our sights beyond the provision of health care—important though that is—to health itself.

The national health service was founded to secure improvement in the physical and mental health of the people and the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness. That was enshrined in the National Health Service Act 1946. This strategy carries those principles forward in a programme of work which will take us well into the next century.

The health reforms have enabled health authorities to take a more strategic look at the health needs of their local populations. The priority areas that we have selected and the targets that we have set match local needs and concerns. The NHS management executive will require health authorities to build the target-setting approach into all levels of local activity. The strategy will be central to the work of the NHS.

The NHS must also lead by example; it must be a healthy employer. Its 1 million employees must themselves play a part, helping themselves, their families and friends, as well as the patients for whom they care, to improve their health. We shall engage all NHS staff in making their own workplace a healthy place both for themselves and for patients. The NHS chief executive is working with the Health Education Authority to launch a special initiative on this later in the summer.

By many reckonings, we are healthy. In 1991, for the fourth successive year, perinatal and infant mortality rates fell to their lowest ever recorded levels. Our immunisation rates are high. We were the first country in the European Community to establish national screening programmes for breast and cervical cancer. In the past decade, life expectancy has risen by three years for men and by two years for women.

We have been adding years to life; the health strategy is about adding life to those years. Ultimately, it also means adding even more years to life. No one doubts that there are areas in which we can grow healthier as a people. The White Paper has identified those key areas and it has proposed real action for improvement.

The ideas in this White Paper will take root and grow. We have the potential to take this country to the top of the health league. I commend the White Paper to the House.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): There will be a broad welcome for the stress that the Secretary of State has rightly placed on promoting better health rather than just curing ill health. I offer a personal welcome for the toughening up of a target for a reduction in coronary heart disease which has been increased from 30 per cent. to 40 per cent. The Secretary of State will recall that when I pointed out to her predecessor that the original target meant that there would be no increase in the rate of reduction, he described that point as "facile" and "a misunderstanding". I express my pleasure that the right hon. Lady shares my misunderstanding and has acted on it.

It would be unfair not to recognise that the right hon. Lady has responded to the criticism that the Government's proposals on mental health were only about the closure of institutions. I congratulate her on coming up with a welcome range of targets for positive improvement in the mental health of individuals. These are all the more welcome as mental health does not always achieve the attention that it deserves in our deliberations.

The White Paper provides a bold target for cutting teenage pregnancies. In view of the trailers in the Sunday newspapers, I express some surprise that the Secretary of State made no mention of the target in her statement. Is that because she knows that the White Paper contains no new initiative on sex education and not a new penny for family planning? Will the right hon. Lady accept that, in this and in other measures, the reaction of many people to the White Paper will be that it has got the right diagnosis, but has not come up with the right prescriptions?

The White Paper identifies smoking as the largest single cause of preventable disease—a point stressed by the Secretary of State. Why, then, do the Government still duck a commitment to banning tobacco advertising? Does the Secretary of State appreciate that the offer in the White Paper of a review of tobacco advertising will be greeted with disbelief? Was she not listening during the year of consultation on the Green Paper? Can she name one submission from anyone in health promotion which did not support a ban on tobacco advertising? Does she not understand that it will be widely believed that the Government's failure to act now on the issue has nothing to do with the need to collect further information through another review and everything to do with the 2,000 poster sites supplied to the Conservatives by Imperial Tobacco in the general election campaign?

The White Paper stresses the need for a healthier diet. Will the Government therefore bring back the nutritional standards for school meals which they scrapped as soon as they came into office? The White Paper calls for a cut in road accidents. Will the Government accept the case for random breath testing to crack down on drink driving? The White Paper stresses people's responsibility to keep a check on their health. Will the Government scrap the charges for eye tests which dramatically cut the number of people coming forward for that check? What does the Secretary of State intend to do to ensure an NHS dental check for everyone who wants it when dentists are leaving the NHS in droves?

The Secretary of State claimed that her White Paper was comprehensive. I think that that was the word that she used in her statement. How can a White Paper on health promotion be comprehensive when it does not once mention poverty? Does the Secretary of State recognise that by doubling the number of children in poverty the Government have increased the number of children brought up on a poor diet? Does she recognise the link between increased homelessness and increased respiratory disease? Does she recognise the increase in suicides as a result of the increase in unemployment among young men?

Does the Secretary of State recognise that everyone knows that those links are missing from the White Paper because they would require the Government to admit that by increasing inequality they have increased ill health? A White Paper which does not propose a single measure to combat poverty, homelessness or unemployment is not a White Paper which offers better health to all.

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming me to my position, but move on swiftly to say that I do not know whether this will be his swansong.

[Mrs. Bottomley]

Having said that, I hope that by the time we finish today we shall have had a last opportunity to convince him on several matters and errors of debate in recent years.

The hon. Gentleman raised several points which were a vindication of the strategy. He raised issues which are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and for Social Security. That shows why it is so important to have a Cabinet Committee specifically to address the improvement of the health of the nation. I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman on matters for which I am responsible. He will understand that other matters are precisely those which need further debate.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that the targets had been strengthened. Indeed, in his working group the chief medical officer identified the targets and sought targets which were not extrapolations—the point that the hon. Gentleman made on the last occasion—but were challenging yet achievable. We have strengthened the targets not only on coronary heart disease but on smoking among women and on mental illness. I thank the hon. Gentleman for recognising that we have included mental illness. We share the view that mental illness is the source of a great deal of disability and unhappiness and does not always get the focus that it requires.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned poverty. The Department of Social Security spends £1 billion a week —an extra £600 million—on arrangements for low-income families. When we have discussed aspects of deprivation in our health debates, the hon. Gentleman has sought time and again to make the point that GPs in inner-city areas should not be expected to deliver the high targets set for the rest of the country. We disagree with the hon. Gentleman. We believe that we should encourage all areas to do as well as the best. That is why this year we are driving forward improvements in perinatal mortality rates to ensure that the least advanced areas do as well as those which are striking ahead. Above all, when it came to the GP contract, our approach was not a lower target for inner-city areas. On the contrary, it was to provide for the first time deprivation payments for GPs in inner-city areas.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned eye tests. As he will be aware, the number of tests has now reached the level that it was at when the charges were introduced. It is reasonable when allocating resources to expect those who can afford it to pay an average of 12p per week for their eye tests. As for dental checks, we have never had so much NHS dentistry at any stage of the national health service. There were 7 million more courses of adult treatment last year than in 1979.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned school meals. It is not our view that school meals should be controlled by central diktat, but we welcome the activities of local education authorities, which are working with nutritionists to produce healthy meals in their areas. One of the initiatives of the health strategy is healthy schools.

Smoking is an important area, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have strengthened targets for smoking. We are unequivocal in our determination to achieve those targets. What the hon. Gentleman does not always say is that only one country in the European community has achieved a sharper reduction in tobacco smoking than this country, and that is the Netherlands. It is a curious fact that the majority of countries which support a ban on advertising also have nationalised tobacco industries.

When considering what influences people to take up smoking, the key factor is price. The hon. Gentleman may wish to reflect on the fact that under recent Conservative Governments the price of cigarettes has risen by 43 per cent. When Labour was in power, the price rose by a mere 1 per cent. That is the contrast. We recognise that advertising has a part to play, and that is why we have a stringent voluntary code. What is more, we have introduced the fiercest health warning labels on cigarettes of any EC country. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the tobacco industry is busy taking the Government to court on the strength of that.

This strategy represents an important new landmark for the national health service. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bring himself to a deathbed repentance and will admit that he was wrong about the GP contract and wrong about NHS health reforms, but that at least he is right to welcome in principle the "Health of the Nation" strategy.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I welcome the publication of the White Paper and on behalf of my hon. Friends I congratulate my right hon. Friend on demonstrating that she is a Secretary of State for health and is not solely responsible for illness.

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this year the Government will be spending nearly £36 billion on the treatment of illness and disease, a high proportion of which is avoidable? Does it not make sense, and is it not incumbent on us all and not just on politicians and medical people, to ensure by following the White Paper's proposals that we avoid illnesses and diseases which can be avoided?

My right hon. Friend mentioned a number of targets. Can she say a little more about the mechanisms proposed at Cabinet level and locally to progress how they are met?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend, who has for many years been a champion of the cause of health strategy. As he rightly says, the White Paper sets the agenda for the Department of Health to consider health as well as health care. The reforms enable us to take that strategic approach so that we can assess the health needs of local communities precisely and translate them into concrete actions. The White Paper sets the third leg of the health service—prevention—as well as treatment and rehabilitation.

The NHS will be setting, and seeking to secure, delivery of those targets—the chief executive through the priorities and planning guidance, the regions by setting targets with the districts, and the districts by implementing those targets in the contracts that they place. At the same time, the ministerial Committee will want to monitor the development of the strategy and to ensure that, if we need more stringent action in any area to meet the targets, that action is taken.

I assure my hon. Friend that we shall meet those targets, and we shall beat those targets.

Ms. Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Does the Minister accept that there is more to health promotion than giving up chips and taking up jogging? Does she recognise that all Government Departments must be involved? Will she now demonstrate her commitment to health promotion by

persuading the Government to ban tobacco advertising? Otherwise, people will assume that the Government are willing to profit from a person's addiction rather than do all in their power to prevent it.

Mrs. Bottomley: Certainly, I hope that the Department will practise what it preaches and that the NHS will practise what we preach. That is the significance of our initiative in ensuring that the NHS is an example of a healthy employer. As the largest employer in the country, it should certainly be a healthy employer. Our Department has been affected by the ministrations of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) when she was at the Department and we have already taken a number of practical steps.

I must repeat our absolute commitment to meeting the targets to reduce smoking. Days lost, unnecessary costs to the health service and personal misery all result from needless smoking. We are determined that, by price, education, stopping the £1 billion subsidy to the growing of tobacco, preventing the example of tobacco smoking, and continuing to review the role of advertising, we shall ensure that this country is in the lead in the reduction of smoking. However, it is hard for us to take lessons from countries whose records in the reduction of smoking leave much to be desired.

Several Hon Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We have reached the point at which I must remind hon. Members to ask only one question. I also appeal to the Minister to answer briefly so that we can make progress.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the White Paper, which is to be welcomed, would not have been possible without the health reforms which preceded it? Is it not about time the Labour party accepted the great benefits that those health reforms and the British Medical Association have brought to the health service?

Mrs. Bottomley: Following your instructions, Madam Speaker, I will simply answer yes.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Does the Secretary of State remember the time when she worked for the Child Poverty Action Group, when she lobbied the then Government to set health targets for all groups of the population but particularly for low-income groups? Does she recall that the official response to her then was that it would have been incautious of the Government to set such targets as they might be held to them? I congratulate the Minister on being less spineless than her predecessor. Does she also recall that when she worked for the group there were many data on the link between low income and ill health which current data still support? As the Government's figures show that since 1979 there has been an inexorable rise in the number of people and families on low incomes, what steps does the Secretary of State intend to take to prevent the Chancellor of the Exchequer's strategy from undermining her objective that poor as well as rich families will achieve those targets?

Mrs. Bottomley: The strategy is for the whole Government and the whole nation. I have made it clear that we already spend £1 billion per week on social security payments. The priorities of social security payments have been reordered so that additional money goes to low-income families. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that the challenge for us all is to generate wealth so that we can provide welfare. That is so whether the money goes into social security payments or the national health service. As for the resources available in the health service, we are determined to do all that we possibly can to encourage those sectors which have not acheived as well as those which are striving ahead. That is why, when it comes to immunisation, screening and every other health indicator, we are making it our business to ensure that the resources and skills of the health service are directed to the areas which need them most.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My right hon. Friend will be well aware that in Lancaster we have an outstandingly good health service, but we have one worrying problem? May I draw her attention to pages 69 onward of her White Paper in relation to skin cancer? Lancaster appears to have a higher incidence of all forms of skin cancer than similar districts. Will my right hon. Friend make inquiries to see whether we can get to the bottom of that problem and cure it?

Mrs. Bottomley: One of our new targets is to halt the spread of skin cancer by the year 2005. I have no doubt that representatives of the regional health authority will talk to those of my hon. Friend's excellent district health authority—to which my hon. Friend rightly paid tribute —to consider whether there are special factors such as a special health promotion campaign or other means to ensure that my hon. Friend's part of the country achieves the same targets as other districts.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): If the Government are serious about improving the nation's health, why will they not tackle the problem of ill health caused by bad housing and low incomes?

Mrs. Bottomley: The document contains a great deal about the importance of housing. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment played an important part in the document's preparation. I believe that he has welcomed the initiative as there are many sectors in which environment and health walk hand in hand. The document talks of establishing an institute to help set targets and study the links more effectively. Opposition Members are circling without knowing much about the detail, but those who have been involved in the development of estate action and urban programmes and channelling resources to the Housing Corporation all know that the Government do not shirk their responsiblities to improve the nation's housing stock and recognise the associations.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for her kind remarks about me and reciprocate by saying that with this excellent White Paper she runs the risk of being the best Secretary of State for Health that we have had in a long time. If she is serious about reducing the number of adult smokers in this country, will she follow up the point that she rightly made about the price of cigarettes and encourage our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that the real price of cigarettes—the most important element—goes up in this country year by year? Will she also ensure that we push hard in the

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

Community, using our presidency, to ensure that the £900 million worth of subsidies towards tobacco production in Europe come to an end?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am grateful—very grateful—to my hon. Friend, who once again gets straight to the heart of the matter. Nearly £1 billion is spent on subsidising tobacco growing. However, of equal importance is the fact that we want other nations in the European Community to increase the price of cigarettes in their countries—and will take the opportunity of our presidency to push for that. If we do not, cheaper cigarettes could come into this country and undermine the policy. The price of cigarettes has increased by 43 per cent. while the Government have been in power. The White Paper reinforces that commitment to maintain the real price of cigarettes, which contrasts only too clearly with the record of the Labour party when in office.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Secretary of State will recognise that no one would oppose the broad principles which underpin her statement today, but does she realise that in conceding a clear link between poverty and ill health—whether that poverty manifests itself through bad housing, lack of employment opportunities or bad environmental conditions—she has said that she is prepared to argue the case for additional expenditure in those public sectors? In that context, in the interesting conversations which have taken place on public expenditure, has she argued that instead of commissioning a fourth Trident submarine the money should be used for housing, education and employment opportunities?

Mrs. Bottomley: While our party has been in power, life expectancy has risen by two years for women and by three years for men. Perinatal and infant mortality are the lowest ever. The Labour party should therefore keep its remarks in context. Our economic policies will improve prosperity at all income levels. The public have no confidence in the Labour party's economic policies or—dare I say it?—in its health policies.

This strategy is about improving the health of the nation. I shall discuss with all my colleagues how we can work together to improve the health of the nation.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the proposals and targets for the mentally ill. Far too many work days are lost through mental ill health, and there are far too many suicides which would not necessarily have taken place if we had looked after those people better. The targets will be warmly welcomed. Does my right hon. Friend believe that they are attainable, and does she see a chink of light in the fact that they have at least temporarily stopped the sneering of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen?

Mrs. Bottomley: The targets that we set for mental illness are primarily associated with suicides. Nine per cent. of the life years lost by people under the age of 65 are due to suicide. Our concern is that many who have taken their own lives have been in touch with health or welfare professionals during the time before taking the fatal step, so it is extremely important, with the development of our mental health services, that we have better safeguards and a more effective and comprehensive service.

We have introduced a specific grant for mental illness. We are also working with nurses, doctors and other health professionals to ensure an effective and seamless service. I believe that we can meet these important targets.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Does the Secretary of State accept that the Department could make a contribution to giving babies a healthy and happy start in life if she accepted the report on maternity services issued by the Select Committee on Health? It includes a plea to the Department of Social Security to stop discriminating against the youngest mothers in the benefit system as they and their babies are the most vulnerable. Will the right hon. Lady take action on that?

Mrs. Bottomley: We shall be replying to the Select Committee shortly. I congratulate the hon. Lady and the members of the Select Committee on that important report, which I believe has changed the focus of the debate on maternity services. Having a baby in this country is a safe process now, and infant and perinatal mortality rates are at their lowest ever.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the initiative that she has announced today and particularly on the targets that she has set for mental illness and mental health? I also congratulate her on the praise that she indirectly gave to the Select Committee, whose recommendations I think brought about the reduction in perinatal and neonatal mortality.

Will my right hon. Friend accept that some of us may have priorities additional to the five that she has identified? One of the greatest concerns in the health service and the social services is about whether community care will be effective and fully implemented in 1 April 1993. We are, after all, dealing here with the most vulnerable groups in society.

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend; I can give him that commitment. A great programme of work is under way—my hon. Friend the Minister for Health will give more details of it soon—to ensure effective implementation and co-operation between the agencies. My hon. Friend has always sounded a note of caution about the exit of patients from institutions. As has been recognised already, the target involves the health and social functioning of mentally ill people, not just bricks and mortar.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Secretary of State explain whether she accepts that there is a direct link between poverty and poor health? Yes or no will do.

Mrs. Bottomley: I believe that there is an association between a number of social factors and health. This health strategy is about how we can maximise the health of the nation; that, too, involves taking into account a great number of factors.

The hon. Gentleman may be surprised to learn that an inverse correlation governs some diseases and these factors. Breast cancer, it so happens, is inversely related to income—so the hon. Gentleman's assertion is not universally applicable.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the initiative that she is taking. Is it not a deplorable fact that hundreds and thousands of

illnesses and deaths are self-inflicted and are largely preventable? If the situation could be changed in the years ahead, her efforts will have gained her much credit.

Mrs. Bottomley: We wish to make cost-effective improvements to health and it is clear that, by altering the focus, we can achieve real improvements in health, above all, by engaging and involving individuals, groups and employers in taking practical steps to ensure that the people for whom they are responsible make informed choices.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the White Paper, but why are we targeting male smokers when younger women smoke more than younger men? Prevention is better than cure. Is there anything in the White Paper to encourage a shake-up in the royal colleges and prepare surgeons and others to deal with the new challenges of that age and to give women a proper role in medical and surgical care? In particular, will the Medical Research Council be doing anything to develop an understanding of myalgic encephalomyelitis, which is causing a great deal of concern and problems to many?

Mrs. Bottomley: Perhaps I can reassure the hon. Gentleman. The target for the reduction of smoking in women has been strengthened since the Green Paper. We want to ensure that men and women receive the maximum possible health gain. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comment about the role of women in the delivery of heatlh care. The national health service was the first Government department to sign up to Opportunity 2000 and we are determined to maximise the role of women in delivering health care throughout the service. ME is one of the many issues about which we received representations for inclusion. More work has to be undertaken as to what is an achievable target and what is effective intervention to achieve that target.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Warren Hawksley. No, I am sorry, Mr. Roy Thomason.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Sometimes it is an advantage to be mistaken for others. My right hon. Friend has said that this excellent health strategy is from the Government as a whole and not just her Department. How will she extend it to the Government as a whole, operating through other Departments, and in particular to the Department of Education?

Mrs. Bottomley: The ministerial Committee which meets under the chairmanship of the Leader of the House will hold all Ministers to account to ensure that they achieve progress and meet targets. In many sectors, we have similar interests with the Department of Education, as my hon. Friend rightly said. We work frequently through the Health Education Authority on smoking, sexual education, drug addiction, healthy eating and the development of healthy schools.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): If the Minister is committed to prevention rather than cure, why does she not restore nutritional standards to the school meals service? Why does she not negotiate with her colleagues in other Departments to stop the persecution of local authorities? Why have her Government persistently brought in policies which have damaged the school meals service? Why does she not act on the Black report recommendation that youngsters should have access to a free school meal? That is the best way to prevent bad health in low-income families.

Mrs. Bottomley: We certainly support the education authorities' work locally to ensure that meals are healthy and appropriate. It is not our view that the right way to do that is by central diktat.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): Does my right hon. Friend realise that many doctors thought that the immunisation and cancer screening targets were not achievable—as did the Opposition, who poured scorn on them when they were first introduced?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am afraid that I must remind the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) yet again of his words in earlier debates about the general practitioner targets. He said that they were "too heroic" and "not achievable". In fact, nine out of 10 general practitioners are meeting the targets for immunisation and cancer screening, and three out of four are meeting the higher levels. That is a real credit to the family doctors and a real success in the health and welfare of women and children.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am not sure what this expensive, pretty and ultimately superficial document is meant to reflect, but may I ask the right hon. Lady how the patients in my constituency will be helped by the quite clear distortion in the provision of health care by general practitioner fund holders? Not only is the right hon. Lady aware of that, but so is the whole of the health authority, which now has to deal with the problem.

Mrs. Bottomley: I find that a sad statement. The fund holders have made remarkable progress in innovating, developing and taking forward improved health care for their patients. Professor Glennister's report, which I recommend to the hon. Lady, makes it clear that the progress being achieved by fund holders is progress for the benefit of all general practitioners. It raises primary health care standards for all patients.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the very welcome targets can be effective only if there is a system under which we can analyse both the quality and the nature of the health care which needs to be delivered? Does that not go to the very heart of the Government's proposals for reforming the NHS? Do not the proposals answer the Opposition, who do not believe that we care enough about those who most require health care? Have we not provided, through deprivation payments and through splitting the contractor from the provider, the best way to deliver health care to those most in need?

Mrs. Bottomley: That is precisely the success of the health reforms. Health authorities have been freed to take a strategic view in assessing health needs, and they can now commission health care to meet those needs. They will be held to account for the targets that they have been set by the regions. For the first time, we have the mechanisms to deliver a health service which will truly achieve health gains rather than automatically deliver a health service.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): To establish health targets, there must have been a great deal of departmental research and statistical estimating.

[Mr. Malcolm Wicks]

Would you be able to estimate how many people will die by the year 2000 because of your inaction—[HON. MEMBERS: "Order."]

Madam Speaker: Order. Let us have a little tolerance with new Members.

Mr. Wicks: How many people will die because of the right hon. Lady's inaction in banning tobacco advertising? Is it because the Tory party is now the tobacco party?

Mrs. Bottomley: A great deal of research has gone into smoking and the factors behind it, and I hope that there will be more. It is difficult to explain, in the hon. Gentleman's terms, why we have had a sharper reduction in the number of people smoking than any country except the Netherlands—which, like us, takes the view that the right way to control tobacco advertising is by a voluntary agreement. Price is a most important factor. When the Opposition were in office, the price of cigarettes increased by less than 1 per cent. We have increased it by 43 per cent.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): May I draw attention to the progress being made in beating by one third the targets set by another Secretary of State for reducing the number of people killed and seriously injured on the roads? I remind my right hon. Friend that the view echoed then was that the only way to reduce drink driving was to institute random breath testing; similar views are expressed now about tobacco advertising. The Labour party was wrong about that. Should not Labour Members look at the figures rather than the slogans?

Mrs. Bottomley: I believe that the Labour party was wrong and my close hon. Friend is right. Along with his ministerial colleagues, he did an enormous amount to change people's understanding of the effects of drinking and driving. Fifteen per cent. of life years lost by those under 65 are lost as a result of accidents; that applies not least to lives lost on the roads.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I am sure that the Secretary of State will know of the work done by Dr. Harvey Brenner and others on the correlation between unemployment and ill health, and the subsequent work done in this country by, in particular, Dr. Beale in the Wiltshire, North constituency—which, of course, is represented by the Minister for Trade. What provision is made in the White Paper to deal with the special category of people involved? I note that it is not included in the list of special categories towards the end of the document.

Mrs. Bottomley: I can only make it clear again that this is a Government strategy to achieve improvements in health. We have set challenging targets; we shall meet those targets, and we shall use all the means at our disposal for that purpose.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has just scorned my right hon. Friend's welcome targets for a reduction in the rate of pregnancies in those under 16. Does she agree that he should take an extended tour—a Cook's tour, indeed—to Holland, where the rate of pregnancies in under-16s is twice as low as ours?

Mrs. Bottomley: The subject referred to by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and by my hon. Friend is of great concern. I did not deal with it properly earlier.

In recent years, there has been a vast expansion in the provision of family planning services by general practitioners. Two out of three women now go to their GPs for family planning advice. However, that development has not been accompanied by a proper review of the appropriate role of family planning clinics. This year, one of the priorities of the NHS has been to review the provision of family planning clinics, and to ensure that they offer choice and a service for young people where that is appropriate. In supporting that work, we shall certainly take advice from Holland about how this worrying problem can be tackled.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Does the Secretary of State agree that the death rate as a result of accidents is intolerably high? Will she bear in mind that certain industries—notably the construction industry—involve a large number of such deaths and that little or nothing is being done to arrest that? Will she ensure that the matter is addressed as part of her strategy?

Mrs. Bottomley: I beg to differ with the hon. Gentleman. The accident record in this country compares favourably with that in other countries. The hon. Gentleman has made an important point, however. Along with the Health and Safety Executive, which has worked closely with us in implementing the strategy, we want to promote the initiate of healthy alliances, especially in the workplace.

Mr. Simon Coombes (Swindon): If my right hon. Friend's targets are to be realised in future, millions of ordinary people will have to change their life styles dramatically. Does she recognise that the key to that is education, and that an increase in the resources available to the Health Education Authority and health education facilities throughout the country is a necessary prerequisite for the achievement of such targets?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend, who has been a great champion of the cause for many years. We work extremely closely with the Health Education Authority, which has been very much involved in our strategy.

The HEA's contribution is important, but so, too, is the role of other health professionals. Following the introduction of the new GP contract, a number of health promotion clinics have been set up. Using the work of GPs in spreading the necessary messages has been extremely effective. We must involve nurses, other health professionals and those in the wider area to ensure that people know and understand the sensible choices that they can make to improve their health.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): As usual, my question will be brief and pithy. If these stringent voluntary advertising agreements with the tobacco industry are so effective, why is that industry now targeting young women through women's magazines, with the result that the number of young women who smoke is rising? Would not the health and lives of thousands of young women be saved if these voluntary agreements were even more stringent?

Mrs. Bottomley: All these matters are subject to continual review. The targets that we have set will be met. There is a particular rise in the target for a reduction in smoking amongst women. We are especially concerned about smoking among pregnant women, and in that regard there will be further initiatives. With regard to relations with the tobacco industry, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that that industry is currently taking legal action against the Government because the packet labels that we have introduced are the most severe.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): While we welcome the White Paper, the last thing we want is to frighten the nation to death. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that it is perfectly possible to enjoy a good lunch and a glass of wine and still live to a ripe old age? Does she agree that stress and tension, as demonstrated by the Opposition, are just as likely to cause heart disease as over-eating?

Mrs. Bottomley: With reservations, I confirm my hon. Friend's comments. On Saturday I went to a 100th birthday party. The person who had just become 100 years old ate moderately, drank little, had always taken a good deal of exercise and smoked not at all. I think that that indicates that the advice that we are spreading through our document should be followed.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does the Minister accept that her cosy, vapid comments will entirely lack credibility so long as she fails to tackle the real problem of advertising with regard to the cancer-producing substances of tobacco? Could she not start by banning secondary advertising at outside sporting events, mainly through BBC television? There is clear advertising of cigarettes through that medium. The right hon. Lady could then go on to tackle the advertising of booze—alcohol products which cause an enormous amount of ill health in the nation. Or are the Tory Government simply in the pocket of the tobacco manufacturers and the brewers?

Mrs. Bottomley: The Labour party seems to be fixated on one means which it alleges can deliver an end. We are determined to achieve that end. Our aim is that this country should not just be the European Community member with the second greatest fall in tobacco consumption but should build further on that record and do even better by the end of the century. We shall use whatever means can achieve that end. As I have said before, I believe that price is important, that subsidising the growing of tobacco is important, and that advertising is important. In the case of advertising, that is why we have the voluntary agreement, which is constantly subject to renegotiation. Further powers have been taken to tighten control of the sale of cigarettes to under-age children. I take the view that, with regard to smoking, the worst effect on young children is produced by the smoking of parents.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): My right hon. Friend's strategy is very welcome. Can she confirm that built into it is flexibility which will allow for the changing needs in medical science, such as growing awareness of the problems of younger Alzheimer sufferers, and for use of the whole range of medical science, including homeopathic medicine?

Mrs. Bottomley: The strategy is a beginning, not an end. We shall build on the targets. I hope that we shall develop them and broaden them and that new key areas will be introduced. We are working very closely with the director of research and development in the national health service so as to develop better mechanisms to set and achieve targets. I shall certainly bear my hon. Friend's remarks in mind as we carry the strategy forward.

Mr. Jimmy Boyce (Rotherham): The Secretary of State has said today that she supports a voluntary code for the advertising of tobacco products. She also referred to the fact that the best way to curb tobacco smoking is an increase in price. Will she be kind enough to tell us what level of price increase she is prepared to support?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am not prepared to tolerate any increase in smoking. That is why we have introduced strict targets to reduce smoking even further. There has been a significant fall in this country which, as I have already explained, is greater than in any other country apart from the Netherlands, which happens to take our view on the banning of tobacco advertising. There is concern about particular groups. They are a source of concern to us, of course. We must make sure that we continue to take all possible steps that will effectively achieve that end.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I warmly welcome this further step in the development of the Government's preventive health policy, which I understand has already been described by the World Health Organisation as a model for other countries. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are to increase the targets for reducing coronary heart disease, it is vital to inculcate, particularly in young people, habits of exercise to promote good health? To that extent, will my right hon. Friend liaise with her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education to ensure that physical education in schools is given much higher priority than it is at present, when all too often only one hour per week is allocated to this very important activity?

Mrs. Bottomley: I shall certainly speak not only to the Secretary of State for Education but also to the Secretary of State for National Heritage. I can confirm what my hon. Friend said about the World Health Organisation. Its director general, Dr. Nakajima, said:

"The health of the nation has international value. I am sure other countries will benefit greatly from the approach England has adopted."

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that the continued price increases since 1979 for prescription charges, dental treatment and eye testing undermine and erode the whole concept of the national health service? Bearing in mind that fact and the Secretary of State's refusal to take any action over cigarette advertising, less hypocrisy from her on these issues would be welcome.

Mrs. Bottomley: I urge the hon. Gentleman to look at the facts more closely. On prescriptions, when the Labour party was in power, one item in three carried a charge. Only one item in five now carries a charge. Furthermore, life expectancy has increased by three years for men and by two years for women. Perinatal and infant mortality have fallen dramatically. According to a great number of criteria, the nation is healthier now than ever before. Our health strategy is about carrying that forward further and faster.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that there is a disturbing increase in asthma and related problems among children, particularly those living in inner-city environments? Is she prepared to undertake a serious study of the link between asthma in young children in inner-city environments, the increase in pollution caused by traffic, and inadequate housing? Until now, in response to parliamentary questions from me, she has said that there is no central recording and correlation of these data.

Mrs. Bottomley: The director of research and development has made it clear that better research in the case of asthma is something that we very much want to take forward. There has been a growth in asthma among children. All the factors are not properly appreciated. More work needs to be done. However, I can give the hon. Gentleman a pretty clear undertaking that this will come forward as a key target area at a later date when we have more information.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I have a simple question for the Secretary of State: to what extent has the Department costed these plans? Is she aware that the Northern region costed the meeting of a coronary heart disease target in the Green Paper as between £1·6 million and £2·4 million each year until the year 2000? There are many other regions, including those in Scotland and Wales. What will be the total cost of the proposals? Will there be new money, or does the Secretary of State intend to raid existing NHS budgets and force cuts in other areas? Can she guarantee that there will be new money to fund all the targets?

Mrs. Bottomley: The purpose of the health service is to deliver high quality services and to achieve health gain. By concentrating on prevention in these areas, we can achieve health gain cost-effectively. That is our whole strategy for health—the result of our work in reforming the national health service. We spend £100 million a day on the NHS —we have never before put more money into it—and as more money goes in, so priority will be given to the key areas, chosen because through them we can most effectively improve the health of the nation.

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): Would not a more appropriate title for the White Paper be, "The Health of Two Nations"? Has not a section of our population been so impoverished by the Government that they cannot afford the high quality diet recommended? Their children are not getting high quality food at school —and often come back to damp and inadequate homes, which reflects the local government cuts enforced by the Government.

Mrs. Bottomley: I do not have sympathy with those remarks. I have made it clear that, for example, one of the most important developments in the general practitioner contract was the introduction of deprivation payments for GPs working in inner cities. Throughout all the key areas that we are considering it is important to ensure that those areas which have not made the same progress as others catch up. That is where health resources are concentrated —the skill, effort and determination necessary to meet the targets and to ensure that we tackle variations wherever possible.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must now move on.

Points of Order

4.35 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): As you are aware, Madam Speaker, this morning the Bank of England published its response to the report of the Select Committee on Treasury and Civil Service on banking supervision and the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, dated 4 March. When I sought to obtain a copy of the report from the Library, I was told that none was available. I realise that the Governor of the Bank of England is running around the City like a headless chicken, seeking to defuse the expected criticism in the Bingham report. However, when public bodies respond to a Select Committee report, is it right that they should tell the Press Association before telling hon. Members?

Have you, Madam Speaker, had any intimation from the Chancellor of the Exchequer as to whether he is in a position to make a statement on when the Bingham inquiry report is to be published? There are only five days left before the recess, and hundreds of thousands of people all over the world are waiting for the results of the inquiry.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please—Mr. Terence Higgins.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): It is always inconvenient for the House when an hon. Member receives a written answer that does not appear in *Hansard* until the following day. For the convenience of the House, perhaps I should therefore mention that an hour or so ago I received a written reply to a question asking when there would be a response from the Bank of England to the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. The answer said that the Treasury Minister understood that a response had now been made and a copy placed in the Library. I received a copy earlier today, and I believe that copies are now available in the Library. No doubt, when the Select Committee is reconstituted—I very much hope that it will be next week—it will wish to consider the Bank of England's response.

Although the response accepts some of the recommendations, it does not accept them all; nor, in my view, is it adequate. But——

Madam Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is getting rather carried away—points of order are for the Chair. His earlier remarks were extremely helpful.

Mr. Higgins: Then I shall say no more, Madam Speaker —other than that the response does not seem to cover the criticisms that have been made and that I therefore hope that there will be a further response at a later stage.

Mr. Sedgemore: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I confirm what the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) has said. The Library has provided me with a copy of the report.

My point of order concerns the actions of the Bank of England in relation to the procedures of the House. Today, the Bank of England has published its response to the fourth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on banking supervision and BCCI. On page 12 of *The Guardian* today there is an article by Alex Brummer and John Willcock headed

"BCCI prompts Bank to seek law change".

I have checked the article against the report. It could have been written only by journalists who had the report. At the very least, it is discourteous and deceitful of the Bank of England to give copies of the report to journalists before it is available to hon. Members. I am sure that you, Madam Speaker, know what has happened: before hon. Members get the Bingham report, the Governor has attempted a pre-emptive strike because he knows that his job is on the line. I believe that that is an abuse of the procedures of the House. I hope that you will deprecate the actions of the Governor of the Bank of England.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. May I deal, first, with the points of order that have been made? In answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), I have had no indication that the Chancellor or another Treasury Minister wants to make a statement today. I strongly deprecate the action of the Bank of England, because it shows great discourtesy to the House. As the House knows, I have no influence on the Bank of England, but, as a matter of courtesy, I would expect the House to be informed of a response to a Select Committee report before any other outside body.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is reported that the Government have appointed consultants to review the future of water services in a Scotland with a view to privatisation. That would affect everybody in Scotland, yet local authorities and workers in the industry have not been consulted and a statement has not been made on the Floor of the House. There is no Scottish Select Committee and there will be no Scottish Question Time between now and the recess. How can we make the Government answerable without them yet again resorting to the medium of a planted written question to deal with important Scottish matters?

Madam Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's frustration. It occurred to me that we have the debate on the summer Adjournment tomorrow and he might like to try his luck in that.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The European Court ruled this morning that the Shops Act 1950 does not breach European law. In the light of that, and to assist local authorities, is not it time that the Government introduced legislation—preferably along the lines of the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell)—so that this nonsense of law-breaking up and down the country can be brought to an end?

Madam Speaker: That was a good try, but it is not a matter for the Chair. It is a matter to put to the Government in business questions.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I raise a matter with you in your capacity as the defender of rights and privileges of Back Benchers? We have no greater privilege than the right to put questions to the Government.

For the past six months, I have been raising with the Government a matter of the greatest importance to my constituency. I received five answers last Thursday and a letter last night giving me ambiguous replies. Today, I was told that the Government had been in touch with Directorate-General XIII. I have since telephoned Brussels, which has no trace of any contact with the Government on this important matter. Unless that contact was made today, the answer that I was given was not entirely true. I realise that you, Madam Speaker, are not responsible for these matters, but I ask you to use your great influence to ensure that answers to hon. Members are intelligent and truthful.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that answers to Members are truthful. I do not have the influence that the hon. Member gives me credit for. I understand his frustration, because he has raised the subject on a number of occasions on the Floor of the House. I shall look into it.

Transactions with Tax Havens (Sanctions)

4.44 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide sanctions against persons or organisations who engage in financial dealings with tax havens; to amend the Companies Acts in respect of audits carried out by accountants who maintain offices in tax havens and in respect of the duties of directors of public companies; to amend the Banking Acts in respect of transactions with banks situated in tax havens; to regulate the activities of advocates, barristers and solicitors with regard to transactions with tax havens; and for connected purposes.

Although I am a chartered accountant and I shall mention the accounting profession in my speech, I have no financial interest in tax havens.

The House will be aware that one important aspect of the Maxwell affair is the fact that Mr. Maxwell based his business empire in the tax haven of Liechtenstein. Financial transactions with Liechtenstein are rarely, if ever, for honest purposes. The same is true of many financial transactions with other tax havens.

Recently, we have seen a number of large frauds involving loss to our citizens as a result of transactions involving tax havens. Consequently, I wish to introduce a Bill that would make it unlawful to carry out most types of financial transactions with tax havens. My Bill would provide for sanctions against professional persons—bankers, accountants or lawyers—who provide advice or assistance with financial transactions involving tax havens.

My Bill would further provide that directors of public companies and of companies managing collective investment schemes such as pension funds and unit trusts shall not enter into transactions with tax havens either personally or through their companies. If my Bill had been law in this country, there would not have been the scandal of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, in which many United Kingdom citizens lost hundreds of millions of pounds, the scandal of Polly Peck in which hundreds of millions of pounds are still unaccounted for, the scandal of Barlow Clowes or the scandal of Mr. Robert Maxwell stealing so many hundreds of millions of pounds from the pensioners who had worked for his companies.

One point that I should like to make clear to the House is that the problem that tax havens cause is not so much related to the low rates of tax that exist in them; if that were so, the United Kingdom might be regarded as a tax haven. The main problem caused by tax havens is that they allow transactions to take place in conditions of extreme secrecy, which can be used by fraudsters like Maxwell and the management of BCCI unlawfully to remove many hundreds of millions of pounds from our citizens.

The use of the words "tax havens" is less and less appropriate as they become more and more fraud havens. Indeed, in my draft Bill I have not sought to construct my definition of a tax haven in terms of it being a low-tax area, since that of itself is of little concern. Instead, I have constructed the definition on the fact that a tax haven or fraud haven is a place where money goes missing and where there are no legal arrangements in operation that enable United Kingdom citizens who have been defrauded to obtain information or help that would assist them in the recovery of the money that they have lost.

Many people will ask, "How serious is the problem of tax havens?" I should like to make it clear that the Government have certainly tried to tighten tax law to reduce avoidance and evasion. However, the effectiveness in practice of some of the changes is open to doubt, and in any event the changes in tax law have not dealt with the problem of business and personal fraud.

Although there are no published figures, it is likely that as much as £2 billion a year may be lost in avoided or evaded tax and business or personal fraud through the use of tax havens or fraud havens. One has only to look at the large firms of United Kingdom accountants that maintain associate offices in the tax havens to see how big the business has become.

Although my Bill is mainly concerned with preventing fraud, a tax haven would not be a tax haven if it were not for the reduction in taxation that could be achieved by a person controlling a business from there or creating tax-efficient transactions re-routed through the tax haven. Often, that person gains the benefit of living in or carrying on a business in the United Kingdom but avoids or evades paying tax here by controlling his or her business assets through an offshore trust.

That is just what Robert Maxwell did. He never claimed to own the *Daily Mirror;* he claimed only to be its publisher, with ownership controlled by a Liechtenstein trust. That convenient arrangement enabled Maxwell to avoid—some would say evade—about £100 million of capital and other taxes that should have been payable on the profits made by his investment in the Mirror Group.

The loss of tax revenues through tax havens is clearly a serious matter. We could probably reduce income tax by a further 1p in the pound if the Government tightened this area still further. Losses caused by tax havens are by no means limited to the loss of tax revenues. Commercial and personal fraud through tax havens is running at record levels.

In the past 10 years, there have been nine Department of Trade and Industry company investigations which have found extensive details of fraud involving Switzerland and Liechtenstein. Those DTI investigations also detailed the part that other tax havens have played in assisting frauds through the provision of a cloak of secrecy behind which crooks can operate. Consequently, the main purpose of the Bill is to reduce economic loss to the United Kingdom and our people and to discourage white collar crime.

Which are the tax haven countries? According to my definition of a tax haven, the main criterion is that it is a country that assists fraudsters in the taking of other people's money. It is not my intention to penalise a tax haven because it may have a lower rate of tax than the United Kingdom; my concern is that income and capital gains should not be diverted to a tax haven from the United Kingdom to enable a person who benefits from an association with the United Kingdom to evade or even avoid tax in the United Kingdom.

The Bill is directed at the tax havens that assist frauds to take place as well as tax evasion, drug dealing, money laundering and insider dealing. They are crimes that the United Kingdom Government regularly enact legislation to prevent, but all United Kingdom Governments—Labour and Conservative—have failed to tackle the problem adequately in terms of hitting the white collar criminal where it hurts, which is in his or her bank account. The Government must face the issue because the size of frauds involving tax havens is growing and the number of frauds may also be increasing.

Some areas that are regarded as tax havens, such as Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, could easily adapt

their systems to avoid being classed as tax havens. All they have to do is accept that where a monetary loss takes place in the United Kingdom, they will co-operate in righting the wrong. Indeed, I believe that some degree of co-operation from those countries has been available in the past.

My main concerns are with Switzerland, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands Antilles and a number of United Kingdom dependent territories in the Caribbean such as the Cayman islands, the British Virgin islands and Panama. The latter countries and United Kingdom-dependent territories are the countries where many of the fraudulent transactions take place. Too many tax havens have traditional relationships with the United Kingdom. That is no excuse for allowing their economies to develop around fraud. Their people will become lazy and their economies will not develop properly. The Foreign Office has a duty to our citizens to review its policies towards those territories and to suggest policies which benefit this nation and its people.

Too many tax avoiders and evaders have been using such tax havens. Too many creative accountants or company directors have been using them; for example, Mr. Maxwell arranged a number of transactions of such a nature to manipulate the accounts of the Maxwell Communication Corporation. Large international drug dealers are known to use places such as Panama. Share manipulators, a new breed, were found to use tax havens in the Guinness affair, and Goldman Sachs did a large number of share transactions in Maxwell Communication Corporation shares from Liechtenstein trusts in very dubious circumstances.

Tax havens have been found to be used by insider dealers in the United States, and a significant one was caught recently. Sadly, no big insider dealers have been caught here. Those caught have tended to be the smaller ones, and one wonders whether that is because the investigations have gone to the door of the tax havens but, because of secrecy laws, have been unable to go any further.

The case for the Bill, or for measures with a similar effect to be introduced by the Government, is overwhelming. How will the Bill operate? In practice, United Kingdom accountants and accounting firms, lawyers and other professionals who have privileges enshrined in law would have sanctions brought against them if they continued to make transactions with tax havens. Accountants carrying out audits and law firms have significant privileges in law. If the privileges are to be sustained, such people and organisations must also have responsibilities to others. Tax havens and transactions with tax havens should be restricted, and sanctions should be used against those who carry out their work in tax havens.

United Kingdom public company directors also have many privileges. They should not own or carry out transactions in a tax haven——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. May I invite the hon. Gentleman to wind up?

Mr. Shaw: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall conclude.

My Bill would work. I believe that the sanctions, which would be onerous, would be effective because they are necessary to restrict the fraud that has taken place in the companies that I mentioned. The Maxwell fraud and the misery that has been caused to many retired and elderly people make one realise that no measure can be too draconian if it prevents such an evil fraud. I believe that many banks in the City of London would welcome the Bill because it would assist them in preventing and tackling fraud within their own operations.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Shaw, Mr. Richard Page, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Keith Vaz, Mr. Tony Banks and Mr. Simon Hughes.

Transactions with Tax Havens (Sanctions)

Mr. David Shaw accordingly presented a Bill to provide sanctions against persons or organisations who engage in financial dealings with tax havens; to amend the Companies Acts in respect of audits carried out by accountants who maintain offices in tax havens and in respect of the duties of directors of public companies; to amend the Banking Acts in respect of transactions with banks situated in tax havens; to regulate the activities of advocates, barristers and solicitors with regard to transactions with tax havens; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 27 November and to be printed. [Bill 57.]

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

Not amended in the Committee and as amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

New Clause 12

HOME INCOME PLANS (INVESTMENT BOND SCHEMES)

'.—(1) Where a person has sold since 6th April 1986, more than ten investment bond related home income plans to individuals, the provisions of this section shall apply to them.

(2) A person falling within the provisions of this section shall be entitled to a reduction in their tax liability for 1992-93 of the amount specified in subsection (3) below if the condition of subsection (4) below is met.

(3) The reduction in tax liability referred to in subsection (2) above shall be £1.

(4) The condition referred to in subsection (2) above is that no more than 10 per cent of the investment bond related home income plans they have sold since 6th April 1986 have subsequently been terminated.

(5) The Board is empowered by this subsection to issue regulations defining the term "investment bond related home income plans".'.

Brought up, and read the First time.—[Mr. Boateng.]

4.56 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The last time the issue of home income plans was raised on the Floor of the House was in March, during the debate on the Friendly Societies Bill. At that time, I registered my concern, that of my party and, indeed, that of hon. Members of all parties about the thousands of pensioner households which had been inveigled into making investments in wholly unsuitable home income plans. I also said that I had doubts about the effectiveness of the Government's response, which consisted of setting up a committee of regulators to examine problem cases.

We make no apology for bringing the House's attention to the subject again, because we see no evidence—and our postbags reflect this—that the problems have been dealt with adequately. Indeed, there are currently a number of early-day motions which have attracted widespread support from hon. Members of all parties.

The subject, which is of particular concern, has been raised during points of order and in the presentation of the Bill. It is of particular concern because of the warnings that have repeatedly been given, not least by my colleagues, that the Government's deregulation of the financial system has left the unsophisticated saver dangerously unprotected.

The issue should concern all hon. Members. It follows directly on something that the Prime Minister said at the previous Tory party conference. Some Conservative Members will remember that they were there, clapping like agitated penguins at the Prime Minister's words. He said:

"I want to give . . . every family the right to have and to hold their own private corner of life; their own home, their own savings, their own security for their future."

They are fine words but they are, of course, belied by the number of home repossessions.

Home repossessions are especially tragic when they involve the victims of the home income plan scandal, victims who are in the main aged, in retirement and in the autumn of their lives. They find themselves on the verge of being flung out of their homes, and some are being flung out. A number of them have been driven to suicide as a result of their anxiety about the plans and the indebtedness into which they have fallen. Literally hundreds of people have written to me in the past nine months about their plight arising from the home income plans scandal. I know that hon. Members of all parties have received a similar postbag.

I will read to the House some letters that give a sample of the agony and concern that these elderly people face. Mrs. Vera Hawkins of Bromley in Kent writes on behalf of her husband:

"We are another elderly couple who are involved in the Home Investment Plan Scheme which went so distressingly wrong. My husband is 72 and I am 69.

We are desperate because so far nobody has been prepared to stand up and be counted on our behalf.

We understood that we were safely covered by FIMBRA the regulatory body. Can the Government tell us to what use or purpose these bodies exist? They are called 'Watchdogs.' Who are they watching? Not those devious firms who are their members! Not the clients who obviously so needed this! Did the number of clients increase their cash flow?"

Mrs. Hawkins describes writing to the regulatory body and the unsatisfactory answer. She tells of the crippling burden of debt that she and her husband face. She also tells of the plight of other elderly people who have gathered together in support groups for victims. They are doing all they can, even in old age, to fight back.

Mrs. Timperley writes from Northamptonshire. It is often the case that elderly women write because their husbands are too ashamed of the debts into which they have fallen to put pen to paper. Their distress is added to by the fact that they are of a generation for whom any indebtedness is a shame and a disgrace. They are often afraid to go to the local citizens advice bureau or to face their Members of Parliament at their surgeries.

Mrs. Timperley writes:

"I am 73 and my husband is 77. Three years ago we saw an advertisement in a magazine for the over-65s"—

the sharks knew how to target their victims and where to go to attack the vulnerable and ill informed——

"regarding these schemes. We were put in touch with the Portman Building Society and applied for a loan on our bungalow of £10,000 or less. The minimum was £20,000 so we borrowed that amount. After about one and a half years, we repaid £8,000 thinking it would bring the basic mortgage down to £12,000. We received a statement earier this month and to our dismay find that we owe nearly £22,000 and are paying interest on interest. This means that in a few years time we will be homeless and they will have the property for £12,000."

Mrs. Timperley describes how she trusted the good faith of the building society and how, as a result of what she describes as sharp practice—an understatement—she is in her present plight. She asks whether something can be done

"for all the elderly people who have been duped in this way and prevent it happening to others?"

Those are just two letters from a postbag that runs into hundreds.

The new clause is exploratory. We recognise that the procedural conventions of Finance Bills proscribe any amendment designed to increase revenue. They constrain us from our preferred course, which would be to levy a

substantial charge on financial advisers engaged in selling the schemes. Instead, we are obliged to offer a reward to any adviser who can demonstrate a 90 per cent. success rate. We do so in the confident expectation that no one will come forward because no one will be able to exhibit such success in relation to the ill-fated schemes. If anyone did so, he would receive the princely sum of £1, which shows how high in the public esteem those who sell such instruments are held.

More importantly, the new clause provides an opportunity for the whole House, once again, to express its concern about the issue and to reassure the victims that they are not forgotten. It is also important to hear the views of the Economic Secretary, and we look forward to them.

I do not want or need to describe the details of the schemes again, or to explain why they were so unsuitable for pensioner households. Most hon. Members already know that the schemes involved remortgaging a home to invest the proceeds in broker bonds, and that they relied on a scenario of ever-rising house and stock market prices. That scenario in relation to house prices was actively fed by some Conservative Members and by the Government of the day. The schemes were always highly risky speculations and were suitable only for those with large amounts of capital to spare. Clearly the regulators agreed, albeit belatedly, with that assessment, because they banned the further sale of such schemes two years ago.

The Government have not been short of expressions of sympathy for those who are already trapped. The former Economic Secretary, John Maples, wrote to me on 12 March. He said that he could

"well understand the distress which has been caused by the inappropriate home income schemes."

The relevant regulatory bodies

"have produced a straightforward system for handling, on a case-by-case basis, complaints which have arisen as a result of schemes which have gone wrong."

He saw no need for the Government to press building societies to make any further undertaking.

That reply was not good enough, because a number of problems have arisen from the scheme established by the Government for complaints about home income plans. The procedure is complex; the system for handling complaints is far from straightforward. We accept that the victims' position was eased by the creation of a single port of call for the registration of complaints, but that is by no means the end of the story. To put their case, victims are obliged to fill in a mass of documentation. Elderly people, who are more vulnerable and more likely to be confused than others, often find writing a letter a strain. Simply to present the case is not enough, because they then have to get it resolved.

The method by which claims are subsequently processed is unwieldy and time-consuming. To put it bluntly, those elderly people do not have all that much time left. They have only a limited number of years left to them and they are entitled to some quiet and calm in those years. The speculators and sharks who sold them the schemes have denied them that calm.

The committee established is composed of seven different bodies, yet the previous Economic Secretary described it as straightforward. The bodies include the Securities and Investments Board, the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Organisation, the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation, the investors compensation scheme, the Building Societies Commission, the building societies ombudsman and the Law Society. Each body has distinct responsibilities, but crucially no one body is in overall control. That is where, all too often, the problem lies.

There is a suspicion that, if it were possible for a case to be solved by the regulators acting alone, the regulators would do so without the intervention of the Securities and Investments Board committee. For example, one accepts that LAUTRO has on occasion been able to deal speedily with its problems. Conversely, if responsiblity is not easily assigned, matters can be spun out indefinitely as the various regulators pore over the details of the case to determine who is responsible when none of them is empowered to insist that a decision is made. That is a time-consuming process. The victims do not have time, and the process is grossly unsatisfactory.

Secondly, the restitution offered to victims is inadequate. The victim cannot be certain of full restitution. Let us take a typical case of a pensioner who has been sold a home income plan by an independent financial adviser. The victim is not entitled to any recompense from the investors compensation scheme unless the financial adviser has been suspended from FIMBRA membership. Instead, the victims have to rely on FIMBRA's arbitration system, which is under-resourced and obliges the victim to forgo any other recourse against the FIMBRA member. Fears have been expressed about that in the House before, and I have no doubt that they will be expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) in the speech to which we all look forward that he is to make in the Consolidated Fund debate early—at least I hope it will be early, for his sake—on Friday morning. So restitution is a problem.

Another problem is that, once access to the ICS is obtained, the rules restrict the payout. Compensation is limited to investment losses. No account is taken of legal or other costs already incurred, let alone damages for stress and inconvenience. A ceiling of £48,000 is placed on total compensation. That is often below the loss that victims face. The victim's claim is assessed as of the date when the FIMBRA member was suspended. That is clearly not appropriate in the case of investment bond related home income plans, in which interest on the victim's mortgage will continue to build up. It is in the nature of such plans that the interest will roll up during the period of up to one year while the ICS is assessing the relevant claim.

Furthermore, in order to claim funds from the ICS, the victim is required to assign to the ICS all rights to redress from third parties, even where he or she has received less than full restitution. In those circumstances, it is hardly any wonder that the victims and their solicitors have been wary of committing themselves to the procedures of the committee of regulators.

5.15 pm

Thirdly, the resources for tackling the issue are insufficient. The Government must acknowledge—we look for some sign of it this evening—that, even if victims are persuaded to come forward, the present system is simply not equipped to cope with the numbers involved. Age Concern has estimated that we are talking about more than 40,000 victims. The committee of regulators appears

to consist of ad hoc meetings of staff, whose principal responsibilities lie elsewhere. They are brought together from other duties for the purposes of the meetings.

The problem is recognised by some of those involved. Almost all the problem cases involve building societies and to that extent are likely to require the attention of the building societies ombudsman. The ombudsman's annual report for 1991-92 published last month makes some reference to the matter. It says:

"We might find ourselves with a large number of cases which are difficult for us, as well as the parties, to process."

That issue needs to be addressed. Surely it would be possible for the Government to ensure that resources of staff and support are available to process the claims that are being made and are expected to be made.

Another problem is non-co-operation from certain building societies. The committee of regulators relies on the co-operation of all the parties. That does not cause a problem where lines of responsibility are clear and established. As the SIB has other investment business, clearly there is not a problem where other parties are involved. Again, the principal problem lies with the building societies. As we have asked from the outset, who is to ensure that the building societies meet their obligation? The remit of the Building Societies Commission is "prudential supervision" of the societies.

The Economic Secretary's predecessor, Mr. Maples, was at pains to emphasise that the commission had insisted on additional capital adequacy requirements to reflect the risky nature of home income plan business. I do not doubt for one moment that that decision was sensible, but that is of no comfort whatever to the victims. It is of no comfort to them to know that the building societies have survived the experience. It is not the building societies that face the loss of their homes or destitution in old age.

The building societies ombudsman is responsible for complaints against societies, but even there a hitch has arisen. Leading counsel has told the ombudsman that the ombudsman has jurisdiction only where the complainant was a member of the society when the contract was signed. Typically, home income plan victims came to an arrangement with their financial advisers before the mortgage was formally arranged—that is the whole point—so the victims lie outside the ombudsman purview. Apparently, nothing can be done.

So the absurd position has arisen whereby building societies can be held to account by the committee of regulators only if they volunteer to be held to account. That is absolute nonsense, because it gives those building societies which are not prepared to adopt an altruistic and moral approach a way out. If the building societies were concerned with morality and prudence, they should never have become entangled in home income schemes in the first place. It is a shame and disgrace to those who became entangled that they did so. That is a matter of real substance, and we must have a response from the Economic Secretary.

Of the six societies initially identified for scrutiny by the SIB, three have not agreed to co-operate: the Bristol and West and the National Counties refused outright. That is disgraceful, and those responsible for their management have a great deal to answer for, not least when my postbag shows that there are a particularly large number of victims in the Avon area who have been lured into their schemes as a result of the reputation of a building society that seeks to trade on its probity. The West Bromwich building society has still to make up its mind. There is no question about those three societies and the position that they take—that is the report of the building society ombudsman. It is time that the West Bromwich made up its mind, and agreed to take responsibility and to accept the jurisdiction of the committee of regulators.

To their credit, the Cheltenham and Gloucester, Bradford and Bingley and Britannia building societies are co-operating. One would expect no less from societies of that reputation. The other three societies have some explaining to do. Let me make it clear that Opposition Members—doubtless many hon. Members on both sides of the House will take this view—will not hesitate to come to the House again and again to expose the failures of those building societies, as they have taken a grossly irresponsible course over the scandal, and have either refused to co-operate or have prevaricated in so doing.

The question remains about the other societies involved in the disgraceful business. Apparently, the list contains well over 20 names. It is not clear whether they will withhold their co-operation and what will happen to the Government's committee of regulators if they do. We understand that the SIB has recently forwarded a few more names to the ombudsman. We should like the Minister to tell us what the response from those societies has been. It is absolutely vital that such issues are out in the open.

It is vital that those building societies, which trade on their good name and reputation, should not be allowed to hide their response to Government action over the scandal behind a veil of official secrecy. If open government means anything, and if transparency in financial regulation is to have any meaning, we should know which societies are involved and what their response has been. Only when we know that can we judge the degree of responsibility, prudence and morality that guides their actions.

We make no apology for focusing our attention, and that of the House, on the role of the building societies. We have all been the recipients of missives from building societies. Some have sent them with more regularity than others; nevertheless, they have all been actively lobbying on their own behalf and on that of their members. They were among the most active in lobbying for deregulation in the 1980s. They fought to lend ever higher multiples of earnings and proportions of market value. One only has to open the papers to see that they continue down that route, even with the housing market in its present state. They complied in the practice of equity release to extend their borrowing still further. Now that the experience has turned sour, they have been distinctly lukewarm about helping customers who have hit difficulties. It is not good enough. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot hold themselves up as responsible lenders, and organisations deserving of special treatment, by virtue of their reputation, history and tradition of mutuality, while turning their back on the aged and vulnerable. We are entitled to expect a better response from the building society movement.

The Government also have some responsibility. Now is not the time to go into the inadequacies of the Government's mortgage rescue package. That has been discussed and I do not want, for one moment, to remove the focus of the debate from the plight of the elderly and the vulnerable who have been affected by the schemes, but it has to be said that the Government's rescue package simply has not bitten to assist those facing repossession.

However, it goes beyond that. Sir George Blunden, chairman of the Money Advice Trust and former deputy governor of the Bank of England, has criticised the building societies for failing to offer adequate help to the Government scheme. Home income plans, and the inadequacy of the building society's response to them, is simply an example—albeit the worst—of a generally lukewarm response to home repossessions. We intend to pursue the issue until we have had an adequate response from the Government and from the building society movement.

Time and time again, we argued with the Minister's predecessor that it required the Government's active participation to bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion. That remains the case—more than ever before. Only the Government, with the power and authority that lie at the disposal of the Treasury, are in a position to bring pressure to bear on all the parties. Nothing that the Government have said or done suggests that they appreciate the scale or the urgency of the problem.

Tonight we want to hear from the Minister how many cases have been solved through the existing apparatus. Is he satisfied with that number? Is he satisfied with the way in which the arrangements are working, and, if not, what will he do? What assurance can he give the House, and, more importantly, to the vulnerable, who face ruin and penury in their old age, that the Government will act? The penury they face is not a matter that the House could take lightly or would wish to. It is a matter of the gravest concern, and we expect a sufficient response—one that recognises that concern in a way that, to date, has been all too sadly lacking.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): As the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) said, all of us have received letters from constituents on this issue. A letter from two of my constituents in North Cornwall says:

"My wife and I are two of a large number of people throughout Britain who are now confronted with the dreadful possibility of losing our homes, and with it, the only asset of any substance to our name. Some poor wretches who have suffered were driven to suicide, and whereas I do not wish to appear over-melodramatic, it is important to convey to you the very seriousness of the matter. We are both pensioners, and as there was a need two or three years ago for us to increase our level of income, the scheme advertised in the national press seemed to be the ideal thing we were looking for, and we entered into it accordingly. As I hope you will appreciate, it does seem drastically wrong that people such as ourselves, who after a lifetime's hard work and having contributed to the 1939-45 war, should now be confronted with a threat of this kind through absolutely no fault of our own in the twilight of our lives."

The letter concluded:

"would you please do all in your power to keep this matter constantly in the minds of whoever in Government is responsible in such matters?"

As the hon. Member for Brent, South said, someone in Government must be responsible for that situation and, therefore, responsible for finding the appropriate remedy.

5.30 pm

I do not wish, in a short speech, to refer in detail to the schemes. We all know them too well from experience passed on to us by elderly and vulnerable householders in our constituencies. However, three elements of each of the schemes have surely caused the difficulty, and Age Concern has accurately pinpointed them in the excellent briefing that it has given to many hon. Members: first, the independence evident in the advice given to customers; secondly, the extent to which that information was biased about the merits of the schemes—bias that may have been caused by eligibility for commission; and thirdly, the extent to which people taking out such schemes were warned of the possible risks, either from a reduction in property values or from a reduction in the value of equity holding.

It may be said that people should have known about all those three points, because, after all, similar schemes in the past have fallen foul in the same way. Age Concern's briefing makes it clear that nobody in Government or in the regulatory bodies at the time was adequately able to monitor what was being said or to add the "health warning" that should have been attached to those schemes.

In the Adjournment debate on 11 March, the then Minister for Corporate Affairs said:

"My hon. Friend said that he thought that some of these difficulties arise because we have a system of self-regulation. I cannot entirely agree. We do not have a system of self-regulation: we have a system of professional regulation under statute. There is practitioner involvement at board level, but the people doing the day-to-day regulation—those who have to go out and interrogate, investigate and bring suspicious circumstances to the public eye—are all full-time paid professionals who do this work and nothing else."

If the system is not self-regulatory, some responsibility for what is described as "professional regulation under statute" must fall back on the Government. Later in that debate, the Minister said:

"My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside asked why such schemes were permitted in the first place. With the benefit of hindsight, that is a good question."—[*Official Report* 11 March 1992; Vol. 205, c. 953-954.]

Although several paragraphs follow thereafter, on that occasion the Minister never answered the question which he described as good.

Today, patience is wearing thin, for the reasons that the hon. Member for Brent, South described. Many of the people most hard-hit by those schemes are not—temperamentally, psychologically or because of their age—capable of putting up with the strains and stresses of what has occurred or of trying to find a way out of it. It is especially unfortunate that some of the building societies, with which many of those people had saved throughout their working lives, have now decided that they should try to sidestep their proper responsibility. Each month, week and day that passes, frustration and helplessness increase. Sadly, some of the victims must be disappearing from the list of complainants because they are simply no longer with us.

There seems to be a real danger of legal nit-picking and prevarication that does no credit to the regulatory bodies or the Government who stand behind them. Moreover, the fact that we must constantly return to discussing those issues does no credit to the House. We welcome the opportunity offered by new clause 12 further to investigate the full implication of those schemes. It is time to examine again the responsibility that lies on the Government and their self-reglatory bodies to clear up the mess.

Although the precise wording of the new clause may not be viable, we believe that Ministers must make a definitive statement this evening to show how they intend to help that vulnerable section of the community, strengthen the regulatory system and prevent a repetition of this matter in the future.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): The hon. Members for Brent, South (Mr.

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

Boateng) and for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) have raised an important issue and have once again brought before the House the plight of many thousands of people who have suffered serious financial loss and face great uncertainty through the purchase of home investment bonds and home income plans.

I am the first to appreciate, listening to the letters that they have read out from constituents and other correspondents, the real financial difficulties that have been visited on people and the issues that must be addressed, not just by the Government but by those in the financial services, banking, credit and marketing industries. I hope that the subject of our debate will go well beyond the Chamber.

I shall not accept the new clause, which the hon. Member for Brent, South was the first to admit was exploratory rather than substantive. However, if it does not embarrass him too much, I wish to congratulate him on the way in which he has pursued the matter, not just today but with my predecessor. To his personal credit, he has championed the cause of many people. Since assuming my responsibilities, I have taken an interest in his previous correspondence and meetings and have sought to ask, in the Treasury and elsewhere, many of the searching questions that he has rightly posed this afternoon. Although I may not be able to give him all the satisfaction that he requires, nor that required by those who have suffered loss or are fearful for the future, I hope that my remarks will provide some reassurance.

May I make it clear that by no means all schemes that allow people to release equity tied up in their homes are bad. For example, under home reversion schemes the owner of a property can sell all or part of it to the scheme provider for an immediate cash sum and can continue to live there until he dies. That is a much more assured scheme and carries much less risk than the sort of schemes under consideration today. It has been, and no doubt will remain, of benefit to many of those who enter into it.

The purchase life annuity scheme is the most common method used by elderly people to release the equity in their homes and, crucially, is the only sort of scheme to receive encouragement through the tax system. That does not apply to roll-up mortgages or the sort of schemes covered by the new clause. Under a purchase life annuity scheme, the home owner takes out a mortgage loan on the property and uses the cash to buy an annuity, which services the loan interest and leaves an income.

Under the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, relief of up to £30,000 is available on the loan used to buy the annuity. As long as people keep below that limit, they should enjoy a positive, if modest, income after meeting the interest due on the loan. As the interest is always covered, there should be no risk of the debt getting out of hand. It is estimated that about 2,000 such plans are taken out each year and, on that basis, there may be about 15,000 to 20,000 plans in existence.

Under investment bond-based schemes—the sort of scheme to which the hon. Member for Brent, South referred—the owner takes out a mortgage on part of the value of his or her home and invests the proceeds in an investment bond. It appears that several thousand such schemes were sold. Although borrowers were advised that the bonds would generate enough income to pay the interest and provide an income, the bonds were high risk and, in many cases, did not perform to their expectations.

I understand and fully sympathise with the concern expressed by hon. Members at the plight of elderly home owners who have been sold unsuitable home income plans. As the hon. Members for Brent, South and North Cornwall are aware, action is being taken to deal with that problem. I shall expand on that matter, on which I was quite rightly subjected to incisive questioning by the hon. Member for Brent, South.

The financial services regulators—the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Organisations and the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisations—have amended their rules to prevent the further marketing of unsuitable and inappropriate schemes and have taken disciplinary action against the firms involved. In addition, action has been taken to help those in difficulty. Investors may be eligible for compensation from either the investment company or the investors compensation scheme, set up under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Firms regulated by LAUTRO have already paid £5 million in compensation to more than 400 investors, who have been restored to the position that they were in before they became involved in the scheme. I understand that the great majority of investors who took out such schemes on the basis of advice from salesmen of LAUTRO members have been compensated, although 60 further cases are being considered by the insurance ombudsman, a recognised complaints authority for LAUTRO. As the hon. Member for Brent, South appreciates, and it is important for the House to understand, LAUTRO generally compensates in cases involving tied company agents. LAUTRO's member firms and LAUTRO itself return people to their former position so that they are fully recompensed.

The position is different in relation to independent financial advisers under FIMBRA. They introduce, perhaps to an insurance company, not just the prospect of a buyer for an investment bond but a mortgage package that may be different from that which the company representative of a LAUTRO member would have offered. Unfortunately, it does not necessarily follow that people will be entitled to the same restitution and compensation as those covered by LAUTRO have received. Each case is subject to an examination of the package, the circumstances and the terms of the investment bond and mortgage proposed. The extent and admissibility of the application for compensation will depend on those factors.

Four of the independent investment intermediaries involved in marketing schemes who were members of FIMBRA have been declared in default under the investors compensation scheme. More than 1,000 claims involving those firms have been received, and I understand that payments have begun. Many cases are complex and many involve the responsibility of a number of different parties such as the financial adviser, solicitor or lender.

5.45 pm

In March, the liaison group set up by the Securities and Investments Board announced a one-stop procedure for handling complaints. Under that procedure, investors who invested in such schemes on the recommendation of a FIMBRA member, are in difficulties as a result and have received no satisfaction may pursue all their complaints

through FIMBRA even if the complaint involves firms other than the FIMBRA member. That might include the insurance company whose investment bond was used or the solicitor who dealt with the mortgage documents.

Some building societies have agreed to co-operate with the building societies ombudsman in using the one-stop procedure, and discussions are continuing with other building societies with a view to encouraging them to do likewise. I am sure that societies will have noted the strong words used today by the hon. Member for Brent, South. I hope that the societies involved will feel able to agree to co-operate with the building societies ombudsman.

A number of building societies have been approached to join the one-stop procedure for complaints about the investment bond scheme, and three of the larger societies have agreed to participate. As the hon. Member for Brent, South knows, a number of other building societies have not. As I understand it, there is no legal sanction to force them to do so due to the limited remit of the ombudsman. However, I agree with the hon. Member for Brent, South and hope that those societies will feel able to co-operate.

I understand that, in addition to those cases where there are claims under the investors compensation scheme, a further 60 complaints are being considered under the one-stop procedure. Meanwhile, the building societies involved have made it clear that they want to enable elderly borrowers to stay in their homes, resolve their worries and avoid hardship. During the debate, some building societies have come in for criticism. It is only fair to say that most building societies have made it clear that they want elderly borrowers to stay in their homes and there is no question of parting them from their homes, which is an important assurance.

The consideration of complaints and compensation claims takes time. One of my concerns was to act as expeditiously as possible and encourage the responsible authorities to speed up their handling of applications for compensation and complaints, as uncertainty and worry are visited on people, many of whom are elderly and vulnerable. Therefore, I have raised the matter as often as I can.

It is sometimes difficult and time-consuming to obtain all the necessary information about what has happened. The investors compensation scheme and the regulatory organisations are aware of the concern of all hon. Members, which I share, that the matter should be resolved as quickly as possible. I am assured that every effort is being made to help investors provide the necessary details as quickly as possible so that their cases can be dealt with without duplication or avoidable delay.

The investors compensation scheme expects to make substantial progress in finalising claims in the next two months and hopes to have dealt by November with the bulk of claims so far received. I hope that cases being handled by the one-stop complaints procedure can be completed in a similar time scale.

In response to the pertinent points raised by the hon. Members for Brent, South and for North Cornwall on new clause 12, I shall conclude with a short personal homily that will provide little comfort to those who have lost, or face the prospect of losing, under such schemes.

The more I become aware of the marketing of schemes of this kind and the more I look at reports of what has gone wrong, the more I become aware of two aspects. One is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to devise a fail-safe system of investor and depositor protection. It does not matter whether there is a statutory scheme or a self-regulatory scheme or a statutory-based system of practitioner self-regulation, which we have. It is extremely difficult—I dare say impossible—to provide against every possible loss and ensure that people will not be ripped off.

We must do what we can, however, both in Parliament and in the City, to ensure that the risk for depositors and investors is limited as far as possible. At the same time, the investing and depositing public have a duty to remind themselves that they must not be encouraged by modern marketing schemes to abandon the basic common sense and prudential rules which have always been impressed on people.

The five golden rules are: buyer beware, spread investments, seek good advice, read the small print, and do not confuse authorisation with a guarantee. Investors must always consider not just the attractions and benefits of an investment scheme but the down side of the scheme as well. It is right to be cautious and to use common sense. People should not be misled by the attractions and by the statistics advanced in favour of schemes and their attractions.

There has been an increasing number of claims and of cases arising out of self-regulatory organisations standing behind firms, the Securities and Investments Board standing behind self-regulatory organisations and the Government standing behind the SIB. I do not think it practical, desirable or possible to have a guarantee or indemnity in all cases of misleading sales, faulty products or default on behalf of investment firms. Authorisation must not, therefore, be confused with a guarantee or an indemnity.

I have said what I have said about spreading investment and reading the small print, but despite the problems that sometimes arise, people should still seek professional or independent or reputable advice, as the circumstances demand. Ignoring these basic rules of investment or of incurring liability involves risks.

I have met constituents who lost large sums of money in Barlow Clowes. Like the hon. Member for Brent, South, I was impressed by how vulnerable many of them were. Not necessarily elderly, many of them were straightforward people who had, for instance, spent their lives in the armed forces and who, with a commutation retirement pension, had sunk all their money in one investment product offered by Barlow Clowes. It seems hardly credible that people who have held responsible jobs and saved securely throughout their lives should then abandon a basic tenet of safe investment: not putting all one's eggs in one basket. Yet people do that; and the elderly are even more vulnerable.

This is why it is right that we have introduced financial services legislation and other measures designed to protect such people. It is why it is right continually to re-examine whether these mechanisms are working properly. It is why it is right—without indulging too much in homily—to remind people from time to time that neither the Government nor the taxpayer can safeguard or indemnify investors in all circumstances. People must use their own nous; the buyer must continue to beware.

I hope that what I have said will encourage the hon. Member for Brent, South to believe that the Government take seriously the distress of those involved with home income bonds. We are encouraging expedition in dealing with claims for compensation and we will carefully watch

the responses of the building societies and regulatory organisations to these difficult problems. On that basis, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the motion.

Mr. Boateng: The care and thoughtfulness that have clearly gone into the Minister's response are welcome. We look forward to his continuing involvement as a Minister with responsibilities in this area. I am sure that I speak for all who have signed a variety of early-day motions on this matter when I express the hope that he will in due course agree to meet a group of us so that we can explore these issues further on behalf of those who have suffered from the marketing of these schemes.

When we meet the Minister—it will be sooner rather than later—we will expect greater clarity about the number of cases that have been resolved under existing arrangements and a greater willingness, in the spirit of open government, to inform us which building societies are proving recalcitrant about arriving at voluntary arrangements. By the time of our meeting, we will also expect a marked degree of progress on both relevant fronts in respect of compensation.

All hon. Members whose constituents have been affected by the tragedy that these schemes represent want to place on record our appreciation of the work of the victim support schemes set up as a result of the need to bring together the elderly and vulnerable people who have suffered as a result of the marketing of these plans. The schemes are designed to offer mutual support and to pool such resources as these people have to obtain proper advice and assistance. We should record our appreciation of those who organise and service these schemes. I think particularly of people like Mr. James Fielding of Essex, who has done so much to bring this matter to the attention of hon. Members. Many others have done the same.

We wish these people well in their continuing work of supporting those who have suffered at the hands of the unscrupulous persons who have marketed the schemes—and of those who stand behind them and who seek, regrettably, to shirk their responsibilities.

We will not tolerate it if building societies continue to avoid their responsibilities in this area. They will be exposed if they continue to be indifferent to the sufferings of the victims of the unscrupulous people who marketed the schemes, and they will be exposed to the full glare of publicity unless they are prepared to co-operate with the regulatory committee and arrive at a fair and reasonable settlement about outstanding claims.

We shall return to this issue in the fullness of time, but in the meantime I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 13

TRAVEL BETWEEN WORK AND HOME

'(1) In section 154 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (general charging provision) after subsection (3), there shall be inserted the following subsections:

"(4) The benefits to which this section applies shall exclude any benefit consisting of an employer paying for an employee's journey between work and home where:

(a) the employee is required, by reason of his employment, to work to a time between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m.; and

(b) it would not be reasonable for the employer to expect the employee to use public transport at that time.

(5) For the purposes of subsection (4) above, but without prejudice to the generality of that subsection, there is a presumption that it would not be reasonable for an employer to expect the employee to use public transport where:

(a) public transport has ceased or being substantially curtailed; or

(b) because of the low level of availability or reliability of public transport services at that time, a journey using public transport would be likely to take significantly longer than a journey between work and home at a time between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m.; or

(c) there would be an increased risk to the personal safety of the employee should they travel by public transport at that time.".

(2) In section 153 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, after subsection (3), there shall be inserted the following subsection:

"(4) The payments to which this section applies shall exclude any payments made by an employer if, had they been incurred by the employer directly, they would not have been taxable benefits to the employee by virtue of section 154(4) and (5)".

(3) This section shall apply for the year 1992-93 and all subsequent years.'.—*[Mr. Nicholas Brown.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

6 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause is aimed at addressing the circumstances in which work-related travel expenses paid by the employer are deductible for income tax purposes, particularly where the employee has to work late. At the moment, journeys between work and home are tax-deductible in certain circumstances, which are set out in the Inland Revenue pamphlet IR1 on extra-statutory concessions. The circumstances that the Inland Revenue says are satisfactory for the concessions are these:

"Where . . . an employee is occasionally required to work late but those occasions are neither regular nor frequent; and by the time the employee can go home, either public transport between the employee's place of work and home has ceased or it would not be reasonable in the circumstances for the employer to expect the employee to use it".

The definitions that are set alongside this are that

"a requirement to work late means working until 9 pm or later"—

that is reflected in our new clause—

"late working would normally be regarded as frequent if it occurs on more than 60 occasions in a tax year; regular means a predictable pattern, for example if late night transport is provided every Friday."

We are arguing that the extra-statutory concession should be made statutory, and our new clause would achieve that.

Before going into the details of the topic, I should emphasise that we are not arguing that, in normal circumstances, travel to work should be allowable for a deduction from income tax. I know that the Financial Secretary will be tempted to attack a target as wide as he can make it, so it is important that we focus on the circumstances in which people have to go home late at night. We are not arguing for a wider concession. We are not discussing normal circumstances. We are discussing those who, because of the nature of their employment, have occasionally to take taxis home after 9 pm.

This is an important matter to us, because it affects the safety of employees in this position who have to face the dangers of travelling home late at night and unaccompanied, often when the running of whatever public transport is still working may not fit the whole of the work

to home travel pattern. I am sure that the House will readily accept that the people most likely to be affected by this are those who work in the licensed trade, such as bar staff, who have to work late into the night.

This is an important matter, because of the number of people employed in this sector. The hotel and catering trade employs 1·1 million of our fellow citizens, many of whom would fall within the ambit of the new clause. Therefore, it is worthy of our consideration and attention, and I hope that it will command the full attention of the House and the Paymaster General, who I know is particularly responsible for some of these matters, at least when it comes to setting the duty on the products retailed to the public by the people whom we are discussing.

I know that the Government hope to bring the wages councils to an end as soon as they can, but at the moment a wages council order sets a minimum wage for the licensed trade. In 1991, it stood at £2·74 an hour, but I understand that the Financial Secretary and his friends think that this is too much, and that the protection afforded to these low-paid workers should be removed.

The full £2·74 an hour is less than half the average hourly pay of manual male workers, which is £5·76 an hour, and two thirds of the average for manual women workers, which is £4 an hour. In 1991, full-time male workers in the hotel and catering trade were paid on average £157·60 a week, and female workers were paid £119·90 a week. Of the 400 or so occupations covered in the new earnings survey, working in the hotel and catering trade was the lowest-paid occupation for men and the joint lowest-paid occupation for women, the other being hairdressing. That will come as a surprise to nobody who is familiar with these matters.

We are discussing the tax treatment of a payment to a substantial number of people—1·1 million—who are among the lowest paid of our fellow citizens. A number of points logically follow from the fact that wages in the licensed trade sector are so abysmal. The first is that it is odd that the Inland Revenue is targeting them for special attention. There cannot be much money involved in the remuneration of the poorly paid. Secondly, it is far less likely, because of the rates of pay, that employees in the hotel and catering industry will have the personal transport that would allow them to travel to and from work. Therefore, it follows that the concession of getting a paid taxi home late at night for their safety is even more significant than might at first be thought.

The third factor that follows from the deplorable rates of pay in this trade are that the earnings are so low that some employees will fall below the £8,500 threshold and therefore will not be eligible for taxation on benefits-in-kind. This is an important issue, and I know that if I do not refer to it, the Financial Secretary will do so. He is always reminding us that real take-home pay is important, and of the great Conservative achievement that it rose throughout the 1980s. However, the benefits-in-kind threshold has not risen with it, and the £8,500 limit was set in 1979-80. Had the limit been raised in line with prices, it would be two and a half times that level, or £21,500. The regulations ensure that liability to income tax on benefits in kind are biting at ever lower income levels, so it logically follows that, year after year, more and more people in the hotel and catering trade will be drawn into the Inland Revenue's net.

When the benefits-in-kind threshold was first set, in an earlier age, I understand that the principle behind it was that it would catch those who were well remunerated and were in a position to get a whole range of benefits in kind on top of a substantial income. It was rightly felt that it would be unfair if such benefits became an extended tax avoidance device. However, at the same time, it was clearly the view that it would be unfair to catch the much smaller scale benefits, if benefits they be, of those who were poorly remunerated. I am thinking in terms of the free coal to mineworkers, or the taxi home late at night for bar staff. However, such is the change in these matters that taxis home for bar staff are very much in danger of being caught.

It might be argued that the threshold of £8,500 is still set sufficiently high to ensure that part-time bar staff are not caught. While I accept that there may be some force in that argument, it is only fair to point out that the threshold includes the value of the taxi home. If someone received £10 a night for a taxi, five times a week, the total cost could be well over 20 per cent. of his total remuneration. When the Inland Revenue examines the notional earnings of bar staff as opposed to their real earnings, it insists on the inclusion of a notional element for tips. Therefore, it is not simply a question of the wage rate; it includes what the Revenue believes the tips to be—and added to that will be the value of the taxi home at night, the benefit in kind. It is likely that many bar workers will cross the £8,500 threshold much more quickly than at first appears to be the case.

Bar staff are not the only people liable to have their taxis home taxed as a benefit in kind, although they are the category most likely to suffer and to be treated unfairly in the way that the Revenue pursues these matters. Other people are driven home if they work late at night—for example, the Financial Secretary. We discussed these matters in the early hours of the morning, when we considered the Bill in Committee. I walked back to my flat, but I saw the hon. Gentleman being driven home in a Government car—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps I do the hon. Gentleman an injustice; it might have been an illusion due to the time of the morning. However, I am sure that he will concede that it is normal practice for Ministers to be driven home while their counterparts have to walk. I note that the Minister thinks that that is right, and no doubt if I were in his position I would take the same view. I am sure that Ministers are not taxed on their cars home as a benefit in kind, although there may be other considerations in the case of Ministers.

If civil servants have to stay late at night to help us in our deliberations, they have taxis home. I have seen prominent civil servants leaving this place late at night in taxis, which I assume are paid for by their Departments. I do not want to discuss the tax arrangements of any individual, but it is highly unlikely that the Revenue taxes civil servants' taxis home as a benefit in kind.

I understand that journalists who stay here late at night covering our debates could have their taxis home late at night or early in the morning taxed as a benefit in kind. Indeed, there are discussions between the Revenue and the journalists' unions about the tax treatment of the cost of their taxis home. It would be unfair to tax journalists in that way when they have to work here, or anywhere else, late at night, as though the taxi home was a benefit rather than something necessitated by the late hours they work.

Although the group that is undoubtedly most affected, simply by the sheer number of people involved, is the workers in the hotel and catering industry, the issue goes

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wider and embraces the journalists who cover our debates. It could embrace senior civil servants, but I suspect not. It might even embrace Ministers, although again I suspect not.

6.15 pm

I ask the House to consider whether that is a sensible use of the resources of the Inland Revenue. The effective policing of those arrangements, pub by pub, club by club, throughout the country would require vast resources. I suspect that, in practice, such arrangements cannot be effectively policed. If the Government insisted that they were, the benefit to the Exchequer would be disproportionately small compared with the resources involved.

Time and again, we have pressed the Government about tax avoidance, but we always keep a sense of perspective in our representations. I debated with the hon. Gentleman's predecessor the issues of dual residency and the use of offshore trusts as avoidance devices. Those are large issues that cost the taxpayer billions of pounds a year, but that is not what we are discussing today. Instead, we are discussing the cost of a taxi home and the tax take from that for people who are among the poorest of our fellow citizens.

The avoidance issues are at the heart of the way that the Inland Revenue operates. The Government are absolutely obsessed with investigating what they believe to be the concealed earnings—the hidden perks—of the less well-off. Their priorities should be elsewhere. The Inland Revenue's 1990-91 annual report shows that £1·4 billion was raised from counter-evasion and counter-avoidance activities, so the Government's priorities should lie there. A further £2·5 billion was raised by the Revenue's technical review exercise—the reviewing of company accounts to check that the profits on which corporation tax is paid are as they should be. That sort of exercise should be the Government's priority, not picking on poorly paid bar staff.

The relationship between the cost of compliance and the yield in increased tax is shown by the yield-cost ratio, which is the way that the Government and the Revenue measure these matters. The inquiry branch raised 24 times more than it cost. The ratio was 29:1 for the special office —which together with the inquiry branch form the main pillars of counter-evasion work. Should not the Government place emphasis on that sort of work rather than picking on the poor? The Revenue's activities included company investigations, with a yield of 9:1; accounts investigations, with a yield of 5·5:1; and non-accounts investigations, with an astonishing yield of 47:1.

That sort of work should be the Government's priority if they are serious about clamping down on evasion and targeting resources efficiently. The Financial Secretary should be thinking about doing that rather than picking on the poorest people in society. Our new clause is a modest attempt to bring fairness back into the tax system—something that the Conservative party is reluctant to agree to in practice.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The new clause would exempt from income tax the provision of late-night transport by employers. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) was at pains to stress that it was not his purpose to argue against the general principle that provision of home-to-work transport should be taxed as a benefit; he accepts that the tax system is built on such principles, and he regards that as correct. He said that he wanted to enshrine in legislation the extra-statutory concession A66, which sets out the circumstances in which an employee is not taxed if his or her employer provides late-night transport.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the terms of the extra-statutory concession are quite narrow. They require a journey during unsocial hours to be neither "regular" nor "frequent". The hon. Gentleman wants to remove that test of regularity and frequency from the concession before it is written into the statute book. It is therefore not quite accurate to describe new clause 13 simply as a measure to "legislate" the concession; the hon. Gentleman's ambition is slightly wider.

The new clause would write an important new loophole into income tax law. It would remove the test of regularity and frequency from the concession, allowing employers to provide their employees with tax-free transport if those employees were returning home between 9 pm and 6 am. That would be the most important test: night workers would be entitled to a concession allowing their transport between home and work to be paid for regularly by their employers without paying tax on that benefit.

Such a concession strikes me as too wide to write into the tax system. The hon. Gentleman, understandably, stressed the implications for the hotel and catering sector, emphasising that many workers in that sector are relatively low paid. That is true, of course—although plenty of workers in that and other sectors are not low paid, but work unsocial hours. I am not sure why they should benefit from such a concession ahead of workers in other sectors who may be paid significantly less, but who are not provided with tax-free transport between home and work. I do not feel that the simple test of working hours is a sufficient basis on whch to exempt transport between home and work from income tax.

I understand the case made by the hon. Gentleman and others about the potential risk to personal safety posed by travel undertaken late at night. That is one of the motives behind the well-established extra-statutory concession. The risk to personal safety is greatest when employees are working late at night on an irregular basis; the chances are that an employee working late on a regular basis will make arrangements to avoid threats to personal safety.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I do not entirely understand that argument. If it is dangerous for a young girl to travel home late one night, it will be equally dangerous for her to do so on two or three nights. I know that from experience. I am involved in the hotel industry and my daughter, aged 18, once had a low-paid job in central London. Her employers operated the rule that if employees worked until later than about 1 am, they should be sent home in taxis. I was grateful for that rule; I did not like to think of my 18-year-old daughter travelling home through central London at that hour.

My daughter did not work late every night, but she worked late regularly, several nights a week. I do not understand my hon. Friend's argument that regular late-night travel is not so dangerous as irregular late-night travel.

Mr. Dorrell: If that had been my argument, I would understand my hon. Friend's mystification. I was arguing not that such travel was any less dangerous if undertaken regularly, but that if it was undertaken regularly as part of the normal course of employment, it was reasonable to expect employer and employee to make arrangements to avoid the hazards associated with it. Employees are at greatest risk when they have made no such arrangements and do not know how they will get home. I feel that the taxing of those who find themselves having to work late on an irregular basis, with no arrangements for getting home safely, is most objectionable.

Mr. Townend: If such arrangements are made because the employee must undertake late-night travel regularly, why should they be taxed as a benefit in kind? I do not understand the logic.

Mr. Dorrell: I am coming to that. When an employee plans to work late as part of his employment, he knows that he will have to travel at times when there is not much public transport. He will have to find a way of getting home at such times. Surely it is reasonable for that to be reflected in the agreements reached with the employer in regard to remuneration and other terms and conditions of employment.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): If an employee must regularly make arrangements for getting home late at night, he will probably decide to take a taxi, as will employees who work late on an irregular basis. The cost will be exactly the same in both cases. Why does the Financial Secretary suggest that those benefits—as he sees them—should be taxed differently?

Mr. Dorrell: That is the point. If late-night travel is undertaken regularly, it is reasonable to expect employer and employee to agree terms which cover the extra cost. If it is undertaken irregularly, there will be no need for the terms of employment to cover the cost. When employees have to go home late in exceptional circumstances, that will be an exceptional cost associated with the employment. People who have to work late regularly should agree wages which cover the cost of late-night travel before taking on such employment because it is not exceptional but an obligation that is expected from the outset.

The person who is in the worst position is the employee whose late-night travel is unexpected, and whose conditions of employment do not cover the extra cost. That is the key proposition on which the extra-statutory concession is based. The cost of regular late-night travel should be included in the wages agreement; if an employee is not satisfied with the conditions—including the requirement for late-night travel—it is open to him to argue with his employer. The employee is in the worst position when he or she is required irregularly and at short notice to take on that cost. In those circumstances, it would not be reasonable to ask the employee to pay tax. That is why extra-statutory concession A66 exempts the employee from tax.

Mr. Townend: Does my hon. Friend not agree that acceptance of his view could result in sex discrimination? He is saying that the employee has to negotiate with the employer to secure extra salary to pay for a taxi. It might well not be unreasonable for a strong boy 6 ft tall and 18 years old to walk a mile or a mile and a half at half past one in the morning, but in the case of a girl of 17 it would be extremely dangerous. My hon. Friend has not convinced me at all. Clearly he does not have much knowledge or experience of the hotel industry, as I have.

6.30 pm

Mr. Dorrell: I realise that my hon. Friend has a lifetime's experience in the hotel and catering industry, whereas I do not for one moment pretend that I have. However, I am not sure that I can accept the proposition that we should design the tax system in such a detailed way as to take account of my hon. Friend's point. We should have to provide for tax-free late-night travel for women but not for men—maybe even for small women and not for big women. We cannot make the tax system as precise as that.

The proposition on which I base my argument is simply that in normal circumstances the cost of travel between home and work is expected, in general, to be met by employees out of their after-tax earnings. It seems to me that that should apply as much to people who work late and unsocial hours as to the rest of us. Only in the special circumstances of the requirement to work late at night on an irregular basis is a tax concession justified. On that basis I recommend that the new clause be not accepted.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I do not suppose that the same arguments would be advanced if we were discussing this matter in the context of Ministers rather than bar staff. It could hardly be argued that lady members of the Cabinet should be provided with cars to take them home late at night while gentleman members should be required to walk—whatever the Financial Secretary says about his willingness to walk rather than be driven home in the early hours of the morning. I am sure that the Financial Secretary will accept that it is not the intention of the parliamentary Labour party to create a new tax loophole. On the contrary, to my certain knowledge, in the debates on Finance Bills over the last five years the parliamentary Labour party has tried to close tax loopholes, so it would be odd if, even inadvertently, we were to create a new one.

There is some strength in the Financial Secretary's argument that those whose occupations require them to work late should have their hours taken into account when the terms and conditions of employment are being settled. Where things are equally balanced, that is probably what happens in practice, and the disadvantages of working late are probably reflected in salary. It is fair for the Financial Secretary to observe that late-night working can be taken into account in the employer-employee arrangement without further provision through the tax system, but that argument applies only where employer and employee have something like equal bargaining strength. The Financial Secretary's argument is less strong in respect of those working in the hotel and catering industry, who by any definition are low paid. The Financial Secretary referred to those people as being relatively low paid. I repeat that of the 480 occupations included in the new earnings survey, hotel and catering work attracted the lowest pay in the manual work sector, and among women workers those in the hotel and catering industry were joint lowest with those in the hairdressing industry. Those people are not relatively low paid; they are absolutely low-paid.

One of the reasons for that is that their bargaining position is not so strong as that of people in the industrial sectors, where claims can be asserted with more vigour.

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

The industry is noted for its transiency, and the low wages probably have some bearing on that. I suspect—though I cannot offer any evidence for this—that the average age is lower than in the work force as a whole. The industry is noted for seasonal employment and for the fact that it offers jobs to casual workers, some of them students trying to earn some money during the summer.

It should be pretty obvious to the whole House that such people are not in a strong bargaining position. They are not able to say, "I won't take the job unless the wages council rate is topped up by an amount to cover the cost of getting home late at night." That is not a practical proposition, and the purpose of the new clause is to deal with the circumstances arising from the fact that it would not be practical for this matter to be taken into account in the employer-employee relationship. I suppose that it follows logically that we should have put an earnings ceiling on the concession. The Financial Secretary did not make that suggestion, but it follows logically from his arguments, too. It would have been legitimate for him to make such a proposal. The idea has some attractions, and if its absence from the new clause makes the provision imperfect, that will explain why I do not intend to press it to a vote.

The Opposition's main concern is not the generality of the way in which this benefit is treated but how it bears down specifically on poorly paid workers, who may be substantially disadvantaged by the way in which it operates in practice. We are worried about precisely the circumstances that the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) described when he brought to the House his experience of these matters. It is frightening for a young lady of 17 or 18 to be required to get herself home at half past eleven at night when public transport has ceased altogether or is very infrequent and in any event may not get her from her actual place of work to the safety of her home. Safety is at the heart of our concern.

We are not seeking to establish some great loophole of which the very wealthy can take advantage; we are seeking to ensure that a girl of 17 or 18 can get home in safety. At the very least, the tax system should not create a disincentive in that regard. The whole House will agree that we should do all that we can to assure the safety of vulnerable people.

I emphasise again the importance of keeping a sense of proportion in these matters. Really efficient use of the Revenue's time is not achieved by the pursuit of some student bar worker in respect of the very limited concession—if concession it is—of a taxi ride home. It is a waste of the Revenue's time. The Revenue can make effective use of its time elsewhere—by pursuing corporate evasion, not by pursuing innocent and very poorly paid students. I am sure that the Financial Secretary has taken that point on board. I do not intend, therefore, to divide the House on the new clause.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) that the new clause should not be pressed to a vote. I apologise for not having been here for the whole debate—I was attending a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee—but I have been here long enough to get the flavour of it.

The Inland Revenue and the Treasury are frightened by anything that might lead to a loss of revenue. However, the way of earning a living, particularly during the last 10 years, has undergone fundamental changes. Large costs are involved nowadays in earning a living. People travel much further to work than they ever used to do. They have to wear far better clothes. They have meals in the canteen, or elsewhere. In the past, many people lived just along the road from their factory. They wore work clothes and they had butties for their meals. Many pounds are now spent each week on transport, clothes and food. None of that is allowable against income tax. Yet those items are an essential part of earning a living. That was not so in the past.

I recognise the obvious problems involved here, but people can be discouraged from seeking employment because they know that they will be unable to claim some of those considerable expenses against tax. I was interested in the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East that a ceiling could possibly be placed on any concession. Another ceiling which might be placed on any concession is that the place of employment should be no more than a certain distance from a person's home.

We all recognise that we must try to prevent loss of revenue of the kind envisaged, but at some stage in the future the cost of earning a living must be related to the income tax that a person pays. My hon. Friend was right to give the subject an airing.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): We now turn to new clause 15.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): In the absence of the hon. Members for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), in whose name the new clause stands, it would be regrettable if this valuable opportunity to give a boost to the——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am advised by the Clerk that only a Member whose name is attached to a new clause can move it, so I am afraid that the hon. Member is out of order.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it not have been a courtesy to the House if those hon. Members who placed the new clause on the Amendment Paper had not left us in the position of being unable to debate the new clause? I know that a number of hon. Members would have liked to take part in that debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair. It is a matter for the hon. Members for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend). I have no doubt, however, that the right hon. Gentleman's words will have been noted.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I had hoped to take part in the debate on the new clause. It has important implications for many people in maritime communities in Scotland. Were you informed at any stage that those two Members would not be present this evening?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I personally had not been informed, and I am not aware that the previous occupant of this Chair was informed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is possible that we have made faster progress than was expected. That may be the reason why my hon. Friends are not here. It sometimes happens.

Clause 12

VEHICLES EXCISE DUTY: DISABLED PERSONS

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 8, line 32, leave out clause 12.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 1, in page 9, line 6, at end insert—

'(3) Subsection (1) shall not have effect with respect to any individual who was entitled, at 30th June 1992, to exemption from vehicle excise duty by virtue of section 7 of the Finance Act 1971 or section 7(2C) and (2D) of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971.'.

No. 2, in page 9, line 6, at end insert—

'(3) Subsection (1) shall not have effect with respect to any individual aged under five or over sixty-five years of age if, apart from this section, they would be entitled to exemption from vehicle excise duty by virtue of section 7 of the Finance Act 1971 or section 7(2C) and (2D) of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971.'.

6.45 pm

Dr. Marek: The Opposition certainly had no prior knowledge of the fact that new clause 15 was not going to be moved. I believe that some of my hon. Friends came here for the express purpose of debating it. However, as it has not been moved, we have to turn to the next set of amendments.

I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for grouping amendments Nos. 1 and 2 with amendment No. 9. In our view, it makes sense, since they all relate to clause 12 and to the withdrawal of a concession to a group of disabled people.

Hon. Members receive a lot of mail from charities and societies that represent disabled people—and rightly so. In the Opposition's view, the needs of disabled people are not properly recognised. It is right that hon. Members should be informed of lacunae in the legislation and also of Government proposals to take away rights and privileges that disabled people have hitherto enjoyed. Clause 12 will lead to the Government taking away one such right from disabled people.

I have received many letters recently from people who drive ambulances for leagues of friends and other charities. They pay value added tax on their petrol. They are wondering whether there is any way in which they could be exempted from paying VAT on petrol that is used to drive disabled people around the country. Without that service, disabled people would not be mobile. If the Paymaster General could say something about that, I should be grateful. However, that is not the import of the amendments. They principally concern vehicle excise duty and the fact that the Government seek to withdraw an exemption from a particular group of disabled people.

Three groups of disabled people are exempted from the payment of road tax for a vehicle registered in their name. About 2,500 people qualify as a result of belonging to the pre-1976 invalid carriage scheme. The answer to a recent parliamentary question of mine showed that, at 31 March 1992, 2,125 people qualified for exemption. The invalid carriage scheme was phased out in 1976, so a diminishing band of people qualify under that scheme.

In addition, approximately 400,000 people qualify because they receive the higher rate of mobility component in the disability living allowance. Clause 12 does not seek to change the status of people who receive the higher rate of mobility component in the disability living allowance. They will continue to be exempted from paying road tax for a vehicle that is registered in their name. However, about 20,000 people under the age of five or over the age of 65, who are virtually unable to walk and who receive the higher or middle disability living allowance care component, need to be driven by another person. The Government seek to remove exemption from payment of road tax from that group of people.

People are disabled for all sorts of reasons—either from birth or through accident. If people are disabled, they ought to receive special help so that they can be mobile. In previous years, the Government have recognised that. Those three groups of people were in a scheme which by and large was considered satisfactory, and people who wanted help with mobility could get it in various ways —not least of which was the exemption from vehicle excise duty.

According to the parliamentary answer on 30 June, among the approximately 20,000 people in the third category who receive the exemption, there were more than 4,183 first-time successful applications during the period 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992. The Government seek to stop that group of people gaining exemption from VED. It is likely that the figure of 4,183 represents a continuing level, so basically the Government are stopping an allowance for about 4,000 new disabled applicants every year.

Although there are temporary provisions in the clause to ensure that everybody in the third category who receives the exemption will continue to do so, I believe that anyone not already exempted will be unable to obtain exemption once the Bill is enacted.

There is an interesting political point here. The Government have slipped clause 12 quietly in, couched in parliamentary language so that it is difficult for anybody reading it to understand exactly what it is about. It has taken the House and the interested organisations representing disabled people largely by surprise. Nevertheless, I have had a reasonably heavy postbag on the subject, pointing out the problem, and I hope that some of my hon. Friends have too. It may be late in the day, but it is not too late, because now we can discuss the clause on Report.

The Government want to exclude the third group of disabled passengers from road tax exemption, even though that may be the only form of assistance with mobility costs they receive. Children under five cannot get the mobility component of the disability living allowance, and people over 65 can receive it only if they qualified for it before their 66th birthday.

Such severely disabled people are more likely to need a car because they experience difficulties in getting around, yet they are less likely to be able to afford to purchase and maintain one, because their incomes are generally low, and they are under pressure from other costs caused by their disabilities. I wonder whether the Government understand

[Dr. Marek]

the financial pressure that people suffer simply to make ends meet, as they get older and need extra heating and incur extra mobility costs—as I shall seek to demonstrate later.

Children under five with cerebral palsy, for example, need great care and help if they are to be mobile at all, and substantial extra costs are incurred by parents, some of whom must purchase and maintain a car. It is perhaps easy for us in the House to say that, if parents with one or more children with cerebral palsy have a household income that is not high, they should use public transport, but in practice it is not that easy, and some parents have to purchase and maintain a car, which causes a lot of hardship.

It is mean and niggling for the Government to withdraw the vehicle excise duty concession for parents who have to look after such children under the age of five. Those people are angry that the Government refuse to accept that they have extra mobility costs. Will the Paymaster General confirm that, or will he admit that those costs exist?

Here is a clear example—a child under five with cerebral palsy. At the moment, his or her parents can obtain the exemption on the child's behalf so as to allow the child mobility. The Government propose to withdraw that exemption. I should imagine that, on hearing about that, everybody in this country would say that it was entirely wrong—and I hope that some Conservative Members will think so too, so that something can be done about it.

The provision would affect not only children under five but people over 65 in that third category of about 20,000 disabled passengers. They have to be unable or virtually unable to walk, to receive the higher or middle DLA care component, and to be driven by another person. If such people do not apply, or do not demonstrate their eligibility, by their 66th birthday, they will not be able to get the exemption in future—or rather at present.

However, some old people—including, I believe, people with cerebral palsy as they grow older—get arthritis, and that disease may not become evident, or may not become serious enough to satisfy the present regulations for securing exemption from VED, until people are well beyond their 66th birthday. People who develop arthritis in advanced years would not be able to gain exemption if the clause as it stands were enacted.

I should be happy for exemptions under the disabled passengers scheme to be abolished, but only when the Government remove all discrimination on the grounds of age from the DLA mobility component. Amendment No. 2 seeks to do that, so that disabled people under five or over 65 would be able to claim exemption through receipt of the mobility component, like everybody else. While that age discrimination remains, the current method of exemption under the disabled passengers scheme will continue to be necessary.

I feel strongly on this subject. The measure is a petty attack on what could be described as a small concession for disabled people—but a disabled person with limited means will look upon it not as a small attack but as something much bigger.

The Government do not have to do as they propose. I should like them to accept our amendment No. 9, which would remove clause 12 from the Bill—there would be no problem in doing that at this stage. They could ensure that the needs of the under-fives and over-65s are properly looked after and table a new clause to next year's Finance Bill. They should not object to leaving the situation as it is for another year. I am aware that a new DLA scheme will be introduced in September, but despite that there is no need for the Government to insist on clause 12 remaining in the Bill.

If the Government cannot accept amendment No. 9, they should accept amendment No. 1 or 2, and I should prefer them to accept amendment No. 2. However, if they want to be obstinate and to drive the knife into this class of disabled people, I ask them to give the organisations that represent disabled people a chance to show the need for the exemption from vehicle excise duty. If they did so, I would withdraw some of my strictures.

Clause 12 is a petty measure that sticks the knife into a group of people who desperately deserve our help. I hope that the Government will consider the clause with a social conscience and accept the amendments.

7 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Hon. Members who served on the Committee or who have read our proceedings will know that clause 12 was the subject of long and occasionally sharp exchanges between myself and the Paymaster General, which were truncated only by the lateness of the hour. The right hon. Gentleman will agree that we now have a better opportunity to consider clause 12.

In Committee, the Paymaster General was at great pains to assure Members that no one who is eligible for vehicle excise duty exemption would lose it. He said that the clause would increase, rather than decrease, the number of disabled people who are assisted and that, far from achieving savings—a term that he described as a legal term and not one to detain the Committee—the Government would offer disabled people more help.

Closer examination shows that the Paymaster General was being less than forthcoming and complete in his description of clause 12. Its effect is to disqualify disabled people over 65 or under five from the exemption from vehicle excise duty which they have come to rely on. I should have thought that there would be cross-party agreement on that provision continuing, but, unfortunately, that is not the effect of clause 12, which the Paymaster General described as a tidying measure.

It may be helpful to give the history of the exemption to understand better why it is becoming less than full and is being withdrawn from a small but severely disabled group of people. The original exemption scheme, to which clause 12 refers, was first introduced in section 7 of the Finance Act 1971, which exempted three categories of people from vehicle excise duty. The first category were disabled drivers of cars and invalid tricycles issued by the then Department of Health and Social Security. The second was disabled drivers eligible for a grant from the DHSS in respect of their own cars.

The third—this is the crucial category—were

"persons having a particular disability that so incapacitates them in the use of their limbs that they have to be driven and cared for by a full-time constant attendant."

That last group was excluded from help under the DHSS vehicle service because they were too disabled to drive, but it was thought reasonable, appropriate and desirable for

them to receive exemption from vehicle excise duty on cars used for their use and benefit. The criterion for eligibility was deemed to be met if the person was in receipt of attendance allowance at the higher rate.

Subsequently, the DHSS vehicle service began to be phased out, and mobility allowance was introduced. Disabled drivers in categories one and two and some disabled passengers in category three were exempted from vehicle excise duty by their receipt of the new mobility allowance.

In many respects, the introduction of the mobility allowance represented a significant step forward in provision for and the extension of benefits to disabled people. Unlike the original DHSS vehicle service, the new mobility allowance equitably helped those who could drive in spite of their disability and those who were too disabled to drive. There was no discrimination—those who could drive and those who were too disabled to drive equitably received the same benefit.

The equity was maintained when section 7 of the Finance Act 1971 was amended by the Finance Acts 1972 and 1974. Significantly, the amendments made in 1972 and 1974 meant that those in the original third category, who were too old to be eligible for the mobility allowance, were still entitled to receive the vehicle excise duty exemption.

Even at that stage, when the 1971 Act was amended in the subsequent Acts of 1972 and 1974, there was no age bar or disqualification for those under the age of five or those who became disabled passengers after reaching the age of 65. However, it was in the transition from the simple mobility allowance to the higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance that the Government effectively changed the rules and abolished the eligibility of that small but severely disabled group. The House will recall that the change was made in April this year, when the disability living allowance was introduced.

Unlike the previous simple mobility allowance, the higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance cannot be claimed by people over 65 or under five. The crucial change was made in the transition from the former simple mobility allowance to the new higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance, which was introduced in the Government's new provisions in April this year.

As the Paymaster General said in Committee, clause 12 tidies the Finance Act and brings it into line with the changes introduced when the disability living allowance became operative in April this year. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said, its savage effect is to stop very severely disabled people, who after reaching the age of 65 find that they cannot walk or drive, enjoying vehicle excise duty exemption. In effect, as a result of the tidying and consequent to the changes in the transition to the introduction of the disability living allowance, the Government are saving a not insignificant sum of money at the expense of some very severely disabled people.

In passing, without any great elaboration or explanation and at a late hour, when our consideration of these issues was drawing to a close, it was perhaps understandable that the Paymaster General did not speak in as much detail or with as much specificity as the Committee might have expected in view of the consequences and implications of the changes being proposed. Nevertheless, he said:

"there is no longer machinery for setting entitlement"

for those who become 65 and become disabled passengers and who previously have been eligible for exemption,

"because the machinery for the new allowance . . . cannot be used."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 18 June 1992; c. 151.]

7.15 pm

I hope that the Paymaster General will now give a proper explanation as, if necessary, we have the whole evening ahead of us to discuss this issue. I suggest that there is machinery for awarding the highest rate care component of the disability living allowance, which used to be called the higher rate attendance allowance. The existence and availability of the new highest rate care component of the DLA could be used to provide suitable criteria, as the care allowance did, to make exemption available to all, whether they are under five or over 65 when they become severely disabled and too disabled to drive their own cars.

Why cannot the new care component be used to deem that the criterion of having to be driven and cared for by a full-time constant attendant is being met, just as it was if the person was in receipt of the previous attendance allowance at the higher rate? I contend that the two are comparable and that it is possible to transfer that eligibility, definition or qualification using the new higher rate care component in exactly the same way that the previous care allowance was used under the previous arrangements.

If the available machinery were utilised, it would mean that those who became severely disabled after the age of 65 and who would previously and easily have qualified for exemption could continue to do so, thus obviating the need for clause 12.

The Opposition strongly believe that vehicle excise duty exemption should remain available to disabled passengers —the original third category—who become disabled too late to be eligible for the mobility allowance or for the new higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance. Eligibility for the higher rate care component would qualify for entitlement to the higher rate mobility component but for the fact that the people involved are over the age of 65.

I strongly urge the Paymaster General to consider using that simple comparison and the transferred use of the care component—the former care allowance and the new higher rate care component. If he were to do so, it would obviate the need for clause 12. Acceptance of the amendment would enable the Government to withdraw clause 12.

There is absolutely no reason for clause 12 to be included in the Bill. It tidies what does not need to be tidied, because there is machinery available to transfer and extend the exemption in the way that it has always operated. Clause 12 excludes those who are under five and have severe disabilities, and those who are not yet 65 may become disabled passengers after that age. They should not be excluded from such an important exception.

I hope that, in understanding the full history of the measure and in accepting my argument for the comparability and transferability of the machinery that is available to the Government to use, the Paymaster General will accept the amendment so that clause 12 can be removed from the Bill. That will benefit a significant number of considerably disabled people in our community.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who so ably moved the amendment, I and many of my hon. Friends have strong and deeply held views on the subject. It is reasonable to say that clause 12 can be described only as the most lamentable feature of the Bill as it provides for the repeal of the disabled passengers' scheme. Those affected by clause 12 include severely disabled elderly people aged 65 and over and severely disabled children under the age of five who are already denied help under the disability living allowance with extra mobility costs. Although the Government have made it clear that clause 12 will protect entitlement for existing claimants—that must be good news—no new claims under the disabled passengers' scheme will be possible if clause 12 remains in the Bill.

Age Concern, the Disability Alliance and many other organisations have expressed the view that the clause is an attack on severely disabled people. I share their concern and that of many of my hon. Friends that that is precisely the import of the clause. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) made clear, we do not believe that we can regard the clause as a tidying-up device. It is no such thing. Clause 12 can best be described as a convenient fig leaf which conceals a wider and reprehensible attack on the rights of disabled people.

We can legitimately regard clause 12 as discrimination against two of the most vulnerable and needy groups of disabled people. I and many of my hon. Friends share the concern of many organisations in the area that that will be the real effect of the clause. That is why I support the amendment and urge the Government to think again.

Some 20,000 people currently qualify under the scheme that clause 12 seeks to abolish. In the past year, more than 4,000 people who come into those two groups of disabled people came under the cover of the scheme. Those are significant numbers. It is worth bearing in mind that the Government have never actively promoted or publicised the disabled passengers' scheme. I suspect that the figure of 4,000 can be regarded as the tip of the iceberg. There may be significantly more disabled people in the two crucial categories who may be entitled to vehicle excise duty exemption but who do not apply for that exemption. Clause 12 is likely to have severe long-term effects, especially as the overall population is ageing. The number of people reaching the age of 65 will increase, so the effect of clause 12 will be cumulative as the years pass.

The Treasury stands to gain from clause 12, but it will do so at the expense of very disabled people. In the current climate, that says a lot about the Government's real objectives. It is fair to describe the clause as an act of indescribable meanness. Part of the Government's case, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool said, is that the necessary machinery to assess who qualifies under the disabled passengers' scheme is no longer in place. That follows changes introduced by the disability living allowance and by the process of self-assessment.

Surely it would be easy for the relevant Department to devise a few self-assessment questions for the purpose which would allow the identification of need to be established and assessed at an early point. It is ludicrous to argue that the only response is to abolish the scheme altogether. That is not a credible or coherent approach for the Government to adopt.

I urge the Government to think again about clause 12 and to do the decent thing for those deserving categories of disabled people. They need our help, and it is inconceivable and cruel for the Government to maintain the fictitious argument that they have deployed throughout proceedings on the Bill.

The Government have frequently expressed their commitment to improving the quality of life for older people and to enabling them to live as full and independent lives as possible. In that context, I strongly urge the Government to reconsider the proposal and to move towards ending discrimination against people who become disabled later in life. I urge the Government to think again, to go back to the drawing board and to come back to the House with more credible and reasonable policies which address fully the mobility needs of those with acute and severe disabilities.

I have one comment about the interaction between the fiscal and tax system, and the social security system as a whole. I understand that part of the Government's case is that the benefits should be part of the social security system. I do not believe that the two groups of disabled people whom my hon. Friends have identified as losers from clause 12 will receive any equivalent extra benefit if the clause remains in the Bill.

I seek an assurance from the Paymaster General that there will be no losers if clause 12 remains in the Bill. It would be contemptible for those two groups of disabled people to lose as a result of the clause. Concern about clause 12 is shared by hon. Members of all parties. I hope that the Paymaster General will confirm that there will be no losers and that he can categorically assure me and many of my constituents who are concerned about the proposals that none of them will lose a penny piece because of clause 12.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The proposals stem initially from the changes which brought in the disability living allowance. No Opposition Member has sought to undermine the main thrust or benefits of those proposals. What we have done is to highlight a problem whereby, under clause 12, only those who receive the higher rate mobility element within the DLA will get vehicle excise tax exemption.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) rightly stressed, in Committee we did not have as thorough a discussion of the matter as we might have done. We tried to raise questions and to get some information about how many people would be affected by clause 12. We wanted to know how many people who had been in the category of being able to get vehicle tax exemption would not have that right in future. We have now been given information that about 20,000 people will be in that position. If the scheme were retained, with better publicity the number might grow, but currently it is about 20,000.

We are dealing with the two categories of people who are the passenger element in the scheme—children under five and people over 65 whose lack of mobility came about after the age of 65. The number of people is not enormous compared with the total benefit arrangements that the Government make, but that does not mean that those people should be forgotten or treated any old how without any thought or care for their welfare.

7.30 pm

As only 20,000 people are involved—although the number might be increased with proper publicity—the issue is relatively easy for the Government to deal with. No doubt the Paymaster General will tell us that transitional arrangements will be put in place to ensure that people who currently benefit from the exemption keep it. That is fine for the time being, but in the future people in exactly the same circumstances will no longer be exempt. Ultimately, the 20,000 people who were previously exempt from vehicle excise duty will have to pay it. As transitional arrangements will be made, the number of people who will lose next year and the year after is small. It must be possible for the Government to find a way to assist that small number of people.

Responses from Treasury Ministers always cite costs as the reason why they cannot do things. As only 20,000 people are involved, the expenditure or income forgone by the Treasury must be about £2 million. As the transitional arrangements will deal with most of the 20,000 people immediately, the extra cost of continuing the exemption for people who would newly qualify must be minuscule in this and the next financial year. The cost may be minuscule, but the impact on many families will be considerable. For some families, £2 a week may not be much, but many families of disabled people are on low incomes and £2 a week is a lot to them.

To take another comparison, under the parliamentary mileage allowance scheme, £2 might take one only three miles, but for some families £2 can be a lifeline. Hon. Members must see it in that context. I have spoken to Mencap about the proposal, and Mencap had a simple view, especially on how the proposal affects children under five. When someone has a child with learning difficulties under five, it is all very well to say, "You can put it under your arm and take it on the bus. There is no difficulty with that." Many such children have behavioural difficulties. They often create a disturbance and get upset by the experience of travelling on public transport. Private transport is crucial to the family of such a child. The spokesman for Mencap said:

"Many of these families are under real pressure."

The Government's proposal will simply add to the pressure on families who have real difficulties in any event.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool said, if the Government do not have the machinery available at present to continue the vehicle excise duty exemption, for heaven's sake let them create it. They should not take it out on the families. Eminently sensible proposals have been made and I hope that the Minister will respond to them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) said, if the Government contend that the matter should be dealt with not through fiscal arrangements but through the benefit system, let the Government tell us what extra benefit will be paid to such families. Let them tell us that there will be no losers.

I simply ask the Government to change their mind. The proposal in clause 12 is mean, miserly, despicable and hard hearted. It is the product of an uncaring and unfeeling Government. Our proposal will not destroy their plans for next year's public sector borrowing requirement. It will not undermine the Government's fiscal, economic or social policy in any respect. It is simply a relatively cheap, simple proposal to give a little help to a small number of families who need it. I hope that the Government will accept the amendment.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): I wish to deal first with some of the smaller points and go on to the main questions, which Opposition Members mostly addressed. The effect of amendment No. 1 would be to write into the law one way of delivering the undertaking which the Government have given, and which I am happy to repeat, that no one who currently benefits from the vehicle excise duty exemption will lose it as a result of clause 12.

It is important for me to emphasise—several hon. Members asked me to do so—that there will be no losers at the point of change. However, as I explained in Committee, we seek to achieve that by means of the order which will introduce transitional provisions as well as fixing the date from which the clause takes effect. That is the best way of doing it. It is better than doing it by the means proposed in the amendment.

There is a drafting problem with the amendment. Vehicle excise duty, and thus exemption from it, attaches to vehicles, not people. The position is not as described in the amendment. That is one reason why it would not be a good thing to accept the amendment. However, I accept the point behind the amendment. Indeed, we have said all along that there should be no losers at the point of change. Everyone who currently receives the exemption will continue to do so.

There are other difficulties with the amendment. It fixes the date as 30 June and relates to eligibility rather than to whether or not someone receives the exemption. That could give rise to other complications, but I shall not dwell on them. I am anxious that people should appreciate that we take the point behind amendment No. 1. However, we intend to achieve the aim in a different way.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) raised in passing value added tax on fuel used by leagues of friends and other organisations which often provide transport for the disabled. There is always a problem with proposals to extend zero-rating. It is the problem of the sixth directive —indeed, it was signed by the Labour Government— under which we agreed with our European partners not to extend zero rates. So we could not do precisely what the hon. Gentleman requested. However, it is relevant that vehicle excise duty exemption for passenger vehicles involved in transporting mentally and physically disabled passengers is not affected by clause 12.

Since 1979, no VAT has been charged on the purchase price of cars leased to certain disabled people. A little later, in 1984, we also removed VAT on leasing payments. Subsequently, in 1989, we lifted the car tax on such cars. Various other changes have been made, but we could not pursue the precise change proposed by the hon. Member for Wrexham.

Most of the comments made this afternoon have dealt with the main point behind clause 12. Amendments Nos. 2 and 9 have the effect of removing clause 12, but achieve it in slightly different ways.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) complained of the lateness of the hour, although I see from the record that it was only 10.17 pm when we finished debating the clause in Committee. As I am sure the Opposition Deputy Chief Whip, the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), knows, we sat considerably later than that on several occasions, but I shall not make much of that.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool again used the phrase "tidying up", which is not one that I would have used to describe the proposal. However, I was anxious to ensure

[Sir John Cope]

that the Committee considered the clause in the context of the wider reforms of help for the disabled and the introduction of the disability living allowance. It is clear from the debate that hon. Members have understood that the clause must be considered in that context.

Several hon. Members have described the amount as petty, which it is, as it covers only vehicle excise duty. One hon. Member said that amounted to only £2 per week, but it is slightly more than that. I do not seek to hide behind that. As I told the Committee and as has been reflected in the debate, the introduction of the new allowance makes it difficult to provide the machinery to continue the allowance for the two groups of people to whom attention has been drawn.

Under DLA and attendance allowance for the over-65s, we shall no longer be able to rely on a doctor's examination to provide the information needed to decide about walking ability for the purposes of exemption. That is the central difficulty and, with respect, I do not think that hon. Members have tackled it as they might have done. It is not a question of costs. One hon. Member said that they were minuscule; in terms of Government expenditure and the help that we give to the disabled, they are. I do not seek to dismiss the proposal on that account, but that is a fact.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), among others, suggested that if the scheme had been publicised, the costs involved might have been larger. All mobility allowance recipients received a leaflet about vehicle excise duty exemption, and those awarded attendance allowance were told about it in the award notice. I have heard no suggestion, nor do I believe, that the scheme was not understood by those eligible for it. Therefore, the number of people in receipt does not understate the number that would have been in receipt if there had been more publicity.

Even if hon. Members did not know it before they came to the House, once they have been here for a short while, they must realise that the interaction of the benefit system and the tax systems is extremely complex. It is difficult to ensure that people receive all the benefits for which they are eligible. That is a constant problem, which does not get easier when we extend allowances. On the contrary, it tends to become more complicated. We are all familiar with that, and would like to solve the problem, but it is inevitable.

Several hon. Members mentioned the under-fives, one of the categories involved. We have extended entitlement to help with extra costs for children by making the new, lower rate of the care component and the higher rate available to all children, which in turn gives access to the disabled child premium in the income-related benefits. We more than doubled those in April 1990, and they are important for the under-fives, among others.

As for the over-65s, the clause does not affect any people who benefit from the allowances. We are proud of our record on help for pensioners. It is not irrelevant to remark that expenditure on benefits for the elderly has risen by 33 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79. I hope that we can be acquitted of any general charge as regards the elderly, although it is true that the Government wish to do the best that we can for them, as would all right hon. and hon. Members.

7.45 pm

Mr. Mandelson: No one questions the Government's desire that those who receive benefits should continue to do so. My remarks were aimed principally at those who have yet to become 65 and to qualify for the category three group which I defined. The right hon. Gentleman needs to explain clearly his argument about the machinery before he concludes his remarks. Why cannot the machinery for awarding the highest rate of care component of the disability living allowance, introduced in April, be used to provide the benefit and exemption to those people who meet the criteria, who would previously have fitted in that category and would have been eligible for the exemption after they reached 65? Will he explain that clearly?

Sir John Cope: The criteria provided for that component of DLA are not relevant to this benefit. In any case, the care component does not apply to those who become disabled after the age of 65. That is the nub of the difference that we are introducing in clause 12.

The hon. Member for Wrexham, who opened the debate and sought to remove clause 12 from the Bill, acknowledged that the effect was relatively small and asked whether we would consult organisations about the matter and about the genuine difficulty in which we find ourselves, which gives rise to the clause. My right hon. and hon. Friends—especially those in the Department of Social Security who are mainly responsible for benefits —are continually in touch with the organisations that have been mentioned. I am sure that they will remain in touch about that matter, as they will about other matters concerning disability and benefits.

Dr. Marek: The debate has been useful, and the gist of what the Government are doing has been conveyed to the House by Opposition Back Benchers. I am in a charitable mood this evening, because the Paymaster General answered the debate honestly. I have been in the House for a few years now and in my time on the Finance Bill I have seen and heard Paymasters General who have been decidedly shifty in their replies on clauses. That is not the case this time—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name them."] I must not succumb to my hon. Friends' entreaties on that matter. It would be unfair to refer to other Paymasters General, but I absolve the present Paymaster General of being shifty.

Mr. Mandelson: I would be the last Member of this House to accuse the Paymaster General of being shifty or dishonest at any time. *[Interruption.]* He may have been when he was in the Whips Office, but that was long before I came to the House. Although he may have been honest, his answer to my question about machinery was less than complete. Originally, the criterion that a person had "to be driven and cared for by a full-time constant attendant" was deemed to be met if the person was in receipt of the attendance allowance at the higher rate. Why cannot the equivalent of that former attendance allowance at the higher rate—the higher component of the new disability living allowance—be used now? The Paymaster General has consistently refused to explain why that machinery cannot be used, and we should not let him off the hook.

Dr. Marek: I agree with my hon. Friend. A gallery of rogue Conservative Whips is displayed in today's *Evening Standard*, and the Paymaster General's face does not appear among them. So I shall continue in my charitable

mood and appeal to the Paymaster General's sense of fair play. He said that his hon. Friends in the Department of Social Security were in continual touch, and that he was sure that they would continue to be in touch, with organisations representing disabled people about that matter.

Sir John Cope: I had the impression that the hon. Gentleman might be bringing his remarks to a close, and I wished to respond to the intervention by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). I tried to explain—perhaps I was not clear enough—why we cannot use the machinery that he suggested. The care component is concerned with people's need for attention and supervision, not with whether people are incapacitated in the use of their limbs. That is why the criterion is not relevant in this matter.

Mr. Mandelson *rose*——

Dr. Marek: I shall give way in a moment but, in accordance with the rules of the House, I must make a comment first.

I am grateful for the Paymaster General's explanation, and I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Mandelson: I hope that the Paymaster General will understand the spirit in which I am pursuing this matter. If the criterion of being

"driven and cared for by a full-time constant attendant"

was a perfectly adequate definition and basis for qualification then, why is that not the case now? Why has the criterion changed? The severity of people's disability and their need for exemption from vehicle excise duty have not changed. Nothing has changed apart from the Paymaster General's redefinition of the criterion for reasons that I do not understand.

Dr. Marek: That is a pertinent question. I shall not press the Paymaster General to reply, but I shall give way to him in due course if he can do so.

I agree that there is a much greater reliance on self-assessment in the new scheme for the operation of DLA. An obvious question to ask is why a doctor's note could not be demanded before exemption from the VED was allowed. It would be simple to construct a form in such a way that people would be allowed certain benefits on a self-assessment basis, but if they wanted VED exemption and were under five or over 65—if they belonged to the third group that receives those benefits at present—they would need a doctor's note. If that is the only problem, a bit of ingenuity could get round it.

The Paymaster General replied to the debate in an honest manner. I take it that the sum of money is not at issue—as one of my hon. Friends said, it is only about £2 million—and the Treasury does not seek to recover £2 million to make inroads into the £28 billion of public sector borrowing requirement that it must fund. I do not believe that the Government are hard-hearted and want to hit the disabled where it hurts, so they must be taking this step because their advisers and civil servants have told them that the difficulties in continuing the allowance for the disabled are insuperable and the best way is to get rid of it. Such advice cannot be accepted without thorough and searching scrutiny.

I therefore rely on the Paymaster General's words and shall read them carefully in the *Official Report* tomorrow. He said that his hon. Friends will talk to the groups representing disabled people, such as the Spastics Society and Mencap. If the various societies can convince them that there are ways to get round the problems, I hope and expect that the Government will put the matter right in a future Finance Bill.

The Paymaster General said that the Conservative party is proud of its record on pensioners. I cannot let that remark pass, because it is not true and the myth should not be given credence. Old-age pensioners have received increases based on the retail prices index. The increases are not based on a proportion of average earnings.

While the rest of the country has been growing richer because the world has been growing richer and GDP has been growing faster than the RPI—although slower than in many other states of the European Community—pensioners have not partaken of that increase. Even worse, besides increasing the burden of taxation—as a percentage of GDP it is much higher now, under Conservative rule, than it ever was under Labour rule—the Government are shifting the balance from direct to indirect taxation. By and large, pensioners do not pay income tax, but they all pay value added tax.

Therefore, I challenge the Paymaster General's statement that pensioners have done well or that the Conservative party has a proud record on pensioners. Disabled people, especially those over 65, who need all the help that we can give them, would value a continuing exemption from vehicle excise duty if it could be arranged.

I hope that the Government will continue to talk to organisations representing disabled people, because £2 million is a small sum. If they can find a way round the drafting difficulties to ensure that the allowance goes to those who properly qualify, I hope that they will do so in next year's Finance Bill.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 15

SPECIAL TREATMENT FOR PERSONS INVOLVED IN FARMING ETC.

8 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 11, line 26, leave out clause 15. I wish to make a procedural point, and I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will allow me a couple of minutes to develop my argument.

Clause 15 is the first example in the Bill of a regrettable practice that has grown up in recent years: adding to the Finance Bill in Committee clauses—often with schedules attached—that are frequently never discussed on the Floor of the House or mentioned in the Budget speech, and are neither urgent nor uncontroversial. In 1984, two clauses were added to the Finance Bill in Committee. In 1986, 11 clauses were added in Committee; in 1989, 16 clauses were added in Committee; in 1990, 30 clauses were added in Committee, and the numbers have remained in double figures ever since. Increasingly, as the Finance Bill emerges from the House, it bears less and less relation to the Budget speech that is supposed to introduce the fiscal measures or to the Finance Bill as it was first introduced to the House and made available to the public to study a matter of only two to three months previously.

I accept that there are occasions when the Chancellor or the Chief Secretary in opening the debate on the Finance

[Mr. Michael Stern]

Bill will tell the House that proposals are to be introduced, but the Bill's drafting is incomplete, so those proposals will be introduced into the Bill later. That is perfectly legitimate, because at least the public who follow our debates are aware that proposals such as those in the current Bill that relate to rents are to be introduced. Equally, as with new clause 1, which was introduced yesterday on Report, there are occasions when, in order to stop a gap in the Treasury's tax-gathering powers, it is necessary to introduce a clause urgently. However, it is worrying that much of the legislation introduced in such a way has not fallen into either of those categories.

Over the years, a number of highly contentious matters have been introduced into the Bill in Committee. Section 49 of the Finance Act 1986 reversed the decision in the case of Collard's Mining and Industrial Holdings. Schedule 11 of the same Act introduced the controversial provisions on the taxation of foreign entertainers and sportsmen. Anti-avoidance provisions against charities were introduced in section 31 of the 1986 Act.

Section 109 of the Finance Act 1988, introduced in the name of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, contained provisions on gains from settled property that are still controversial. Section 105 of the Finance Act 1989 restricted the availability of small companies' corporation tax rate.

Such clauses, often introduced only after discussion in Committee, involved matters of great public interest. Section 73 of the Finance Act 1991 deals with relief of company trading losses. Sections 23 and 87 and schedule 4 of the Finance Act 1990 introduced various provisions relating to company cars. Sections 25 and 27 of the Finance Act 1990 introduced provisions on tax relief on charitable donations.

Often clauses were introduced that seemed to have no great urgency, and could have been delayed until the next Finance Bill—for example, clauses 110 to 112 and virtually the whole of part IV of the 1991 Act, relating to non-contentious stamp duty changes. The same is true of section 76 of the same Act, relating to the treatment of annuities.

One assumes that, following today's debate, the current Bill will proceed to be given Royal Assent after only cursory discussion in another place. Protection against clauses introduced into a Bill in Committee or on Report is that they are subject to further discussion in another place, but that is not true of the Finance Bill.

Matters introduced into the current Bill in that way include changes in the rules relating to qualifying maintenance payments, foreign earnings, equity notes, double taxation on interest, films, farmers—the subject of the present clause—and the promised provisions on tax-free rent of furnished accommodation. Anyone who is vaguely interested in taxation legislation but who does not personally receive a weekly tax intelligence report or who does not subscribe to all Inland Revenue press releases will be unaware that such legislation has ever been contemplated, let alone that it is just a couple of days from becoming law.

The procedure is made even worse because new clauses introduced in that way are discussed in Committee only when the entire Bill has been studied and there is extreme time pressure on the Committee's business. Committee members, having spent many evenings, nights and often mornings on the Bill's original provisions, are anxious to complete their business and get back to normal life. Not surprisingly, many of the new clauses added in that way receive only cursory discussion in Committee and are never discussed on the Floor of the House.

The hand of the Treasury on such clauses is weighted even more heavily, as it can supply Committee members with information that is not now, was never and never will be available to anyone else. Whenever a new clause is tabled to a Finance Bill, a few days later—possibly only 48 hours before the clause is discussed—Committee members will receive notes on it explaining its intentions line by line. Those notes are never published: they are secret to members of the Committee, and it is expected that those Members will destroy them once the Committee has deliberated on the relevant clause.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman suggests that the notes were secret. I have been a member of the Committee discussing the Finance Bill and I do not think that that is the case. It was perfectly possible for Committee members to discuss the matter with all interested parties. I have great sympathy with the case being made by the hon. Gentleman, but I hope that he will not overplay it.

Mr. Stern: I must assure the hon. Gentleman that those notes are provided only for Committee members. While it is expected that at least the sense of them may be discussed outside the Committee, they never appear in print in the form in which they are handed to Committee members.

Whatever the reasons for the procedure, I believe that it now goes too far—particularly when one considers the growth in the number of such clauses. In the tax sphere above all others—because of the lack of discussion in another place—legislation that is rushed through, without an effective opportunity for public comment, cannot be part of our system. At the very least, there is surely now a case for the publication of the notes on clauses. That would at least enable those interested in the subject being discussed in Committee to receive full information on what is being added to the Bill.

I should like the Government to go further. I hope that, when it becomes necessary to introduce a new clause to the Bill, they will not simply introduce it in Committee, but will consider proceeding in the same way as they do with every other minor Government announcement: by way of a reply to a written question.

Dr. Marek: I have some sympathy with the views of the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), although some clauses have to be brought in quickly. There is no such thing as a fixed rule which can never be varied.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the publication of notes on clauses. I do not find them very helpful; they tend to be rather perfunctory. If the hon. Gentleman reads them—I am sure he does—he will agree that they should be rather more informative and helpful, so that not only the experts affected but a reader with an average education and some knowledge of the subject can understand them. Some clauses are, after all, technically difficult. The Government should perhaps take action on this, whether or not they publish the notes on clauses.

A great deal of financial legislation is not really a cause of party division. When the Government of the day introduce changes in tax rates, they are likely to be the

cause of political division. I suspect that our confrontational system will continue, but many clauses are not the subject of party political dispute. I always feel that it is a great pity that Her Majesty's loyal Opposition have to try to oppose everything. Equally, when Ministers introduce new clauses, they try to get them through without changing a single comma. Their briefs from civil servants instruct them to resist all attempts to amend such clauses, often listing 20 reasons why amendments should be rejected.

Perhaps we could have a more collaborative Committee stage for some of these proposals—I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would agree. I suspect that this is all part of a much wider subject: the reform of the procedures of the House, which is proceeding slowly in certain areas. I await the day when we can turn our attention to reforming the ways in which we scrutinise legislation which is not controversial.

Certainly many of the clauses and schedules to which the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West referred were not controversial. Clause 15, for instance, is by and large uncontroversial—I could find nothing in it to oppose. On the other hand, the Opposition could certainly have commented on it constructively, and would have done so had we felt that the Government would be constructive in return. Our Committee system is not set up like that, unfortunately. It is a confrontational replica of the House of Commons Chamber. Committee Rooms are full of parallel Benches facing each other, making it difficult if not impossible to scrutinise these clauses in the way that I suggest.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in suggesting wherever and whenever he can that we need to look at this whole matter and to find a better way of scrutinising legislation.

Sir John Cope: My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) will find a good deal of sympathy for his views. He has used this clause and this amendment as a vehicle to express his views on the management of legislation and on the insertion of new clauses in the Finance Bill.

The clause was the subject of considerable consultation by my predecessor, now Secretary of State for Employment, when she was doing largely the same job as I do now before the general election. That consultation involved the Chancellor of the Exchequer and various outside interests connected with the matter.

At the time of the Budget it was not thought helpful to proceed with the scheme outlined in the clause. Such was the view of many of the organisations consulted and it was a view accepted by my right hon. Friends in the Treasury. That is why the scheme did not appear in the Budget.

8.15 pm

When I arrived at the Treasury after the general election the scheme had moved down in the scale of priorities, so it was not included in the Bill as originally published. Consultations had nevertheless continued; we were still in discussion with outside interests, and it became apparent that it would be desirable to include the scheme, which is why we tabled the clause.

As the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said, the clause is not a matter of terrific controversy between the parties. Indeed, it has been generally welcomed—by the National Farmers Union and other involved interests —as a helpful move.

I do not apologise for having inserted the clause. I should have preferred to insert it in a proper manner when the Bill was first published, but events did not turn out that way. It was desirable to introduce the scheme this year rather than to leave it until next year's Finance Bill partly because of the arrival of the single market on 1 January 1993. The clause is not essential for the creation of a single market, but it is helpful to have the scheme to which it refers up and running—if we can—by 1 January.

When we decided to include the clause we issued a news release which I hope will have helped to draw the attention of those outside to what we are proposing. Besides tabling the clause, we also did our best to ensure that those in the House who had taken an interest in these matters, in Committee and elsewhere, knew what we were doing and why.

In Standing Committee we had what I hope was a useful discussion. Today we are holding another debate in which we could, if hon. Members chose, discuss the detail of the clause. There will also be further opportunities for debate on the clause. It is, after all, an enabling clause permitting the flat-rate farmer scheme to be introduced. Treasury orders subject to the affirmative procedure—and, I anticipate, Customs regulations subject to the negative procedure—will have to come before the House.

I assure the House that we shall be exposing for comment later this year details of the scheme that we have in mind to enable the views of those interested in the clause and the scheme to be taken into account before we place the necessary secondary legislation before the House. We have thus gone to some trouble with the outside interests concerned in this clause.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West made, quite fairly, a more general point about the number of clauses being inserted into this and other Finance Bills, drawing attention to some of them in particular. He said that notes on clauses were secret to members of the Committee. I have never regarded them as secret to members of the Committee, who are certainly at liberty to share their copies or to copy notes on clauses at any time. They frequently share them with those who advise them or with whom they are in touch about the different matters involved in Finance Bills. It is true that they are not published in the form in which they are sent to hon. Members and receive a fairly wide distribution. We could consider doing that, but I do not think that it would add a great deal to the knowledge of those outside. Similar information is usually available, sometimes through the written parliamentary question and frequently through press releases.

Mr. Stern: My right hon. Friend is being most generous in his reply. However, I have frequently heard criticisms, particularly within the accountancy profession—of which, as my right hon. Friend is aware, I am a member—that notes on clauses are not published. Those who study tax law consider them to be of some value in understanding the purposes of clauses. Would my right hon. Friend consider, in addition to what he has been describing, placing a copy of the notes on clauses in the Library?

Sir John Cope: Copies are available in the Vote Office. These can be taken away and given to people. That is

[Sir John Cope]

sometimes easier than having papers in the Library. If hon. Members wish us to do so, we can consider other ways to disseminate this information more widely.

Dr. Marek: I do not know whether this will assist the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), but if he thinks that people outside should see the notes on clauses, perhaps they should be put in the Sales Office where people can buy them. Does the Paymaster General know whether that happens?

Sir John Cope: So far as I know, that is not the case, but I am speaking entirely off the cuff. If my hon. Friend would like to pursue that, he should take it up with the House authorities rather than with us. This goes much wider than the Finance Bill, although my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West made a special point about the Finance Bill in relation to the other place.

Apart from the clause which is the subject of this amendment, other clauses have been inserted in the Bill, some of which I hope that my hon. Friend will agree are entirely helpful to the interests concerned, and many of which were introduced after considerable consultation with those interests.

In Committee, I had a little to do with the four new clauses relevant to the taxation of companies producing films. Those are now clauses 41, 42, 43 and 68. Those clauses were the subject of considerable consultation with the industry concerned and were much discussed in advance. They were mentioned in principle in the Budget speech but, due to the complexity of the consultations which had to take place, they were not drafted in time to be included when the Bill was published initially. That is an example of the consultations preventing the system being followed in the conventional manner that my hon. Friend would wish.

Clauses 57 and 58 and schedule 10, which set up the rent-a-room scheme, were introduced in Committee. They were the subject of considerable discussion outside and formed part of the manifesto on which my hon. Friend and I fought the election, as well as press releases, and so on.

One could evolve a special case for all the new clauses which are inserted into the Bill but the fact that one can advance a special case for each and every new clause does not detract from the soundness of my hon. Friend's basic point—that there are too many in total even if each can be justified. My hon. Friend raises a good point about the difficulties, for those outside the House as well as for those inside, of dealing with Bills which change, through the introduction of new clauses, as they follow their stages through the House. I can only say that we shall try to avoid that where possible in the future.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply, and in particular for his comments about notes on clauses. I emphasise my assurance to him that anything that he can do to disseminate these wider will be welcomed, at least among those who study legislation in detail. We have had a useful debate and a mild warning shot has been fired across the bows of my right hon. Friend. In those circumstances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 63

REDUCED AND COMPOSITE RATE

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 46, line 48, at end add—

'(3) the foregoing provisions of this section shall have no effect in relation to proceedings commenced before 16th June 1992.'.

We are talking about court proceedings taken by building societies which believe strongly that they have been required to pay tax that they were not due to pay and have been so required by means of successive pieces of retrospective legislation. They and I appeal to the principle so clearly set out in 1991 by the then Economic Secretary to the Treasury in Committee, when he said:

"it would have been wrong to seek to change the law in the middle of a court case . . . the Committee would have been shocked, rightly, if the Government had sought to change the law in their favour between appeals. That would not have been right."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 6 June 1991; c. 212.]

The amendment has been tabled by myself and the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who took the initiative in bringing the matter back to the House after it had been discussed in Committee so that we could look at it on Report. What lies behind it is a determination that those building societies that have this grievance should not be prevented from taking their case to court by successive retrospective Acts.

All this goes back to the removal of the composite rate of taxation and the introduction of a system under which people pay the tax for which they are liable on their building society account. That was a sensible change and one for which we had argued. However, one consequence was that, in the changeover, a number of building societies whose accounting year was different from others believed that they had been double counted for the assessment of tax. There resulted from this a series of regulations and other legislative measures. In October 1990, the House of Lords found that the Income Tax (Building Societies) Regulations 1986 were invalid in so far as they purported to re-tax interest paid by building societies to their depositors during the tax year 1985-86. That was the transitional composite rate tax that was part of the changeover process.

Woolwich building society took the Revenue to court and was repaid the transitional tax. Other building societies followed suit and demanded repayment. The Revenue said, "No, nothing doing, no money, we're not paying", so others also took the Revenue to court. Two building societies, the Leeds and the National and Provincial, issued writs against the Revenue claiming payment. A few days later—it is amazing how quickly the Revenue authorities operate in these circumstances—the Chancellor announced in his Budget statement a measure that became section 53 of the Finance Act 1991, and retrospectively validated the invalid regulations, except in the case of the Woolwich, which was allowed to keep the money that it had got in the first appeal.

Hon. Members will remember the intense debate that we had on that measure in Committee and the many criticisms made by the hon. Member for Eltham and others of its retrospective character. Although we went into considerable detail on the background to this in Committee this year, it would not necessarily be helpful to go into quite such detail again. The key element for today's debate is that, when last year's Finance Bill was being

discussed in Committee, the Leeds building society pointed out that if the 1986 regulations were validated retrospectively, that would throw out the composite rate tax for one or more years because of the way in which the rules calculated it.

The Revenue's regulations, in measuring the tax by reference to the period of a year, mean that if the period is more than a year the calculation is bound to be incorrect. It said that that would happen, and it did. That is why we have had to return to the matter in the Bill, and why it contains a retrospective clause, adding to the trail of retrospection.

8.30 pm

The Leeds obtained leave to bring judicial review proceedings and it has been joined by four other building societies—the National and Provincial, the Bradford and Bingley, the Scarborough and the Yorkshire. It is because of those proceedings that the Government have sought to block that avenue and to prevent the court from hearing the grievance and resolving the matter.

The Minister made much in Committee of the fact that the ground had shifted and that the building societies inevitably are now arguing a different part of the argument from where they started. That is because of the way in which the Government have dealt with the matter at every stage. Every time the societies have tried to have a real argument before the right court and have their grievance dealt with properly, the Government have taken from them the power to pursue the matter in that way. However, in doing so, the Government inevitably get it wrong and produce invalid legislation—so the societies can pursue their argument in subsequent proceedings.

All that the societies want or ever wanted is the right to have their original grievance heard and the right to the repayment of any tax that the courts find that they were overcharged—no more and no less. The societies have made depositions limiting their claims under the litigation so that they cannot involve anything more than the original grievance.

The amendment would not extend beyond the cases already entered upon and therefore could not open up the possibility of other building societies finding new grievances or claims that they could bring before the courts. The amendment is designed to enable the building societies with the original grievance to pursue it, but to gain no more. In Committee, we offered a perfectly satisfactory way by which the Government could contain the matter to the original grievance. However, they argued that if the matter could be pursued, theoretically £15 billion of revenue could be at stake. The amendment that I moved in Committee was designed to ensure that that could not happen and this amendment is similarly so designed. When combined with the clear declaration by the building societies, the matter would be confined to the original grievance.

It appears to us, to many outside the House and to many of the Inland Revenue's clients who are observing what is happening that in circumstances such as this the Revenue looks rather like a heavily armed, overcoated, trilby-hatted gangster, saying, "Nobody goes to court and gets the better of us—and certainly nobody goes to court, gets the better of us and lives to tell the tale." That is no stance for a revenue collection Department to take, least of all in relation to building societies.

The societies ask for no more than that their grievance be properly heard in a court of law and that their opportunity to pursue the matter in the courts not be removed by retrospective legislation. The amendment would meet that need. I hope that the Minister, even at this hour and even though he did not accept the case in Committee, will feel able to accept the amendment.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that the Inland Revenue was not adopting an appropriate attitude in immediately moving to change the result of a court case that was not resolved to its satisfaction. I can understand why any revenue department would want to do that. The question is whether it is right for Parliament to endorse that decision—and that is what we must decide tonight.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, we considered the matter in considerable detail in Committee, so I do not want to rehearse its long history, even though I have been associated with it from the start. The position is now quite simple. Originally, there was considerable doubt about what Parliament intended. Whatever the Government may have said, in the debate on the Finance Bill in 1985, there was some doubt about what Parliament intended. However, whatever hon. Members may say, there can be no doubt about what Parliament intended when we debated the matter last year.

Not one of the building societies could be in any possible doubt about that, because we had very long debates in Committee. John Maples, the then Economic Secretary, produced a great chart showing in graphic form how the income tax years matched the payment to be made of composite rate tax by the building societies. No one could be in any doubt about what was intended by Parliament and the Government last year. Whatever the building societies have said subsequently, they could quite clearly read what was intended in the *Hansard* of last year's debate.

I did not agree with last year's decision, because I thought that there was sufficient doubt about what Parliament had intended in 1985 not to warrant the introduction of retrospective legislation. However, the position is now different. The Leeds has, as it is perfectly entitled to do, had another try. Three sets of regulations relating to the payment of composite rate tax could have been subject to doubt for a long time as the case wended its way through the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords.

The Government moved immediately to deal with that possibility, and I believe that they were justified in doing so, because there can be no doubt about what Parliament intended last year. There was originally some doubt about what was intended for the payment of composite rate tax in the transitional period. The Treasury's intention was to put the building societies on the same basis as the banks. They were paying interest quarterly, but the building societies were paying it annually. The dispute related to the transitional period. There was doubt about words that were uttered in this House and elsewhere about the Government's intentions, but no one who reads the *Official Report* of last year's proceedings can be in any doubt about what was intended.

Although I appreciate that there is a case for giving special consideration to those who brought legal proceedings before the date in the amendment, I still do not think that the House would be wise to accept it.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) made a helpful speech, although I take a different view. I pay tribute to him, because he and Patrick Jenkin first raised the issue in 1985.

I am prepared to accept that there was some ambiguity in the Government's intention in 1985. If they had clearly considered what their intention should have been, it would be that there should be no taxation for a period for which the tax liability had already been satisfied. Indeed, I do not think that the Government intended to impose taxation for a period for which the tax had already been collected —until part way through the year when, I suspect, the position changed from an excess of income to the Government saying, "It's getting a bit tight", and then to, "Where are the ambiguities, where are the opportunities?" I may be wrong, but it does not really matter. There was ambiguity: I concede that point to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield.

I made a mistake last year. The affected building societies were willing, prepared and keen to write to every one of their members asking them to raise the matter with their Members of Parliament and with the Government. I advised them not to do so, because I thought that there were signs that the Government would recognise that it was politically impossible and unjust to try to draw a division between the Woolwich and the Leeds. I declare a non-interest, as my mortgage is with the Woolwich, not the Leeds. The Woolwich has got its money.

I was wrong last year, and I am prepared to say so. I feel some guilt because I realise that I was wrong. If 1 million letters had been written to Members of Parliament, the Government would have reconsidered dropping the gate after the Woolwich had applied for a judicial review—not a tax appeal—and then the Leeds would have had its money. It is interesting that it took more than five months after the House of Lords announced its result for the Government to decide and declare that they would not let the Leeds have the money.

I have since discovered that, even if there were a tax appeal, let alone a judicial review, the Inland Revenue does not have to pay back money that is unlawfully levied on, demanded or accepted from taxpayers. I look forward to receiving in the next few days a whole series—a first wave —of parliamentary answers to certain questions. However, I do not intend to bring that into the debate.

I may have to apologise for the fact that, in an early-day motion, I described a certain calculation as a mathematical hoax which did not really demonstrate whether the composite rate was appropriate. If that accusation proves wrong, I will happily make a public apology to those concerned. I believe, however, that, given the exact calculation that is in the nature of composite rate tax, it is impossible to match the proceeds with the tax revenue that would have been there had taxpayers paid.

Let me give the Government some encouraging news. I do not think that many European Court decisions have been made about United Kingdom taxation. The Leeds case is clearly unjust, because a division cannot be made between the Leeds and the Woolwich; that simply would not wash, no matter how many times retroactive primary legislation was sought. Once domestic remedies had been exhausted, any European action would abolish susidiarity and open the gates in a thoroughly undesirable way.

If the amendment is not accepted and cannot be rephrased, it would be right for it to be replaced by primary legislation. The Government used such legislation to try to clear up a possible ambiguity that could have operated in favour of the Revenue—or, at any rate, against the interests of the Leeds. I mention the Leeds again because it was that building society that first told the Government and the Revenue what the effect of the original regulations would be. There is some doubt about whether regulations 11 and 12 can be balanced; let me stick to regulation 3. Regulation 3 clearly imposes a massive extra disadvantage on the Leeds and other building societies.

I may speak after the Minister if that is allowed; or I may wait, and try to introduce primary legislation. I suspect that the Government would be beaten if a million letters were written to Members of Parliament. It would be necessary to find only about 10 hon. Members who accepted the injustice of what had happened—I refer not to the interpretation of last year's law, but to what has happened over the past five or six years—to resolve the matter by means of primary legislation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield implied, what has happened in regard to the judicial review of composite rate tax is no surprise. Last year, I made an announcement on the Floor of the House. There was no need for the Government to act after the general election, and nine months or so after I had warned them that last year's legislation would not work.

Let me make a suggestion to my hon. Friend. I am not trying to bring in all the hon. Members who advanced other ideas in Committee; but I suggest that, although it is acceptable for the Government to keep their £15,000 million minus £90 million, it is reasonable to allow the £90 million to be decided by the courts. The Government believe that they have an overwhelming case—so overwhelming that they are introducing primary legislation to ensure that they do not lose. If the matter is not put to the vote, we shall return to it again and again—not just in Europe, but here as well.

Mr. Dorrell: I am acutely conscious that the whole story of the change in the basis of composite rate tax, as it affects banks and building societies, is not a particularly happy saga. I know that I am the latest in a run of Ministers who have had to deal with various aspects of that transition. I assure the House, and in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), that if I felt that there was a way of producing an agreed resolution of the problem—based either on the formal wording of the amendment or on what my hon. Friend and others have said in the weeks since I took responsibility for such matters—no one would be keener than I to find a compromise which was fair to all taxpayers and ensured that the will of Parliament was implemented as it concerns the transition from the old basis of collection to the basis which applied between 1985 and 1988. Indeed, no one has a stronger vested interest in that regard. I do not believe, however, that such a compromise is possible.

8.45 pm

The House must be clear about the issue that is addressed in clause 63—as it has now become, following the Committee stage. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) offered a brief history of the evolution of that issue, and I do not dissent from the bare bones of what he said. The building societies' sense of grievance arose because they thought, and still think, that the imposition of the transitional tax during the "gap"

period in 1985-86 was unfair; they felt that it constituted what my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham described, in shorthand, as double taxation.

Although that was not the issue which was decided in the Woolwich case, it did underlie that case. As a consequence, the House and the Standing Committee considering last year's Finance Bill addressed the issue head-on, and concluded after detailed debate—this is the important point—that the transitional arrangements provided in last year's legislation should be implemented in law.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: May I clarify the issue for the sake of those who may occupy the Financial Secretary's seat if he is promoted before the next legislative stage? The courts did not decide the double or extra taxation for a period for which taxation liability had been satisfied because the first set of retroactive legislation had established that the matter was settled by Parliament and not by the courts' interpretation of the first part of the primary legislation and the regulations.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall not seek to interpret the rulings of judges. I am clear about the basis on which I am advised that the Woolwich case was decided; I am equally clear —and I do not consider it a subject of dispute—that the issue on which the case turned was not the issue of double taxation. Even if it was, however, that issue was addressed head-on in last year's Finance Act, which confirmed provisions for the collection of tax during the transitional period. Parliament considered the grievance felt by building societies during consideration of last year's legislation; it examined the arguments in detail and rejected them. Parliament confirmed that it wanted composite rate tax for 1985-86 to be collected on the basis provided in last year's Act.

Because the building societies accept that last year's Act provides a clear and proper basis for the imposition of tax during the transitional period, a case has been brought which seeks to challenge not the tax levied during the transitional period, but the mainstream collection of composite rate tax during the four-year period between 1985 and 1988. As more than one hon. Member has pointed out, the composite rate tax yield in that period amounted to £15 billion. Because the practical effect of the case currently in the courts is to undermine the legal basis on which £15 billion was collected, the Government introduced clause 52, which has now become clause 63. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). I make no apology for saying that we were right to introduce that clause to remove any doubt about whether that £15 billion was properly collected.

As I said in the Standing Committee, I do not think that it is possible to consider the arguments put forward in Committee and on the Floor of the House last year about the imposition of tax during the transitional period and fail to conclude that it was understood in all parts of the House and by all parties outside that what was under discussion was the imposition of transitional tax in addition to the collection of composite rate tax during that four-year period. I put it to the House that it was understood last year that, once we had agreed the transitional tax, the only practical effect would be to net the transitional tax off the mainstream composite rate tax liability so that the taxpayer would pay no more than he would have done if last year's provisions had never made it to the statute book. If it were otherwise, why on earth did the House spend hour after hour discussing last year's Act? It is patently absurd to suggest that we spent hours discussing tax legislation which would not make a penny piece of difference, either to the total amount of tax paid or to the conditions in which it is levied.

Mr. Bottomley: Let me put my question in a different way. Why on earth should the Leeds have had a duplicate application for judicial review—it used the same firm of solicitors on exactly the same piece of law—when the Government came along and used a pair of scissors between the Woolwich and the Leeds? I do not blame the Government or the Inland Revenue; it is up to Parliament to decide what ought to be the law, and it is for the courts to interpret it. At Somerset house there is a taxpayers' charter which says that cases between taxpayers and the Revenue can be heard by an independent tribunal, but we are being told today that that cannot be done. The House understands the point about the £3,000 million. The amendment would allow the Government to keep the £15,000 million, minus up to £90 million which might be at risk if the Leeds and other building societies were to continue their cases. It seems to me that that is an unanswerable answer to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend invites me to look at the difference in treatment between the Woolwich and the Leeds. Both societies have a year end of 30 September and are, broadly speaking, in comparable positions with regard to the transitional arrangements. It is not in dispute that, from its own perspective, the Leeds has not been treated so generously as the Woolwich. Clearly that is true, but the issue was faced head-on in last year's debate. This has not been landed on the House as a surprise; it was consciously considered during the passage of last year's Bill. As hon. Members know very well, the disparity between the two building societies is the result of the fact that the Woolwich won its court case on a different point. The judgment went in its favour and the Government, in accordance with well-established precedent, took the view that they could not legitimately take away what are loosely termed the fruits of victory.

The effect of the court ruling was that the Woolwich was treated more generously than the Leeds, but that did not arise as an unintended consequence of last year's legislation, which was designed to confirm Parliament's intention.

Mr. Bottomley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend shakes his head. Surely the intention is that taxes should be collected in accordance with the legislation. Nobody argues that last year's legislation is ambiguous. I do not need to enter into the argument, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield and by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham, about whether the earlier legislation was ambiguous. The House considered last year's legislation, knowing that it produced a disparity of treatment between the Leeds and the Woolwich and, weighing all the factors, concluded that it should be passed. Now we have a building society which, because it does not like the decision that Parliament reached last year, is bringing a legal action concentrating on a quite different point as a proxy for the argument that it lost.

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is being very helpful, but I should like to offer a couple of thoughts. In the mid-1980s the Leeds did not want to pay the tax, and did its best to avoid paying. The Government came along and changed the law. Obviously Parliament is more important than the Leeds or the Woolwich and can try to get away with that sort of thing. What had clearly been accepted as being unlawful became lawful, and the Woolwich won the money in the House of Lords. Then the Government came back to divide the Woolwich from the Leeds. For the sake of this discussion, I shall leave the other societies aside.

It was argued in Committee and on Report that it was open to the Leeds to come to an agreement with the Revenue so that the benefit of the Woolwich case would apply to it. Padmore was quoted. In my view, that was not a parallel. We all accept that in a tax appeal case one cannot necessarily expect to secure the benefit. However, I believe that in the case of judicial review there is not one precedent of the Revenue's asking for agreement that judicial review should apply to somebody else. In what circumstances and for what purpose does the benefit of a statement of the law in the House of Lords apply to the taxpayer? It is automatically assumed that it applies to the taxpayer. Therefore, the basis on which the House proceeded last year was pretty well flawed and certainly unjust.

Mr. Dorrell: The House needs to understand the background to the decision that was reached last year. The courts did not rule that the transitional arrangements were unjust or that they constituted double taxation. I have deliberately skirted round the subject. To clarify the issue, to ensure that the House is clear about why we proceeded as we did last year, I remind hon. Members that the Woolwich ruling was handed down not on the ground that there had been double taxation and that, therefore, the transitional arrangements were ultra vires, but on the ground that the rate at which the transitional tax was collected had not been properly calculated. We were talking about a relatively small variant at the margin; we were not talking about an attack in the judge's ruling on the central provisions of the transitional arrangements. That is why it would have been wholly unjust to conclude that, because the Woolwich won its case on that technicality, it was right to throw away the whole basis of the transitional tax arrangements.

That was the issue that Parliament had to address last year, and Parliament concluded that it would not be right to waive the transitional arrangements during that four-year gap. That is why the House concluded last year that, despite the undoubted disparity of treatment between the two building societies, it was right to confirm that the original intention was to levy transitional tax during the four-year period. This year, the Leeds and its co-litigants, having had that issue decided against them last year, are seeking to use the law courts to prolong what is essentially a political argument.

The point that I feel most strongly about is that it is not a proper and legitimate use of the law courts to seek to pursue through the law courts a disagreement that the Leeds building society and its co-litigants have about a decision that Parliament reached last year. The judge has no status for providing a ruling.

9 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Nonsense.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman says nonsense. The judge is perfectly entitled to rule that something is ultra vires, but if this House reaches a decision by proper and due process I do not believe that in a parliamentary democracy it is open to a judge to seek to reconsider a decision that has been properly reached by due process. The effect of the action that the litigants are now bringing has led to the Government tabling clause 63 in this year's Finance Bill in order to put the matter beyond doubt.

Mr. Trimble: I apologise for intervening as I am not entirely familiar with the background, but surely the Leeds is entitled to go to law and to make an application for judicial review. At the very least, the proper course to take is to allow the Leeds to go to court for a decision.

Mr. Dorrell: I do not dispute for one second the right of the Leeds building society to go to law. Everybody is entitled to access to the courts. I am seeking to ensure that the £15 billion of revenue——

Mr. Trimble: What has that to do with it?

Mr. Dorrell: I will tell the hon. Gentleman precisely what it has to do with it. The effect of the clause is to remove from the judge the opportunity to rule that £15 billion of revenue was improperly collected. It is avowedly retrospective—something about which the House is properly sensitive; it flows inevitably, however, from the consequences of the decision that the House reached last year.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I was not a member of the Committee which considered this year's Finance Bill, but I was on the Committee which considered last year's Finance Bill, and I remember that these matters were debated at considerable length and in considerable detail. The Government's position with regard to the Leeds building society was made very clear at that time. The Leeds can be under no misapprehension: it knew that this legislation was going to be passed this year to establish the position. For the Leeds to complain now that this has come as a surprise and that it was not expecting retrospective legislation is unreasonable in the face of the very long debates that we had last year.

Mr. Dorrell: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He is an expert witness. He will remember better than I the arguments in Standing Committee and on the Floor of the House. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and the whole Opposition Front Bench team remember it in great detail. The effect of the decision that the House reached last year was to confirm the transitional tax arrangements during the transitional period.

Both last year's legislation and this year's legislation are avowedly retrospective. The effect of the amendment would be to revisit the decision that the House made last year. I have not been convinced by the arguments that I have heard this evening, and have heard at length both in the Standing Committee and outside the House from those interested in the case, that we should revisit that decision. I believe that the House reached the right decision last year, and I invite it to confirm that decision today.

Mr. Beith: Talk of revisiting last year's decision is a bit rich coming from the Government, who framed the

legislation in such a way that we were bound to revisit it. If they had got the arrangement right last year, there would be no debates this year, no basis for the judicial review and nothing for the Government to be frightened of.

If the Minister is so confident of his case, why does he not let the court go ahead, and make arrangements to appear there on behalf of the Revenue, arguing with similar confidence that the litigants do not have a leg to stand on? That would be a more impressive way of handling the matter.

The Minister is wrong to keep waving the figure of £15 billion at us. It is clear that the combined effect of our amendment and the depositions already made would restrict the sum involved to precisely that which was at issue in the first place.

I am perplexed by the Minister's fundamental argument. He sought to persuade the House that we should not revisit last year's decision because the House had clearly decided last year, after a controversial debate, the basis on which the tax should be collected. The Minister said that the mechanism of allowing the judicial review to proceed was therefore not a satisfactory way to deal with what he acknowledged was a serious grievance. Without admitting the argument, he acknowledged that there was a reasonable matter for dispute here. At the beginning of his speech he said that if he could find a way to secure a compromise which would allow the grievance and the dispute to be considered and dealt with, he would have found one, but that he did not wish the House to revisit its decision on last year's Finance Bill.

During his speech the Minister advanced no satisfactory reason why he could not find a compromise and devise a method of his own choosing to deal with the matter. He has not convinced those of us on both sides of the House who have shown concern about the issue that the societies should not be permitted to go to court. Even if we accepted his argument that it would be undesirable for the court proceedings to go ahead, and undesirable for the House this year to put into question the decision that it made last year, we should still ask why he did not seek methods of his own choosing to find out whether a voluntary arrangement could be made with the societies. He has dismissed all the proper legal routes and refused to make any compromise. In view of that, I cannot do other than ask the House to vote for the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 127, Noes 258.

Division No. 58] **[9.07 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyce, Jimmy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ms Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, James
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian
Etherington, William
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Gunnell, John
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
Oiner, William
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Paul Tyler and
Mr. David Trimble.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*

Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

Amendment accordingly negatived.

Clause 64

LIFE ASSURANCE BUSINESS: I MINUS E BASIS

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 48, line 1, leave out 'income or gains' and insert 'income, gains or expenses'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 11, in page 48, line 7, leave out 'income or gains' and insert 'income, gains or expenses'.

Mr. Beith: We last considered this issue at 4.35 am on 30 June. My comments were brief then because of the lateness of the hour, and I do not intend to speak at much greater length now.

The amendment is intended to make the law clearer so that the clause says what we think the Government want to say and—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should be grateful if hon. Members would depart in peace.

Mr. Beith: Nunc dimittis.

The Government seem to want to say what we think that they want to say but the clause does not say it. The amendment aims to ensure that the income minus expenditure basis is the accepted taxation position—that the net investment return on which a company is taxed is calculated by adding together a company's investment income and its capital gains from sales and subtracting expenses incurred in the same period. There is no quarrel over that.

The problem is that while the clause refers to the "I minus E basis" in subsections (3) (a), (4) (a) and (5) (a), it does not spell out what the "I minus E basis" is. In subsections (4) (b) and (5) (b), it refers to

"the calculation of the income or gains"

and does not mention expenses.

That fact has led to real concern in the life assurance industry that the clause may be interpreted by some tax inspectors as not allowing expenses to be deductible in the calculation of net investment returns. The tax inspectors might argue that Parliament deliberately did not include expenses in the clause mentioning the "I minus E basis" because Parliament does not mean that basis to allow for

expenses to be deductible. That is especially of concern because the area can be a notoriously difficult one in which to agree on what are expenses.

We seek to clarify the position and to clarify what the Minister described in Committee as

"the widely held and long-standing interpretation of the law". —[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 30 June 1992; c. 463.]

I hope that the amendment will prove helpful.

Mr. Dorrell: I can be a little more helpful to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on this amendment than I was on the previous one. There is no division of purpose on the subject. The clause as drafted is intended to have precisely the purpose that the amendment seeks to clarify. For various technical reasons with which I will not bore the right hon. Gentleman, the amendment does not have the effect that he intends.

I want simply to make the position clear to the House. The deductibility of management expenses is not in doubt. The application of the provisions relating to management expenses is secured by the definition of the "I minus E basis" contained in clause 64(3)(a). The "I minus E basis" is described there simply as

"the basis commonly so called (under which a company carrying on life assurance business is charged to tax . . . otherwise than under Case I of Schedule D)".

In those circumstances, the normal provisions of the Taxes Act 1988 relating to expenses of management automatically apply. Nothing further in the clause is required to secure the full deductibility of the expenses of management. I hope that that clarifies the issue beyond peradventure.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful for that clarification. Although it may not hold in a court of law, it will certainly hold —I hope—in all the offices of the Inland Revenue, where it can be printed and set up on the wall. On that basis, I am more than happy to beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

9.22 pm

Mr. Dorrell: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

A Finance Bill is always a long march. In the early days of spring, the Chancellor rises in an atmosphere of enthusiasm and anticipation, and unveils to the House and to the world his proposals for the tax provision in the following year. About three weeks later, there is a dull thud as the impenetrable prose of the Finance Bill is made available to the world. There then follows a series of late nights and high temperatures as the summer wears on and as the detail of the Bill is torn apart. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) said, there has been a regrettable tendency in recent years for Governments to add later thoughts to the Bill as it proceeds. Finally, in the dog days of summer, a rather depleted band of enthusiasts gathers to celebrate the Third Reading of the Bill which has been the subject of such enthusiasm and anticipation on Budget day. Whereas enthusiasm and anticipation are the characteristics of Budget day, relief and exhaustion are perhaps the characteristics of the atmosphere when we get to Third Reading.

I suspect that such feelings are even more palpable than usual this year. Budget day on 10 March seems a long time ago. It was on that day that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out his prescriptions for taxes in the coming year. Six days later on 16 March, in the salubrious quarters of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the shadow Treasury team gathered in panelled splendour to tell us what it thought should be on offer instead.

The shadow Treasury team offered us 59 per cent. tax rates. It defined the rich as those earning more than £22,000 a year, on whom a new impost would be placed to pay for the Labour party's social programme. Three weeks later the people had a choice and the people chose the prospectus of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Betts: Part of that prospectus was a £28 billion public sector borrowing requirement. Is that prediction still correct?

Mr. Dorrell: We do not get into daily revisions of the expected PSBR. The current prediction is contained in the Red Book and, as the hon. Gentleman correctly remembers, it is £28 billion.

In a rational world, the fact that the people chose the prospectus offered by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer rather than that offered by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) should have been fatal for the prospects of not only the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) but the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. It is an engaging idiosyncrasy of the Labour party that it is apparently on the point of crowning king the man chiefly responsible for engineering its electoral defeat.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have no intention whatever of electing the editor of *The Sun* leader of the Labour party.

Mr. Dorrell: It is curious if one thinks about it that every opinion poll not only during the election campaign but before it showed that Labour's Achilles' heel was thought to be the economy. We all know how accurate opinion polls are, but the margins by which people reported that opinion mean that we must attach some credibility to them. Labour needed to keep off the economy as much as some of my hon. Friends thought that we needed to keep off the subject of my earlier ministerial responsibility. The economy was held to be Labour's Achilles' heel. Yet the same opinion polls regularly reported that the Labour leader strongest in public affections was the very same right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East who was responsible for the policy which was held to be the party's Achilles' heel. It is an interesting conundrum which the Labour party is still trying to work through.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): An opinion poll last week showed 80 per cent. support for a referendum on the Maastricht treaty. Does the Minister hold that in high regard?

Mr. Dorrell: I was simply quoting the evidence. I am not a supporter of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. Still less do I believe that opinion polls are decisive on any issue. I am certainly not in favour of a referendum. I have never understood why it should be thought that a referendum is a necessary defence for a

[Mr. Dorrell]

parliamentary democracy. The place where national decisions should be made in the United Kingdom is in this Parliament.

That point is somewhat outside the scope of a Third Reading debate, so I shall not pursue it. I sketched in a little of the political background to the Bill. It might have been thought that, against the background of the electorate's decision which was clearly in favour of the prospectus of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the passage of the Bill would be a trifle subdued.

Mr. Mandelson: I am sorry that I was not present for the beginning of the Minister's speech. I was detained by a constituency matter. Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the political context of the Bill, would he care to set out in some detail the terms in which he spoke at the weekend when he described my party as a potent force that should not be underestimated and was likely to come back and win the next general election?

Mr. Dorrell: I certainly said that the hon. Gentleman's party should not be underestimated, but I did not predict that it would come back to power at the next general election. I said that it was important for us to ensure that we had a sound economic base so that the Labour party would be defeated by a larger margin at the next election than it was at the last.

As the electorate decided the main issue of this year's budget debate, and some of the key planks of my right hon. Friend's prospectus were passed in the short Finance Act just before the election, one might have thought that the passage of the Bill would be relatively quiet and sedate. After all, the chief interest of Opposition Members in the past few weeks has certainly not been the goings-on in Committee Room 10. There have been more absorbing activities elsewhere. However, this year's Standing Committee on the Finance Bill was fascinating.

It quickly became clear to my right hon. and hon. Friends that we were being treated to a sort of officer training school cadet force from the Opposition. A group of people had been selected by the regimental sergeant major of the Labour party, the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon)—a tightly knit group of politically motivated men, who were being honed for fast-stream promotion. Clearly, they were close to the seat of power, with great prospects ahead of them, if they passed the test and satisfied the hon. Member for Jarrow.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), who is deceptively charming and informal, was in charge of the troop. I noticed that he was watching his cadets, and I should tell him that they were watching him carefully. Whenever a furrow crossed his brow, they were nervous. They knew that he was close to the seat of power and had the ear of the incoming centre of power in the Labour party, so it was interesting to watch.

The all-powerful Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East charmingly referred to his hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) as, "Mr. Précis." We shall always remember him in that light.

Just to prove that even in the new model Labour party all is not Calvinistic virtue, the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) was chiefly interested in his travel prospects to Bordeaux, and that detained the Committee on more than one occasion during our deliberations.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) thought heretical thoughts about private landlords and the contribution that they can make to a future resolution of our housing difficulties. That was an interesting speech and it was especially interesting to watch the reactions of some of his hon. Friends as he developed his argument. On my side of the Committee there was some enthusiasm for his ideas, but there was rather less on his.

I began to wonder on one of our longer nights whether there was any subject on which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) would not give us the benefit of his advice.

Mr. Betts: No.

Mr. Dorrell: I do not think that there was.

Clearly, the Committee was made up of the stars of the future Labour party. I am not sure that that encourages me, but it was fascinating to have been a member of such a Committee.

Forty hours later—a day and a half on Report—we laboured mightily to bring forth a Bill which contains some important substance and I hope that the House will give it a Third Reading with a resounding majority.

My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General was responsible for some fundamental reforms on VAT and excise duty being written into the Bill, to provide the basis for the development of the single market within the European Community. He was responsible for some important provisions to improve the tax treatment of charities and of film production, and its encouragement in this country. The Bill will be remembered for those provisions.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary took responsibility for the inheritance tax provisions, which were the subject of substantial debate in Committee. It was an interesting debate because it highlighted some of the differences between the two sides of the House. My hon. Friend rightly stressed the importance of ensuring that those who build successful businesses are not presented with an enormous inheritance tax bill as a result of and as a reward for their efforts, but are given the prospect of seeing their business continue to develop and to provide economic activity, jobs and benefit for the community at large in the medium and longer term.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary dealt also with stamp duty, which is a slightly less comfortable—but none the less important—provision to ensure that when the Government introduce a time-limited tax incentive, the time limit will be observed and honoured. It is important that that happens.

I handled some important changes on the treatment of the married couples' allowance to ensure that it is more fairly available——

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): It is about time, too.

Mr. Dorrell: There is more rejoicing in heaven over a sinner reformed than over 10 virtuous men.

Mr. Beith: Ninety-nine virtuous men.

Mr. Dorrell: I understated the extent of joy in heaven.

Another interesting debate highlighted the difference between the two sides of the Committee over the business expansion scheme and its success in developing a venture capital industry and a vibrant small and medium-sized business sector.

Mr. Smith: That is why the Government are closing it down.

Mr. Dorrell: Indeed, we are now bringing it to an end because the scheme—whose avowed purpose is the building of a vibrant venture capital and small business sector—is well on the way to success.

We also had an interesting debate about enterprise zones in which, once again, the Opposition's preference for central planning and hostility to economic success by private sector entrepreneurs was demonstrated. Their prejudices were even demonstrated in the speeches made by the officer cadet corps of the modern Labour party.

Mr. Salmond: The Financial Secretary is describing all the jewels in the crown of the Finance Bill. Can he point to a measure that will lift the economy out of recession?

Mr. Dorrell: The most important change that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced in his Budget on 10 March, as the House and the electorate are well aware, was the lowest starting rate of income tax for a generation. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know how to create the recovery that we all want, let me say that it is inescapably by ensuring that powerful incentives are available to provide the basis for the efficient operation of a free enterprise economy. When left to its own devices, the free enterprise economy is the most powerful wealth creation machine that anyone has yet devised. We are determined to provide the context to allow that free enterprise economy to do its work. It will then deliver improving living standards and an improving standard of public services for everyone who lives in this country.

I was about to mention an important, although relatively modest, change: the introduction of rent-a-room. It is a relatively late arrival in the Bill but was an important pledge in our election manifesto.

We also discussed the inevitable provisions on anti-avoidance, without which no Finance Bill would be complete. They seem to be planned to come up at four o'clock in the morning, which reflects not the Standing Committee's interests but merely the Opposition's careful planning to ensure that explanations on the most complex bits of tax law are left until all sane people are asleep.

There are important measures in the Bill. We should not forget the important contribution to the British statute book made by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East when I was able, early one morning, to accept his amendment to clause 56—demonstrating, as ever, that the Government are prepared to accept that not all wisdom occurs among Government Members in the House or in Committee.

The Bill contains important provisions. It is the final confirmation of the prospectus that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set before the House and the country from the Dispatch Box on 10 March. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.40 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I am surprised that Conservative Members regarded our debate on the Finance Bill in Committee as a long march, but if they did, they were cheerfully led—although I cannot say that they were cheerfully followed. Indeed, I suspect that their followers were becoming increasingly sullen as the debate and long march progressed. For the Opposition, discussing the Finance Bill in Committee was not a long march but an opportunity that we readily embraced.

In moving Third Reading, the Financial Secretary wondered about the whereabouts of leading Opposition personalities. It might have been more instructive if he had wondered about the whereabouts of his predecessor, Francis Maude, or the former Economic Secretary, Mr. John Maples. For them, the general election did not have the happy outcome of which the Financial Secretary seemed so proud.

The Financial Secretary spoke of opinion polling, and was good enough to refer to the popularity of the next leader of the Labour party, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). He could have explored that subject a little further, and compared and contrasted the popularity of Labour's chief economic spokesman with what the opinion polls—I accept that they are not totally accurate—have to say about the popularity of his chief, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That chief is so popular that the Conservative party hid him away as the general election campaign drew towards a conclusion.

This is an opportunity for us to reflect on what we have done and to review the main functions of the Finance Bill. Its major purpose is to set the chief rates of tax. Unusually, this year that was done for us before the election, so we dealt with the rest of the Bill in Committee. However, the Finance Bill has functions other than setting taxation rates. It reverses the decisions of courts that have gone against the Inland Revenue or the Customs and Excise. We have done a fair bit of that in the past few days. The Bill provides Members of Parliament with an opportunity to demand special tax concessions for one interest group or another about which they feel strongly for one reason or another.

The Finance Bill provides Treasury officials with an opportunity to place on the statute book detailed regulations that they have probably long treasured in their hearts. They succeed in getting the regulations past Ministers and then rely on the Government's majority to get them past the Committee—a Committee that vigilantly scrutinises such matters. The Finance Bill enables the Inland Revenue to catch up in the continuing game of close the loophole—mentioned by the Financial Secretary—that it plays with the tax avoidance industry.

It is not a devious strategy of the Labour party to ensure that such incredibly tortuous and complex issues are discussed in the early hours of the morning. We are not trying to make the Financial Secretary give a personal explanation—heaven forfend. The reason is that, when all hon. Members are committed to closing the loopholes, matters tend to be less controversial and can be taken at a time when our affairs attract less prominence. Those in the Inland Revenue involved in the game of close the loophole play with a handicap—Conservative Back Benchers, who invariably protest, question or demur when loopholes are closed.

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

The Bill also provides a vehicle for bringing in changes that belong more properly to other Ministries or even to separate legislation. I think not so much of this year's Bill as of the legislation relating to privatised ports of a couple of years ago. The Finance Bill can still be used in that way.

Increasingly, Finance Bills deal with harmonisation issues arising out of our membership of the European Community. Such Bills are also an opportunity for us to trail the great issues of the day. On Report yesterday, the Labour party had a chance to air its views on inheritance tax avoidance, the housing market and the recession, and the internationally important third world debt crisis. The Liberal Democrats also had the chance to raise matters that they feel are important. They focused on the position of employees who take their employers' vans for the night. It is of course for each party to determine its own priorities, but we were all very much taken with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who told us about his teenage days courting in what one Conservative Member unkindly described as a passion wagon.

As all who have served on a Finance Bill Committee will know, it is also a social occasion. After all, when else do civil servants get a chance to sleep with Ministers?

Most importantly of all, the Finance Bill Committee and Report stages provide the only opportunity for elected Members to scrutinise details of the Government's primary legislation on these matters, and it is this last function that has been at the heart of the parliamentary Labour party's approach over the last five years. Inevitably, the Government take the view that this is all rather inconvenient; that it takes too much time; that the Government should be able to get their way on a fixed timetable after listening to a few Opposition speeches and a larger number of pleas for special treatment from very interested Conservative Back Benchers.

I know that it will come as a shock to my hon. Friends to learn that there are Conservative Members who do not appreciate the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) on value added tax. I am toying with an idea that will beat the Conservative party at its own game. The Conservatives have released a record of their former leader reading the Gettysburg address with an orchestrated background. Our party can do better. I propose a singularly British reply: the stirring speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham on value added tax, with suitable musical accompaniment and an occasional—utterly authentic—moan of despair from the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). This should be released on a record—a long-playing record. I am confident that sales of this entertainment will exceed those of the American Gettysburg address.

I appreciate that there is a case for reviewing the way in which we handle the necessary and detailed provisions of the Bill. I have no doubt that I or my successor will be discussing these matters with the Government in the context of the Chancellor's planned changes in how we handle tax and public spending debates. We hae always been advocates of reform, and we will take a constructive view of these matters, but we will not give up our right to detailed scrutiny at our own pace. We will not be bullied into an unrealistically short timetable. If the sittings are few, it is likely, as I am sure the Financial Secretary has discovered by now, that they will last longer. It is possible to deal with these matters in a way that is satisfactory to all sides, and I look forward on my party's behalf to discussions about that before next year.

Mr. Beith: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the amount of time taken, particularly in all-night sittings of the Committee, is a direct consequence of the Government's failure to agree the number of sittings, the procedure that he would have preferred, or is it simply a return to the old style of conducting Committee procedure, which many of us thought that the Labour party had passed over?

Mr. Brown: I was speaking generally, not specifically. The right hon. Gentleman is setting himself up as a "Newcastleologist", if such a thing exists, and putting forward the most peculiar interpretations of what are reasonably straightforward actions. I am making it clear to the House that we are happy to enter discussions on these matters, but we are not prepared to give up our right for a steady, thorough and forward-moving consideration of the Bill. If there is only a small number of sittings, it logically follows that we shall have to take more time within them. The hon. Gentleman should not read any more into that than what my words are intended to convey.

I mentioned the role of the Finance Bill in reversing court cases that the Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise have lost or are about to lose. It may seem to dispassionate observers that the Bill has been about little else. Clause 23, and schedule 6 allow the Government to reverse the Court of Appeal decision in the J. Sainsbury plc *v.* O'Connor case. Clause 63, as it is now, has been much discussed and I do not intend to discuss it again, but it is, as everyone will agree, a reversal of a court case and potential court cases.

New clauses 7 and 8 reverse a special commissioners' decision in fiendishly complicated and rather unwieldy language, and the clause that we took on the Floor of the House yesterday on VAT reversed the High Court decision in the Commissioners of Customs and Excise *v.* L. Rowland and Co. (Retail) Ltd.

The Labour party has tried to help the Government in these matters and offered pre-emptive strikes to prevent future Bills of this kind. We tried to amend schedule 13, which clearly does not do what the press release says it is supposed to do, and we tried to amend new clause 11 because there appear to be anomalies in legislation on life assurance and friendly societies. No doubt other Finance Committees will hear about these matters again. As our pre-emptive strikes have not been accepted, I can only assume that Ministers regard it as a treasured part of the Finance Bill that they are able to reverse the decisions of the courts.

The Committee also discussed the relationship between the words of Ministers and the meaning of the Bill. The issue is at the core of the Pepper *v.* Hart court case, in which judgment has been made, although it has been reserved and is not expected until August. The issue before the courts was the status of comments made in Committee and on the Floor of the House relating to the underlying legislation. The case focused particularly on ministerial comments.

It is suggested that these comments affect the way in which the law is interpreted by the judiciary. It is a point

of view that I know that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield holds dear. He suggested that we summon two journalists who hold the opposite view to the Bar of the Committee, convict and then hang them. I suspect that that is going a bit wide of the Committee's powers, but it shows how strongly the hon. Gentleman feels about the issue. However, if he feels that strongly, perhaps he would care to discuss it with the Economic Secretary, particularly in the context of the debate on inheritance tax.

The debate on clause 59, as it was then, was controversial. I said:

"Clause 59, through tax incentives, encourages entrepreneurs to hold on to assets rather than cash them. It encourages older people to keep their wealth in the form of business assets. Given all the extremities of old age, there may be other more appropriate forms for older people to hold their wealth. Those forms would be more suitable but for the bizarre financial privilege that the clause confers on a specific form of wealth holding."

Oddly enough, there was support for that view from the hon. Members for Beaconsfield and for Crosby (Mr. Powell). I remind the Minister that he said:

"The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East said . . . that the provisions . . . encouraged the holding and concentration of wealth. I do not believe that they do. If anything, the clause will make the decision between giving away during lifetime and holding until death more neutral."

I pointed out to him:

"What the Minister is saying is obviously wrong, as two of his hon. Friends have pointed out."

He said:

"The clause and schedule will make the position more neutral between lifetime gifts and retaining assets until death."

He later said:

"My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield was worried that the provisions might encourage the retention of business until death. The provisions will make that less likely."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 30 June 1992; c. *404-14*.]

What the Minister appeared to have in mind was the inheritance tax incentive to give away money pre-death, provided that the giver survived for another seven years. What he did not take on board was the difference between paying capital gains tax on an asset and the base cost of that asset. If a business asset is gifted, it is possible to hold over the gain under section 165 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992. That would reduce the base cost by the amount of the gain—that is, the capital gain is not extinguished, just deferred. That compares with the position at death when assets bequeathed are received at their true value. That is reasonable, because inheritance tax is in principle due on that value.

If the Minister's words are to be interpreted by the courts at some future stage, he will need to reconsider what he has said and at least provide a clarification. I ask him carefully to consider what he has said and to talk it over with his professional advisers. He may then decide whether, at some time in the not too distant future, he should at least put his words in a more acceptable context.

In his opening remarks, the Financial Secretary referred to the speeches of Labour Members in Committee. He was right to do so, as even he, as an honourable opponent, spotted the quality of my hon. Friends whom the electorate so rightly sent here to serve their constituency interests. My hon. Friends went out of their way to try to help the Government through the pitfalls, such as the one that I have just described.

As the Paymaster General was stumbling over clause 1(4)(b), which dealt with joint and several liability, my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) and for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) were there to help him out of his difficulties. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield was there again to help the right hon. Gentleman as he stumbled over the issue of duty paid. I thought that my hon. Friend provided the right hon. Gentleman with far more help than he received from Conservative Members. I would not want it to be thought that they played no part in our proceedings, but when they contributed to the debate, for example, the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) said:

"A chap may hire a van and go to Bordeaux with his wife. As there are two of them"—

that was astutely spotted—

"they may buy 40 cases of wine, two cases of spirits and goodness knows how many cases of beer. They may bring a whole wagonload within the specified amount and then split it with their neighbour. That would be a private arrangement and I suggest that the provision will be impossible to police. Any law that cannot be enforced is bad law. That will filter through to the trade. I do not want the hon. Member for Brent, South to accuse me of being racist."

I do not know why the hon. Member for Bridlington singled out my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) as the person who would accuse him of racism; by the end of that speech, that view of him was widely shared.

The hon. Gentleman went on to say:

"but in the restaurant trade there are people from all parts of the world—Spaniards, Greeks, Italians, Pakistanis, Chinese and so on—many of whom do not have any respect for paying taxes."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 16 June 1992; c. 44-5.]

I have sat through five Finance Bills, and I know that, if ever there was a bunch of people who resent paying taxes, it is members of the Conservative party. I shall take some convincing that that is peculiar to foreign people and unknown among our fellow citizens when a Conservative Member tells me so, and I certainly shall not be convinced on the evidence of Conservative speeches on five Finance Bills.

The Opposition speeches, however, were a joy to listen to. I am only disappointed, Madam Speaker, that you now occupy too elevated a position to preside over proceedings in Committee: I know that that will be a great disappointment to you as well. My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) made a very well-informed speech about an important part of his constituency's industrial base, but before that he had already quizzed the Paymaster General on regulations and statutory instruments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) made a good speech about the defence of good cause for those who fell foul of the VAT man, standing up for the rights and interests of the small business man—something that Opposition Members are often accused of never doing. Those points also worried my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie), for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche).

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington made an effective speech about the powers of Customs and Excise. My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) came in strongly, not on Trident submarines but on section 1 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, which showed considerable attention to detail on the part of one so new to our proceedings and promised much for the future. Not to be outdone, my hon. Friend the

[Mr. Brown]

Member for Hornsey and Wood Green spoke about the Buchanan report and its effect on transport policy: that, too, showed a mastery of detail.

When it came to dealing with bread-and-butter constituency issues, my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds, East, for Hornsey and Wood Green and for Barrow and Furness spoke on the clause relating to bingo duty with the enthusiasm of parliamentary veterans. The subject is of course important in constituencies where the club movement flourishes. My hon. Friends the Members for Hartlepool and for Attercliffe spoke of the importance of the vehicle excise duty clause and its impact on the disabled. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West made an effective speech about charities, supported later in the debate on pensioners and the poor by my hon. Friends the Members for Darlington, for Leeds, West and for Hartlepool.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) contributed to our debate on the married couples allowance. My hon. Friends the Members for Barrow and Furness, for Hornsey and Wood Green, for Hartlepool and for Darlington spoke about capital taxes, and we heard effective contributions from the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) and others on the business expansion scheme, the enterprise zones and inheritance tax.

I have made reference to the important contributions of the new Labour members of the Committee, but not in any partisan spirit. The Financial Secretary too referred to the excellent contributions from Labour Members, so it is only right that I should make what little reference can be made to the contributions from the Conservative side. The hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) welcomed the clause that deals with club bingo, and declared his interest as an officer of the all-party clubs committee. The hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) also quite properly declared an interest as vice-chairman of the Association of Conservative Clubs and as president—I thought this a little more unlikely—of the East and West Molesey Conservative working men's club in Esher. I was slightly struck by the fact that there is a working men's club in Esher. As there is, it is wholly appropriate that the hon. Gentleman should be its president. In any case, he welcomed the clause on bingo.

The hon. Member for Bridlington told us that he was a wine merchant, and he went on to express the fears of the industry, to which I have already referred. He told us that he was a small business man, and he expressed the fears of small business men when we were discussing the business expansion scheme and inheritance tax. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield told us that he was a distinguished contributor to *Accountancy Age* magazine, and he went on to demand that the Committee hang two other contributors. The hon. Member for Slough complained that the Unit Trust Association had not invited him to dinner.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) went one better and defended the lower-rate tax band as a work incentive for pensioners. That is probably the most feeble defence of that measure ever to have been advanced. However, the hon. Gentleman managed to go one better when he defended offshore unit trusts. He said that they were quite expensive to set up. There are many things that could be said about offshore trusts, but use of the cost of setting one up must be the feeblest evidence ever offered in mitigation.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), who is a continuing delight to the Labour members of the Committee, spoke up for capitalism, as he always does. When we discussed inheritance tax and other capital tax points, he told us that he was a director of Dewe Rogerson and a consultant to Morgan Grenfell. We were dealing with matters affecting those firms in relation to schedule 10. He spoke up for the interests of landowners. As we know, he is himself a landowner and a notorious sheep farmer. The hon. Member for Slough spoke up for one of his clients when we were dealing with the clause relating to BCCI and with schedule 11. He even moved an amendment which he hoped would affect the interests of his clients.

These are the forces that have shaped the Bill: altruism from the Labour side; interest—in some cases, vested interest, albeit declared—from the Conservative side. What sort of Act are we bringing into being, and what effect will it have on the great issues that affect the running of the British economy? My hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe referred to the Government's economic forecasting. Their forecast outturn of gross domestic product is again 1 per cent., and the Financial Secretary told us today that he stood by that prediction. But the most likely outturn is nothing of the sort; it will probably be about one quarter of that.

The Government predict that investment will fall by 0·5 per cent. The likely outturn is a fall of 1·8 per cent. The Government forecast that our exports will grow over the year by 3·5 per cent. The likely outturn is now generally agreed to be about 2·4 per cent. The Government expect imports to grow by 1 per cent. Most forecasters expect them to grow by 6·9 per cent. The balance of payments deficit is forecast by the Government to be £6·5 billion. Most observers feel that a figure of £12 billion is closer to the truth.

According to the Government, retail prices are expected to grow by 3·75 per cent., but most forecasters believe that the Government cannot, even in the current economic climate, get that figure below 4 per cent. According to the Government's latest hypothesis, unemployment stands at 2·4 million. The likely outcome is 2·7 million. These are the issues that really matter to the British economy. It is absolutely clear that the Bill that we shall carry into law will have no measurable impact upon them.

10.11 pm

Mr. Beith: The speech that we have just heard demonstrates the truth of the proposition that the speeches made in the Finance Bill Committee by the shadow Treasury team would, placed end to end, stretch to infinity and probably back again. It is alarming to realise that when they get themselves programmed for long speeches they sometimes lose the code whereby the programming can be taken out again.

There was a classic occasion in Committee when the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) was not deprogrammed before he made an incidental speech on tobacco taxation, at a point when the strategy of long speeches had supposedly been abandoned. That most learned discourse, which I shall not fault for its

understanding of the law, seemed to incommode certain of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends. It was not the occasion for one of the hon. Gentleman's regular swingeing denunciations of the idea of a ban on tobacco advertising, but we did get a touch of that during the proceedings, just to set the context for today's discussions across the Floor of the House. Nevertheless, it was a notable speech.

This is a Finance Bill of significant missed opportunities, although it contains some good things. There is the rent-a-room scheme—straight from my party's 1987 election manifesto. There is inheritance tax relief and the transferability of the married couple's allowance, for which we have argued for a long time in successive Budgets. Those are useful provisions. There is a particularly unwelcome measure—clause 63, originally clause 52—which we have debated again today. I do not propose to go over the arguments again, but that measure in itself would be a strong enough reason for me to vote against the Bill.

Much of the rest of the Bill is innocuous. The vast majority of its provisions are totally uncontroversial and are not contested by any party. However, there are many missed opportunities. No provision is made for child care. Interestingly, that is the issue that the Opposition Front Bench abandoned in their shadow budget. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] The Minister referred to the shadow budget and the problems that it presented at the time of the election. The process of dismantling it has begun, but it has begun from the wrong end. It is odd that the Opposition should have removed one of the potentially more popular features of their shadow budget instead of the ones which proved extremely unpopular during the election campaign. However, they are not disposed to support any widening of tax relief for child care.

There are no useful clauses in the Bill to deal with environmental issues, or to tackle poverty, or to help small businesses and the bureaucracy that they face, in the way in which small businesses could have been helped if significant changes had been made. If the clause on vans had been accepted, a lot of small business men would have had a lot less form filling to do and the tax position of a great many people who do not enjoy high incomes would have been eased by the scale charge that we proposed.

This is about the most inconsequential set of Finance Bill proposals that I can remember among the many Finance Bills on which I have served. Yet they led to the lengthiest debates and the lengthiest sittings of any Finance Bill Committee on which I have served. That seems an extraordinary paradox. One has to go back to 1984 and 1985 to find sittings of that length, and then controversial measures were being introduced.

There are various interpretations of the length of the Committee proceedings. One was hinted at by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, but he backed away quickly when a possible truth seemed to emerge—that there had been some sort of breakdown and the necessary number of sittings had not been provided to meet the Opposition's requirements, so the remaining sittings had to be extended.

Then there is the training school scenario, which I suggested when we discussed the matter in Committee, and which the Financial Secretary mentioned earlier. The idea was that the Committee was to be a demonstration to newer Labour Members of what lengthy Committee proceedings were all about, and a test of their ability to carry them through. Indeed, we heard a sort of marks session just now, in which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East went through his list. He did not disclose the marks, but they were there in the tone of his voice, in his inflections and in the length of his descriptions. Those Labour Members all know where they stand, and whether they have passed or failed. Their cards have been marked, on the basis of those comments.

That is no way to examine legislation of this kind. There was a hint of contrition when the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East said that the Opposition were ready to consider whether there were better ways to organise proceedings on the Finance Bill on which, subject to agreement and discussion, reforms could be based. There must be a better way than taking proceedings through from 4.30 in the afternoon to 8 o'clock the following morning, and being forced to add sudden Wednesday sittings because not enough clauses have been considered. There must be a better way than the uneven manner in which clauses are considered according to the state of relations between the parties rather than according to the intrinsic merits of the argument on the clause, its complexity or the difficulty of explaining it. It is time we reformed those procedures and carried them out more sensibly.

Attention to those matters would not solve the disagreements of policy, such as whether the Bill can meet the needs of a country in recession—we believe that it cannot—or whether it addresses issues such as poverty, which I mentioned. However, the sheer quality of legislation, and of the way in which it is considered, could be greatly improved if we organised our affairs on a basis which the outside world might understand. If any outsider had been around to listen to or observe half of what went on in the late hours of the night, that person would have been bemused and not a little derisive at the manner in which our proceedings were conducted.

10.17 pm

Mrs. Judith Chaplin (Newbury): This is a good Bill, and I especially welcome it because of its measures to help businesses. Many businesses are in difficulties and many of the measures, together with those already passed as part of the Budget, will give substantial help, especially to small businesses.

Small businesses have already gained by the freeze in the uniform business rate introduced earlier, whereby no business rate can increase by more than inflation. Many of the businesses in my constituency have been faced with large increases because of the revaluation, so they will welcome the freeze, as will firms throughout the country. That revaluation was based on what may turn out to be a peak year for property values, so the reduction is fair and may relate more closely to the average rate over the five years than to that peak rate.

The Bill also helps small businesses through the changes in the VAT registration threshold, through the changes in the timing of payments and through the reductions in penalties, all of which are important for cash flows. I welcome them all.

The most important measure in the Bill for businesses was the increase to 100 per cent. in the relief on business assets for the purposes of inheritance tax. Too often in this country tax arrangements are designed to deal with a few exceptional cases and no regard is paid to how they affect

[Mrs. Judith Chaplin]

the vast majority of taxpayers or their effect on the economy. Inheritance tax on business assets was just such a tax. Small companies were often destroyed or irreparably damaged because they did not have the liquid funds to pay the tax following the unexpected death of one of their major owners. I welcome the fact that that will stop, to the great benefit of small companies, which grow to form larger companies.

I have already expressed my concern that the change could lead people to hold on to assets to avoid capital gains tax on the increase in their assets in the long term. It has been suggested that, therefore, changes in inheritance tax should not be made. I urge Ministers to consider capital gains tax—a complex and distorting tax that does tremendous damage to the economy—and I hope that in future that will be high on their list of priorities.

Anything that reduces tax complexity is to be welcomed, as it allows the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise to deal more effectively with those who, I am told, are now to be called "customers". That is a strange word to use because people have little choice in receiving this service.

A better service for everyone is, however, to be welcomed. I was rather concerned, therefore, to read a report that the Inland Revenue decision to contract out some of its secretarial and support work was being criticised because it was said that it would lower the standards of confidentiality in taxpayers' affairs. I have been a temporary civil servant and rather resent the implication that temporary staff are less aware of confidentiality than permanent staff. I very much hope that Ministers will agree that contracting out will not make taxpayers' affairs less confidential. It will lead to an improvement in the service, which we should all welcome.

10.21 pm

Mr. Betts: I did not want to disappoint the Financial Secretary by failing, in our final deliberations on the Bill, to persuade him of the path of truth.

I judge the Finance Bill by reflecting on what it offers my constituents and how it meets their needs. What will it do for them? Indeed, what have Finance Bills in the past 13 years done for them? I shall not go as far back as that because I can draw some themes from the Bill. What will it do for the problems of unemployment and housing? Having listened attentively to everything that Ministers have said, I conclude that the Bill does not address the needs of my constituents.

Themes have been apparent in much of the legislation which are consistent with the Government's simplistic view of the private sector and its workings and benefits. Often, the Government have seemed ashamed to admit public subsidies. Some of the examples of management incompetence have been breathtaking. They have generally been followed by a shambolic withdrawal of proposals with little apology or embarrassment for the mess that the Government have created, leaving the real problems facing so many constituents untouched and unaddressed.

There is a real problem with the growth and development of small businesses—a problem of survival through the recession at a time of high interest rates. Everyone accepted that small businesses are important to our future economic development. Despite the Government's overall commitment to a simplistic view of the free market and a philosophy of trying to get British industry lean and competitive—in too many cases, it has become skeletal and redundant for many firms in my constituency—when they introduced the business expansion scheme in the early 1980s there was probably some recognition of the positive role that they could play in helping firms start and grow in the early stages which would ultimately be of great benefit to the firms and to the people whom they could employ. A not inconsiderable amount of public expenditure was involved. I understand that in the past four years about £1 billion of investment was generated through that source, but in the past few years the implementation of what could have been a good scheme has been shambolic and a waste of taxpayers' money.

My constituents want jobs, but not many will get employment in collecting rare wines, not many will get employment in accumulating agricultural holdings, and not many will get employment in owning race horses. Yet money from the business expansion scheme has been spent on all those follies and ventures. The Government have steadily had to legislate for a scheme which they got wrong in the first place. A few people may have been employed in wine bars and restaurants, but those are not the type of businesses that we expected to expand when the scheme was set up, and they are certainly not the sort of businesses that we should now seek to support with public money.

What happened? There have been reforms to try to close some of the loopholes. Following that, there were measures to develop—and now measures in the Bill to develop further—the scheme to encourage housing provision. I do not deny that housing provision is important. Certainly, my constituents would benefit from an increase in the number of houses being built for them to rent. That would be important, but our argument is clear: the business expansion scheme was the wrong way to stimulate housing provision. The release of capital receipts for local authorities to spend would have been the right way.

I shall not repeat the lecture that I gave the Minister at 5 o'clock one morning about the failure of the Government's housing policy—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] I could be tempted, but it might be a waste of time. After all, the Government's failures are there for all to see. They can be seen in the homeless young people on the streets of our cities. These are the 1990s, but a supposedly civilised and wealthy country is unable to care for people and put a roof over their heads. That is a failure of the Government's housing policy with which the business expansion scheme failed to deal, even though 90 per cent. of the expenditure under the scheme in the past two years has gone into housing and providing easy money for people with up to £40,000 to spend instead of dealing with the real issues facing small businesses.

What does the Bill do? Ultimately, it withdraws the scheme to help small businesses and leaves them in the position they were in before the Government introduced the scheme in the early 1980s. In the middle of a recession, with a lack of venture capital, with small companies searching for support and under pressure from their banks, what do the Government do? They walk away. That is the truth of the situation. Many Conservative Members who are concerned about and understand small

businesses should start to worry about the lack of attention shown by the Government—their Government—to the needs of small businesses.

What other schemes have there been? There have been enterprise zones, and we have had some interesting discussions about provisions in the Bill for such zones. In this instance, the Government have made no concessions in terms of their absolute belief in the free market. They believe that if they remove tax obligations, blame the bureaucracy of local councils and remove that too, everything will be all right. There will be a free-for-all and a thousand flowers will bloom. We can take them around enterprise zones—it is not flowers that are blooming but weeds growing out of the rubble that remains.

A free-for-all? Well, there is some freedom from taxation for the businesses involved, but it is not a free-for-all because the taxpayer has paid. As I said in Committee, I believe that Sheffield was right to refuse an enterprise zone because, although we cannot get proper information from the Government about precisely how the money is being spent and what the effect of enterprise zones has been, it is fairly clear that they have not been an enormous success.

Let us consider the money involved. For instance, £2·5 billion has been spent on Canary wharf. That is a disgrace. The Government are now scrambling around to justify their folly and the monument that they have built to Thatcherism. That compares with only £50 million over five years for the development corporation in Sheffield, where there are real problems to address and real opportunities, if only the Government were prepared to work with the local authority and private business.

I was doing some sums on that £2·5 billion of expenditure. It is more money than the Government have allocated in rate support grant and revenue support grant to Sheffield city council over 13 years to provide for education, social services, environmental health, leisure, highways, refuse collection and all the other services that local authorities provide. It is an obscenity that cities such as Sheffield should be starved of resources when the Government are prepared to waste £2·5 billion on that folly of their own making at Canary wharf in order to justify their policies on enterprise zones.

We understand, although the House has not been told formally, that it may not be a matter of moving civil servants down the road and of a leasing arrangement but that the Government may be considering buying Canary wharf. That may be the only way out of their problems. They will have to buy Canary wharf and spend a further £1·5 billion on the Jubilee line.

Few jobs have been created by the Canary wharf project, but lots of cash has been spent. The jobs that have been created have often been moved from nearby. The move from Marsham street is a classic example. Some jobs would have been created anyway. Many jobs are short-term, low-paid jobs which will not exist once the Government end the enterprise zone concessions. It is another shambolic mess of administration. The Government are not continuing enterprise zones because even the Government recognise that they have been a failure.

All the constituencies in which enterprise zones have been created—indeed, all constituencies in urban areas—have the same problems. They are the problems of dereliction, problems which need proper development plan and partnership arrangements between local councils and the private sector. Certainly Labour councils are willing to enter into those arrangements, and the private sector is mostly willing, but meaningful Government support is needed to make such arrangements work.

The rent-a-room scheme is based on the idea that somehow the private sector will solve our housing problems, just as it would solve our industrial problems. Incredibly, in the Standing Committee we heard comments from Conservative Members to the effect that the Labour party was somehow to blame for the failures of the private rented sector. Perhaps they failed to notice that their party had been in Government for the past 13 years.

I accepted many of the comments made by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden). He expressed reservations about the Government's housing policy. He spelled it out. Mortgage tax relief is a difficult issue, but the private rented sector in Britain will never prosper while the Government subsidise owner-occupation through mortgage tax relief. It is quite simple: the Government can fiddle around with schemes as much as they like, but they will not create a viable rented sector.

Now the Government are introducing tax relief for the rent-a-room scheme. In Committee we pressed the Minister at some length about how much the scheme would cost. He was just about awake in that debate early in the morning. He said that it would cost £2 million to £3 million. I will not quibble about the amount of money because in a different debate today we argued that £2 million was not a lot of money. It amounts to a small attempt to tackle an enormous problem. The £2 million to £3 million tax relief will go not only on newly rented rooms but on rooms which are already rented out. The addition to the amount of housing space available for homeless people is minuscule. Perhaps the Government will eventually admit that that scheme was a failure, too, but it is already a failure in that it is no solution to the real housing crisis affecting our major cities. It offers no hope to homeless young people, and does not provide better accommodation for people living in deplorable conditions in the private rented sector or for young people with children who are living in high-rise accommodation and want to move to low-rise properties.

The Finance Bill follows the same track record—an over-reliance on the private sector and a failure to recognise the contribution that the public sector can make, balanced by hidden public subsidies, a lack of open government right the way through, and appalling managerial incompetence on behalf of the Government.

The Finance Bill fails to tackle the real problems of urban areas—the problems of homelessness and the lack of sufficient housing. It fails to tackle the problems of the lack of industrial investment, and offers no coherent approach to small businesses struggling to grow or to survive in the middle of the longest recession since the war, which was also created by the Government's actions.

In the midst of recession, the Finance Bill offers no solutions to unemployment, and no stimulus to economic activity, despite the fact that the Government should admit that their projections of gross domestic product as my hon. Friend said, ought to have changed since the Budget, because all the financial commentators have changed theirs.

By all reasonable tests, the Finance Bill is a failure. The Government may have won the election, but they are not

[Mr. Betts]

winning the battle against the long-term economic decline of this country. They are not even fighting that battle and, ultimately, the electorate will find them out.

10.36 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I shall detain the House for only a few brief moments, and shall resist the temptation to take issue with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts).

First, on behalf of the House, I should express our gratitude to the members of the Committee for the time and wisdom that they brought to deliberations on the Finance Bill. I am sure that those of us who were not in Committee were well blessed to be in our beds when they were kept from them.

On the Third Reading of Finance Bills in the past year or two it has been my habit to draw hon. Members' attention to some features of our tax regime. The six main taxes of the revenue—income tax, corporation tax, petroleum revenue tax, capital gains tax, inheritance tax and stamp duty—raised £80·4 billion in 1991-92. Against those six main taxes are 87 reliefs and allowances, totalling £88·63 billion. The reliefs and allowances come to £8 billion more than the six taxes levied. I want to impart to Treasury Ministers that there is enormous scope for a radical Chancellor to simplify our tax regime dramatically, while decimating the rates of tax.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mrs. Chaplin) rightly had some harsh things to say about capital gains tax. She might be interested to know that there are reliefs and allowances against capital gains tax worth £2·66 billion, even though the tax only raises £1·2 billion. The situation is even more interesting for inheritance tax, where the reliefs and allowances amount to more than £5 billion, whereas the tax raises only £1·3 billion.

I am grateful to the House for bearing with me while I ride that hobby horse. I have said it before on the Third Reading of Finance Bills and I think that I am getting my message through. I think that I am correct in saying that there is one less relief and allowance this year than at the equivalent time last year. So my message is obviously getting through to the Treasury Bench.

I welcome this well constructed and well targeted Bill, which I am sure the House will approve.

10.39 pm

Mr. Mandelson: I am stimulated to intervene at this late stage in the debate by the fine quality of the contributions made by my hon. Friends in this Third Reading debate.

The limitations of the Bill clearly illustrate that the central criticism of the Government is not that, in the full range of their economic and fiscal policies, they look to individual firms and companies to provide the main engine of enterprise in our economy. That view is shared on both sides of the House. The main criticism of the Government is that they expect firms to undertake that task in isolation and are prepared to give so little support to enable companies to be more successful engines of growth and enterprise in our economy. Firms do not look to the Government to do everything for them—far from it—but they do not expect a responsible Government like ours to do so little, especially when Governments of all colours in every other European country are doing so much more for their companies.

No debate during the lengthy course of the Bill's proceedings has better illustrated the paucity of the Government's strategy for dealing with the country's problems than that on the housing crisis and the collapse of the Government's measures to deal with it. The lesson of that crisis goes to the heart of the Government's failing and reveals the tragic contrast between the promises that they made before the election on 9 April and the collapse in hope and confidence in their policies that has taken place since the election. Time has shown the housing measures announced by the Government in December last year to be ill thought through gimmicks, packaged and hyped to people who need not empty gestures but real help to alleviate their housing and personal finance crises.

To take the mounting mortgage arrears crisis off newspaper front pages, the Government struck a rather crude bargain with mortgage lenders: in return for building societies devising a range of mortgage rescue packages and negotiating a variety of arrangements with housing associations, the Government agreed to pay the mortgage interest element of income support direct to lenders and conceded to building society demands for a freeze on stamp duty to kick-start the slumbering property market. In return for a mortgage rescue lifeboat, building societies persuaded the Government to throw in a stick of dynamite to break the logjam in the housing market. Unfortunately, the lifeboat has turned out to be a threadbare raft and the dynamite a disappointingly damp firework.

In February, a Shelter report speculated that some 40,000 families might be saved as a result of the Government's package. That prediction was dismissed at the time, notably by Government spokesmen, as "miserably pessimistic". Instead, the predictions made by Shelter earlier this year have proved, lamentably and tragically—no one derives enjoyment or satisfaction from the failure of the Government's policies to deal with the housing crisis—to be not miserably pessimistic but wildly optimistic. One report, if it is to be believed, calculates that the Government's measures have saved no more than 12 homes and a handful of families.

Across the country, the package has been a sad failure. In my constituency of Hartlepool, there was a 24 per cent. increase in repossession orders last year. Already, in the first quarter of 1992, 102 mortgage possession actions have been entered in the county court of Cleveland. Some 66 suspended orders have been agreed, and a further 15 have been made by the courts.

In rehearsing those figures, I do not need to point out that they represent considerable human misery and tragedy for the families involved. They have suffered considerably during the past two years in the course of the second recession that was manufactured in Downing street and brought about as a failure of the Government's economic policies. It has been a financial blight on their lives, and they have had to find any penny they could lay their hands on.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): In his speech so far, the hon. Gentleman has mentioned the word "crisis" about 13 times. Everything that he has said seems to have smacked of the late Prince of Wales saying nothing more than "something should be done." Will the hon.

Gentleman advise the Houe of specific measures that he believes should be included in the Finance Bill? Otherwise, his reputation as an exciting operator might take a sudden plunge.

Mr. Mandelson: After their party has spent 13 years in government, we can expect Conservative Members to tell us a little more about what should be done to solve this country's crisis in housing and the economy.

The pattern is now prevalent, not only in my constituency but many others like it, not only in the northern region, but across the country, not only in the west midlands and Yorkshire, but in London and the south-east. Many orders have been placed against families in my constituency, threatening the repossession of their homes, taking away their pride in that asset—the castle in which they have invested their savings and from which they have taken so much satisfaction.

If those orders are enforced by county courts in my constituency and others like it, at least one family a week will face the repossession of their home. In many constituencies, more than one family will face the loss of their home. That is not only a tragedy: it is a scandal. I am sure that the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) accepts that it represents a serious crisis in the personal affairs and finances of those families who were so tragically affected.

Those families are trapped in mortgage misery that is not of their making. Thousands of them are marooned in the housing market. Some of them have to watch the value of their houses fall below the size of their mortgage. Others are simply trapped in their homes, unable to find a prospective buyer who will pay a reasonable price for their home to enable them to move—in many cases, to follow their families or to take up the jobs that they have been lucky enough to obtain in other parts of the country.

The main plank in the Government's policies, the chief weapon in their armoury, has miserably failed so far to prevent the continuing collapse of the housing market this year. I refer to the stamp duty holiday. Transactions were down 23 per cent. in the first five months of the year. Understandably, the fear is that the Government's refusal to extend the relief will kill off any struggling signs of life in the housing market, and there are precious few of those.

Home owners, mortgage lenders and house builders, like everyone else in the economy, have been tragically misled by the Government, ever keen to answer with an empty promise any criticism made of them as their policies fail once more to deliver the goods.

This country is crying out for relief from the recession. All hon. Members will know from their surgery experience how constituents come to them begging for relief, to be spared the continued misery that the recession is causing them and their families. It is tragic that this Finance Bill will do nothing to bring relief to the countless people across the country whom we represent here.

We can only hope that the recent warning issued by the Financial Secretary will come true. Many of us were interested in his speech, delivered at the Conservative party's weekend school in a location not a million miles from Nottingham. That speech, never made during proceedings on the Bill, probably said more about the inner feelings and true fears of Conservative Members than any speech made on this Bill.

The Financial Secretary issued a warning to his own party to the effect that the Labour party may have been defeated and may be a slumbering giant but it still contains the strength, the potency and the skill to return and fight and win the next general election. The hon. Gentleman's right hon. and hon. Friends would do well to heed his warnings.

It is the failure of the Government's economic policies —this Bill has done nothing to ameliorate that failure— compounded by the missed opportunities represented by this Bill which will further boost the already considerable strength of the Labour party and enable it to come—I have every confidence in this—to the aid of the country before all hope is lost, at the next election.

10.54 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Financial Secretary, that happy warrior, reaches his journey's end. Before we vote on Third Reading, I have two things to say to those of my hon. Friends who served with me on the Committee. The first and obvious thing is thank you. The second, and perhaps less obvious, is that there are worse things to be called, even in this place, than "officer cadets".

For me, this is the end of five years of serving on Finance Bill Committees, so I also take this opportunity to say thank you to my Front-Bench colleagues, the hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding). A better bunch of colleagues and comrades a Member of Parliament could not wish for.

As the Bill reaches its journey's end, the country will know that its contents are not the fault of the Opposition. I urge my hon. Friends to vote against it.

10.55 pm

Mr. Dorrell: Journey's end indeed! The Bill completes the legislation founded on the Budget that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced on 10 March. It was based on the lowest starting rate of income tax for a generation, and on the commitment to extend that low rate of income tax right through the payers of standard rate tax and to see that commitment carried out as soon as may be. It was based on the commitment to ensure that the top rate of income tax was not allowed to rise above 40 per cent.

The House will remember that, six days after that Budget was presented, the Labour party presented an alternative Budget that promised a 59 per cent. top rate of tax and defined riches as beginning on an income of £22,000 a year. Three weeks later, the country made its choice. It is now for the House to give effect to that choice and to carry the Bill into law.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 250.

Division No. 58] **[10.57 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert	Ashby, David
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*	Aspinwall, Jack
Aitken, Jonathan	Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Alexander, Richard	Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*	Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*	Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Amess, David	Baldry, Tony
Ancram, Michael	Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Arbuthnot, James	Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Bates, Michael
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*	Batiste, Spencer

Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'l'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert G. Hughes and
Mr. Timothy Boswell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard

Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Oiner, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Martlew and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

House of Commons Members Fund

11.15 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I beg to move,

That, in pursuance of the provisions of section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended, and the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied as from 1st April 1992, as follows:

(a) for paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

'1. The annual amount of any periodical payment made to any person by virtue of his past membership of the House of Commons shall not exceed £3,370 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £6,197 per annum; whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to length of service and need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £6,487 or such sum as, in their opinion, will bring his income up to £9,314 per annum, whichever is the less':

(b) for paragraph 2 of that Schedule there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

'2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virtue of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £2,106 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £4,933 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £4,055 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £6,882 per annum, whichever is the less':

(c) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £2,106 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £4,933 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £4,055 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £6,882 per annum, whichever is the less':

(d) in section 2(1) of the said Act of 1981, for the words from the beginning to the end of paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 shall be—

(a) £1,962 if the payments are made to a past Member; and

(b) £1,227 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member'.

Mr. Morris: These motions stand on the Order Paper in my name and in the names of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber who share with me the responsibility, as managing trustees, of administering the House of Commons Members Fund. There are three motions to consider.

The purpose of the first motion is to enable the managing trustees to make higher awards to the widows and widowers of former Members now receiving help from the Members' Fund. Widows and widowers of former Members with entitlements under the parliamentary contributory pension fund receive a five eighths pension, and the managing trustees now propose the same provision for those helped by the Members' Fund. The effects of our proposal are set out in detail on today's Order Paper and can be briefly summarised.

Paragraphs (a) and (b) of the first motion deal with the provision of grants to widows and widowers of ex-Members under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939. We propose to increase the basic annual grant for the period 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992 to £2,023, subject to an income limit, including the grant, of £4,738. similarly, in the case of widows and widowers of ex-Members who had longer service and are assessed as being in need, the grant may be increased to a maximum of £3,894, subject to an income limit of £6,609 per annum.

Para (c) refers to the "as of right" payments to widows and widowers provided for by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981. In these cases, benefit derives from 10 years' service by a former Member before October 1964. For the period 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992, it is proposed to increase to £1,178 the "as of right" payment to the widow or widower of a former Member with that length of pre-1964 service in the House.

The second motion provides for an increase in the present levels of all grants and payments which may be made under the Members' Fund legislation, taking into account the increase to five eighths in payments to widows and widowers. These were last revised by approval of the motions I brought to the House in April 1991, and we propose now to increase them with effect from April 1992 by approximately 4·1 per cent., in line with increases already approved for public service and state retirement pensions which took effect from the same date.

Among those who will benefit from the second motion are mostly very elderly former Members who left the House no later than September 1964, or their surviving spouses, who, unlike present Members, do not qualify for a pension in respect of parliamentary service as of right.

Many of this fast-dwindling number are now into their eighties and nineties, and their problems are compounded by advancing years. The modest extra financial help which the motion seeks to provide will, I know, be gratefully received by the beneficiaries, as evidenced by letters of fulsome appreciation received by the managing trustees and secretariat of the fund during the past year. I am very glad to be joined by the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) who is a long-serving trustee of the House of Commons Members' Fund and who has given distinguished service to former Members and their dependants on boths sides of the House.

I make no apology for asking right hon. and hon. Members once again to help us in tracing any former Members, or dependants of deceased former Members, who may be in need of help from the fund. I appeal to Members, when they return to their constituencies, to find out, if they can, the whereabouts of its former Members. Constituency party or association elders have long memories and the cause is well worth a word with them. Over the last two years, the managing trustees and secretariat of the fund have continued their own searches and have been able to assist former Members and

dependants in need of our assistance, but additional help from Members in identifying possible beneficiaries is always most welcome.

Again, the provisions for which we seek approval in the second motion can be briefly summarised. Paragraph (a) deals with the provisions for grants to ex-Members. Here it is proposed to increase the basic annual grant to £3,370, subject to an income limit, including the grant, of £6,197. In the case of ex-Members with longer service, and in need, the grant may be increased to a maximum of £6,487, subject to an income limit of £9,314.

Paragraphs (b) and (c) deal with the provision of grants to widows and widowers of ex-Members. It is proposed to increase the basic annual grant to £2,106 subject to an income limit, including the grant, of £4,933. Similarly, in the case of widows and widowers of ex-Members who had longer service and are in need, the grant may be increased to a maximum of £4,055, subject to an income limit of £6,882 per annum.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House how he reaches those curious figures? They are very precise, and result in strange numbers, especially the ends of the numbers. Why do we not work to the nearest hundred pounds, say, instead of having peculiar sums such as £97 here, £66 there and £55 there? That seems foolish to me. It may be all right to calculate a day, but it does not seem like sensible administration.

Mr. Morris: Rounding up rather than rounding down, which is what I hope the hon. Gentleman is suggesting, is possible and, I believe, desirable. As managing trustees of the House of Commons Members' Fund, however, we have to work on the public sector increase arising from inflation. We are acting on the figure of 4·1 per cent. and, as others do, we have to keep to the precise effects of that movement in benefits for widows and dependants in the public sector.

I suppose that the hon. Gentleman's point is one of general importance rather than one of particular relevance to our problem. We have to follow decisions made by other people. In this case, the governing figure is 4·1 per cent.

Paragraph (d) refers to the as-of-right payments from the Members' fund to ex-Members who had 10 years service before October 1964, and to widows and widowers of such Members, provided for by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981. We propose to increase the annual payments to £1,962 for ex-Members and £1,227 for widows and widowers.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House the present annual rate of payments from the fund, before the proposed increases take effect?

Mr. Morris: The present annual rate of payments from the fund is rather more than £265,000 in advance of the application of the increases which I propose under the motions.

The third motion relates to section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by section 7 of the Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991, which now authorises the trustees of the Members' Fund to make

"such periodical or other payments as they think fit"

to ex-Members, or their widows or widowers, or to children of ex-Members,

"having regard to the circumstances of the person or persons in respect of whom the payments are to be made."

Section 4 of the 1948 Act, together with section 1 of the 1957 House of Commons Members' Fund Act, as amended, provides that, in any year, for the purpose of making such payments, the House of Commons may by resolution direct that the whole or any part of the amount contributed by Members from their salaries be appropriated, together with the whole or any part of the Treasury's contribution which is now increased to £215,000 a year.

In my speech to the House in March last year, I recalled the then Lord President's agreement to set aside an extra £100,000 to meet the costs of additional discretionary awards under section 4. I am pleased to see his successor in his place tonight, and to say that what was promised is now reflected in the additional Treasury contribution.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): We are concerned about the grant from the Government. Could not they increase the fund for the widows of ex-Members by far more than my right hon. Friend is suggesting? I am not criticising him or his attitude to the fund, which benefits Members on all sides, but the Government should give more, especially as they now contribute less than they did some years ago. How does the investment performance of the fund compare with funds outside the House? I am concerned about a fund that was managed by somebody who controlled the Mirror Group. We all know what happened to that, and when an investigation is carried out, perhaps a further investigation should be carried out by a Select Committee into the pension fund for Members.

Mr. Morris: My hon. Friend made two important points. The grant in aid from the Treasury is now £215,000—an increase on what we received previously. I have proposed, by the motions, an increase in widows' pensions from 50 per cent.—from half—to five eighths. That would not have been possible but for the increase in the grant in aid from the Treasury to £215,000.

Hon. Members on both sides contribute to the Members' Fund. It is not widely enough appreciated outside the House that the fund is largely sustained by contributions made by right hon. and hon. Members. They help in giving money via the Fees Office. They help former Members of advancing years and the widows and dependants of deceased former Members. The Treasury contribution is, however, an important one and it would not have been possible to increase to five eighths the payments to widows of pre-1964 Members but for that increase.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) referred to income from investments. Our gross income from investments in the last year has been more than £94,000. I cannot say off the cuff how that compares with the investment income of other funds. There are not many funds like the House of Commons Members' Fund. It is a highly unusual and, I suggest, an important fund.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): By statute, the public trustee ensures that the House of Commons pension fund investments are properly held in safe custody. In addition, the trustees of the parliamentary pension fund have taken the opinion of independent experts on the investment performance of our fund. I believe that its performance has been somewhat above average in recent times.

Mr. Morris: My fellow trustee is eminently right to say that we do monitor the results of our investments. We try to compare our performance. All the information we have indicates that we do very well in comparative terms.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore will be assured on the two points he has raised—first of all, about the grant in aid from the Treasury and secondly, the gross income from investments—that we are appreciative, as managing trustees, of the interest of hon. Members who follow in great detail our work, as my hon. Friend always does. I am grateful to him.

The extra sum from the Treasury has enabled the trustees to finance some 140 new discretionary awards to widows and widowers of former Members. In addition, there are at present a further nine beneficiaries who receive payments under section 4 and the moneys to be appropriated are needed both to continue these payments and to fund further cases as they arise.

Finally, and as before, I pay very warm tribute to those who help us with the detailed work of administering the fund from the Fees Office. In particular, I want to thank Jim Dobson, the former accountant, who retired last year after long and devoted service to Members, past and present, and their dependants. Tony Lewis, who has succeeded Jim Dobson, is from the same mould and I extend also to him our very warm appreciation. He and Michael Fletcher and all their colleagues in the Fees Office go far beyond the calls of duty in the service that they give and merit not only the gratitude of the managing trustees but that of this House as a whole.

I commend the motions to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With the leave of the House, I shall put the three motions together.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That, in pursuance of the provisions of section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended, and the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied as from 1st April 1992, as follows:

(a) for paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended, there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

'1. The annual amount of any periodical payment made to any person by virtue of his past membership of the House of Commons shall not exceed £3,370 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £6,197 per annum; whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to length of service and need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £6,487 or such sum as, in their opinion, will bring his income up to £9,314 per annum, whichever is the less':

(b) for paragraph 2 of that Schedule there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

'2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virtue of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £2,106 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £4,933 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £4,055 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £6,882 per annum, whichever is the less':

(c) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £2,106 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £4,933 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £4,055 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £6,882 per annum, whichever is the less':

(d) in section 2(1) of the said Act of 1981, for the words from the beginning to the end of paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 shall be—

(a) £1,962 if the payments are made to a past Member; and

(b) £1,227 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member'.

Resolved,

That the whole or any part of the sums deducted or set aside in the current year from the salaries of Members of Parliament under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, and the whole or any part of the contribution determined by the Treasury for the current year under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, be appropriated for the purposes of section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by section 12 of the Parliamentary Pensions etc. Act 1984, and section 7 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991.—*[Mr. Alfred Morris.]*

Resolved,

That, in pursuance of the provisions of section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended, and the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied from 1st April 1991 to 31st March 1992 as follows:

(a) for paragraph 2 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended, there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

'2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virtue of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £2,023 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £4,738 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £3,894 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £6,609 per annum, whichever is the less';

(b) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £2,023 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £4,738 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his need, the trustees

think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £3,894 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £6,609 per annum, whichever is the less';

(c) in section 2(1)(b) of the said Act of 1981, there shall be substituted the words:

'(b) £1,178 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member'.—*[Mr. Alfred Morris.]*

PETITION

11.32 pm

Dogs (Nailsea)

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I beg to ask leave to present a petition to the House. The town of Nailsea in the west country has asked me to present this petition of more than 1,000 citizens. It is a very pretty town, but a minority of irresponsible dog owners are providing an environmental hazard to health and an eyesore. Action is needed to educate dog owners and provide adequate facilities for the disposal of dog excrement. The petition states:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will ensure that district councils, in this case, Woodspring district council, will fulfil its duty as laid out by statute, improving dog fouling facilities in Nailsea and that the House will give due consideration to further legislation to reduce the aforementioned hazards.

To lie upon the Table.

Asbestos Pollution (Armley)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

11.33 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): As the Minister will be aware, I raised the issue of lethal asbestos pollution in Armley in my constituency in the House on 25 November 1988. At that time, I urged the Government to set up a public inquiry into increasingly concentrated cases of people suffering and dying from the deadly asbestos-related cancer, mesothelioma. These were people who had no known previous history of contact with asbestos, other than to have lived in the immediate neighbourhood of J. W. Roberts' asbestos factory in Canal road.

I was advised by the then Minister of Employment that people who were suffering, or who had relatives who had died, had to use the usual legal procedure of claiming against the company. Since then, lawyers acting on behalf of mesothelioma victims have been trying to get Turner and Newall plc of Trafford Park, Manchester—the owners of J. W. Roberts, which closed in 1958—into court to challenge the company with asbestos pollution in the neighbourhood, causing injury and death. Basically, it is an attempt legally to prove negligence in the face of foreseeable likelihood that harm would occur as a result of causing or permitting asbestos dust to permeate the atmosphere in or around the factory premises in Canal road, Armley, between 1925 and 1958.

In his reply, the then Minister—the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls)—said that the main requirement of the 1931 regulations

"was that . . . dust should be controlled by the use of exhaust ventilation equipment".

That means blowing dust out into the neighbouring streets on the assumption that it could be dispersed at what were then described as safe levels. Many local people witnessed that the company allowed dust to escape from the factory into the streets in the vicinity.

The legal test is whether the company knew that the dust could cause serious or possibly fatal injury to those living in the 840 houses nearby who work in the local workplaces or who attend the Armley clock school.

There are now well over 30 recorded neighbourhood mesothelioma cases on which lawyers are working, but it takes time to develop a test case. Already, some of my constituents with mesothelioma—one at least was claiming for a deceased wife—have died. They were waiting for the completion of the legal procedures recommended by the employment Minister to whom I have referred. In some cases legal aid has had to be transferred to other relatives. We have seen examples of the legal delays that are likely to occur. I am haunted daily by the fact that most victims and their relatives will die before their cases get to court.

On 25 November 1988 the then employment Minister said:

"We do not know exactly what was being done at the factory. Nor do we have any data about actual asbestos exposure for either employees or members of the public nearby. At the time no one would have thought it worth collecting . . . records from so long ago are not kept."

The Minister was wrong. I have reason to believe that the company and other sources, medical and environmental, did have that sort of data, and still do. The difficulty lies in seeking it out—discovering it—and, especially, forcing the company to disclose all that it knew and knows.

There have already been national television, radio and press investigations into the Armley asbestos tragedy. So far as I know, however, Turner and Newall plc has undertaken no inquiries into what has happened or is still happening. A responsible company would surely be coming forward to assist and, in view of the worst fears of the community, even to offer to carry out testing in the area.

In reality, there is emerging an intractable legal Catch 22 problem as a result of the document discovery provisions under the terms of section 34 of the Supreme Court Act 1981, rule 7a. Documents tend to be shifted around from one subsidiary to another within the parent group. Lawyers are expected to specify exactly what records they want without knowing what the company holds. Even if they manage to specify particular records, such as reports on the escape of dust from the factory and tested measurements of asbestos levels within the factory or in the surrounding area—even details of the factory's structure and its ventilation system—those documents are either outwith the rules of discovery or the reply comes back that the records no longer exist.

It is surprising that American lawyers who are challenging the same company—Turner and Newall—can insist on visiting its document depository at St. Mary's Parsonage, Manchester. They emerge with photocopies of documents, which are seen in the public domain in the United States. Yet to obtain the same documents and to use them in the United Kingdom is ruled out of order.

Airborne dust measurements that are reported to have been carried out at the factory could provide crucial evidence in this devastating story. I said on 25 November:

"It appears from the evidence of such an intense mesothelioma cluster that the factory had, and is still having, a lethal impact on the people in its neighbourhood."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1988; Vol 142, c. 408-13.]

In the same month, Leeds city council began a survey of a small proportion of the 836 houses in the neighbourhood. It tested 36 homes for asbestos pollution over a period of six months. On the basis of the results, a warning letter was sent to all residents between March 1989 and April 1992 alerting them to the possibility of asbestos pollution in their homes.

In November last the council decided to undertake a more thorough survey of 300 dwellings in the area. The detailed results of that survey are currently being processed and the full report on the findings is due to be published soon. Preliminary reports already suggest that asbestos dust is present in many of the houses, in roofing, cellars and window sashes. Already it seems reasonable to assume that all 836 houses need to be specially cleaned of asbestos pollution.

There is a means of cleaning the houses of asbestos which is properly licensed under the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983. But—here is the nub—it will cost £7,500 per property. That would make a total of £6 million. The properties are back-to-back, terraced homes, of which 556 are owner-occupied, 169 are council-owned, 22 belong to housing associations and 95 are privately rented.

The local authority has to accept the cost of cleaning out its properties, but under the current arrangements it can offer only means-tested improvement grant aid to the private owners. Only 20 per cent. of the residents will

qualify for the full means-tested grant. The majority will have to make some contribution and some will receive no grant.

Most of the families living in the Armley Lodge area simply cannot afford to pay for the decontamination work. Already their homes have lost their value. Their homes are unsellable and blighted. They live in personal fear of deadly asbestos pollution. The victims of the pollution should not even be asked to pay.

When the city council publishes the results of its survey of the extent of the pollution, it should also be in a position to publish a full programme of work to tackle the problem, to ensure that homes are safe and free of asbestos dust in the future, reassure local residents and lift the blight which currently afflicts the whole area. That requires that full and detailed financial backing for such a programme be committed.

The glimmer of good news is that there is a system which could get rid of the asbestos. To reassure residents, tests by electron microscope could be carried out after the clean-up work. But I hope that we all agree that none of the residents should have to bear the costs of decontamination. They are the innocent victims. They have already suffered, they are still suffering, and they have worried enough.

Home owners should not be expected to take on Turner and Newall plc. Nor should the Armley Asbestos Campaign, which represents all the local residents, regardless of tenure, be expected to appeal to law. They do not have any resources to do that. If we are to adhere to the make-the-polluter-pay principle, the money should not be squeezed out of the falling public housing budget of the city of Leeds. Nor should the poll tax payers of Leeds be expected to pay a levy for clearing up pollution caused by a private company.

Leeds city council is currently investigating the legal liability of Turner and Newall, pursuing the polluter-should-pay principle. Turner and Newall will be made aware of the results of the survey and the likely cost, and asked to contribute. But in the event of protracted legal action, people in the Armley Lodge area cannot be expected to hold on and wait for years of legal wrangling and court procedures, living in personal fear for themselves and their families, and trapped in houses which they cannot sell or leave.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will my hon. Friend accept the thanks of some 60 people in South Kirkby who worked at that factory, originally during the war as part of the war effort, and who have suffered from this terrible disease since? Will he acknowledge that for them to sue the company in the economic circumstances in which they find themselves is impossible? They are very grateful for the assistance given to them in their campaign by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle).

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The campaign will continue until a satisfactory solution has been found for everyone who has been blighted by the tragedy.

In the circumstances, I must suggest to the Minister the precedents that could assist positively. First, if land is contaminated, a 100 per cent. derelict land grant is available, across the board, from the Department of the Environment. Is it not possible to classify contaminated homes in the same way and to give them the same treatment?

Secondly, I urge the Minister to consider using the Bellwin scheme emergency funds, set up in 1983, to replace ad hoc arrangements for giving assistance to local authorities faced with serious disasters. Under that scheme, grants are paid to local authorities to help with additional expenditure caused by an emergency or disaster involving destruction of, or danger to, life or property. The grant covers immediate emergency works needed to safeguard life or property, or to prevent suffering or serious inconvenience.

What circumstances could people face which are more of an emergency than asbestos pollution? It is a danger to life, now and in the future. Their property has been totally blighted, and inconvenience and suffering has been endured by a community.

The Bellwin scheme can be activated, at the Minister's discretion, in respect of storm and flood damage, as set out in the letter from the Department of the Environment to local authorities on 6 February 1990. The scheme was called on to deal with flooding in the Severn valley and in Maidenhead in 1990. If the River Aire in Leeds had flooded more than 800 houses in Armley, they would have been covered by that scheme. Yet we face a far more deadly threat than two feet of water and a filthy layer of mud. Residents of Armley have faced the dangers of asbestos pollution for a generation and are still facing them.

When the risk of asbestos is so well known, and it is possible to decontaminate and to check homes to make them safe, it would be major negligence if remedial action were not supported immediately.

11.47 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) for raising the important issue of asbestos pollution in Armley and securing the debate. I note that his concern about environmental and health matters is shared by his hon. Friends the Members for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), as well as by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope).

The hon. Member for Leeds, West spoke movingly about the human issues flowing from that tragedy, and I am full of sympathy for the matters that he has raised. I am familiar with the issues because I read the Adjournment debate that he initiated in November 1988 and he has pursued the matter assiduously ever since. I am aware that the dispute has been long and extremely complicated, and I hope to identify some possible options to deal with the problem. My interest, as a housing Minister, is in physical solutions to help to make the homes safe. The hon. Gentleman raised many other legal issues, on which I fear that I can shed no light.

I want to be realistic about what we can do. Central Government have no powers to intervene directly, or to set up a short-term rescue fund, however attractive that might seem. From the evidence available, the problem appears to be local and it is therefore proper for the local authority to tackle it, using its powers. I fully recognise the lead taken

[Sir George Young]

by Leeds city council in arranging surveys of properties in the area, and in advising householders on how they can best reduce possible risks to their health.

It is important to emphasise that the conditions that applied at the time of the operation of the Roberts factory do not exist now. The Government have prohibited the two most hazardous types of asbestos—blue and brown—and the most hazardous uses. There are now strict controls over all work activities involving asbestos, including demolition, removal and disposal of materials containing asbestos.

Emissions from scheduled asbestos works are currently subject to air pollution control by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution—HMIP—and workplace controls are enforced by Health and Safety Executive inspectors. Controls have been extended by part 1 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Act requires operators of "prescribed processes"—including asbestos works—to obtain written authorisation containing conditions under which processes must operate, including controls on emissions to the air. Those authorisations must be placed on a public register.

Under the new system of integrated pollution control, HMIP is concerned with not only air pollution but releases to land and water. The Government have led the field in raising and maintaining health and safety standards and over the years have introduced a comprehensive package of legislation with the overall aim of reducing risks to health from exposure to asbestos to an absolute minimum.

In situations where asbestos remains a health hazard, local authorities may be able to give house renovation grants towards the cost of remedial works. The grant system thus offers a potential source of help for owner-occupiers, private tenants and landlords for asbestos removal.

Under the grant system local authorities can give mandatory grants for works to make properties fit for human habitation. That may cover asbestos removal where the presence of asbestos causes a dwelling to fail the fitness standard as a result of serious disrepair, structural instability or poor ventilation. It is for the local authority to decide whether particular works qualify for grant aid, but it is conceivable that where presence of asbestos is a hazard to health it could make a property unfit.

In addition, local authorities have, powers to give discretionary grants for asbestos removal where works are required to put a dwelling into reasonable repair, or in conjunction with other works. Again, an authority must decide whether a particular remedial scheme satisfies grant requirements.

As the hon. Gentleman said, all renovation grants are subject to a means test. However, I do not agree with him that grants should not be means tested when dealing with health hazards. The means test ensures that available resources are targeted on those least able to afford to carry out works. Removing the means test for works dealing with health hazards would fundamentally undermine that principle. As the fitness standard is primarily about protecting occupiers against health hazards, it would mean paying non-means-tested grants for all or most works to make properties fit. The result would be that full grants would be given to many people who could well afford to carry out remedial works from their own resources. That would not be a justifiable use of public funds. The present system allows grants of up to 100 per cent. to be paid to those applicants who are in greatest need.

I recognise that means tests may need some adjustment to give more help to those who can least afford the cost of renovation work. I have been examining the operation of the test as part of the recent review of the house renovation grant system to see what changes may be desirable, but we have no plans to change the principle of means testing grants. I hope to be able to announce the outcome of the review very shortly.

Local authorities are allocated resources for private sector renovation grant expenditure as part of their annual housing investment programme—HIP—allocation. Leeds received an allowance of £5 million for its grant expenditure in 1992-93, as part of a total HIP settlement of £27·4 million. As the authority knows, that allowance is not a limit and it is free to exceed it if it wishes to claim the 75 per cent. Exchequer subsidy expenditure. It also has power to borrow temporarily to pay for grants and claim subsidy in the following year. The funding arrangements for renovation grants thus give Leeds City council considerable flexibility to meet possible demand for grants for works relating to asbestos removal.

In the last financial year, Leeds underspent its allowance for renovation grant expenditure by more than £2 million. It is, of course, for the local authority to determine its own priorities for expenditure within the resources available. However, I hope that the authority will give priority to using its grant resources to the full, including possible expenditure on asbestos work, in the current year.

For 1992-93 we have also set aside £30 million as supplementary credit approvals for mandatory renovation grants. These will be issued to local authorities facing heavy pressure from mandatory renovation grants. Leeds will have an opportunity to bid for a share of those resources when bids are invited later this month, if demand for mandatory grants—including grants for asbestos removal works—causes the authority to exceed its grant allowance. Any application from Leeds would, of course, receive careful consideration.

The local authority's HIP strategy and proposals for next year and future years offer the best means of providing extra resources to tackle the asbestos problem in Armley through the grant system. The problem could be highlighted in the authority's annual HIP strategy statement with a quantified assessment of the needs and resources required to alleviate it. That would allow works to be carried out according to a cost-effective and realistic programme over an appropriate time scale.

Placing a bid for additional resources within the context of the authority's HIP strategy has other advantages. It would allow proper account to be taken of it in the assessment of needs and particularly in the exercise of Ministers' discretion over grant resources. Progress in tackling the problem could also be properly monitored and reviewed within a broader housing context.

In addition to the grant system, it is possible that the statutory nuisance provisions, under section 82 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, may be of help to some individual householders whose homes are affected by asbestos dust. Under those powers, a householder affected by a statutory nuisance can bring proceedings against the owner to carry out works to abate the nuisance. That would allow a tenant to take action against a landlord to

carry out remedial works. Where an individual owner-occupier is unable to obtain a grant to carry out asbestos remedial works to his property, there are other possibilities for raising money to pay for it. The Department plans to issue a revised booklet on sources of finance for home repairs and maintenance in the next few months.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Bellwin scheme —a good one to mention as it has Leeds connections. I have considered it and, sadly, I do not think that it offers any joy. An important component of the Bellwin scheme is that the assistance offered is for immediate action such as might follow a storm. Immediate action is taken to mean within two months of an incident. The money is to be used to refund local authorities that have to take immediate action within about two months of the incident. Under the terms set out in section 155 of the Housing Act 1988, it would be difficult to define as "immediate" any action to be taken in the case under consideration.

The hon. Gentleman expressed concern about the disclosure of information by companies to those preparing legal battles about liability for deaths linked to asbestos. There is provision in British law for that, but it is a fairly detailed and complex area of law for which my Department does not have responsibility. However, if the hon. Gentleman would like to put his concerns direct to my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor, I am sure that my right hon. Friend would be happy to pursue them.

I have focused my remarks on that aspect of the problem that my Department has some ability to address. I have tried to outline ways in which owner-occupiers and tenants can obtain access to resources that will enable them to carry out the necessary work for their homes and put the problem behind them. To the extent that Ministers have discretion to try to help Leeds, I can say that we shall give special attention to the case that Leeds makes in its annual HIP bid to see whether we can make fast progress in bringing this sad problem to a conclusion.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 9 July 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 4) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH WATERWAYS BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

CROSSRAIL BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

GREATER MANCHESTER (LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (GREEN PARK) BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 22 October.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Exports

1. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest assessment of the United Kingdom's export performance.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): United Kingdom exports are at record levels.

Mr. Bates: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the fiscal imperatives necessary for successful manufacturing exports are low inflation, stable exchange rates and low unit costs? Does he further agree that it is necessary and important that those remain at the core of Government policy, and that that is vindicated by the news that in the past three months exports in the manufacturing sector increased by 4·5 per cent. to a new record level?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right to stress that British exports can do well in competitive markets provided that we keep our inflation down, that it is not merely equal to, but better than the average and that it compares well with the rates of the Germans, French, Japanese and Americans. Unless we do that, we shall not gain our market share. Our manufactured exports have increased our share of world trade in the past three years, so I accept and am grateful for what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Skinner: Why does the Chancellor of the Exchequer not admit when he talks about exports increasing that imports are also increasing? The latest trend suggests a £9 billion deficit this year on the balance of trade. If the right hon. Gentleman really wants to do something about Britain's export performance, he should cut interest rates by 2 or 3 per cent. and get out of the exchange mechanism.

Mr. Lamont: I do not expect that the current account will be a constraint on growth. Even the figures that the hon. Gentleman mentions, which I do not accept, are a small portion of gross domestic product. The only way that this country can increase exports is by becoming more competitive year by year, by increasing productivity and by keeping increases in earnings and wages down to the levels of our competitors. There are no quick fixes. The idea that we can help this country's economy by depreciating the exchange rate is pure illusion, pure fool's gold. The only way to do that is by improving productivity and competitiveness.

Mr. Brooke: Is my right hon. Friend encouraged by the work of Edinburgh economists, which shows that during the 1980s there was a marked shift in the destination of British exports from third world to more sophisticated markets, which is a good omen for our competitiveness in the 1990s?

Mr. Lamont: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our largest export customer is Germany, our second largest is France and the third largest is the United States. I do not know how people who believe that there is some easy answer through depreciation think that we are going to compete unless we get our inflation rate down to the levels that pertain in those countries.

Mrs. Beckett: Will the Chancellor confirm that, although he said that exports are at record levels, imports are at even more record levels and that our balance of payments is showing a record deficit, even in the depths of the recession? Furthermore, our share of world trade in major manufactures is less than it was in 1979. Do the Government propose to do anything at all about that?

Mr. Lamont: Our imports have risen, but some pick-up in imports is certainly expected as the economy recovers. I repeat what I told the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner): any prospective current account deficit is of a size that can be easily financed. The only way that we can increase our share of world trade is by becoming more productive and more competitive. The hon. Lady does no one any service by pretending that there is some easy way out.

Stamp Duty

2. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the moratorium on stamp duty.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced the increase in the stamp duty threshold last December, he made it quite clear that it was a temporary measure for eight months only. We have no plans to extend it beyond 19 August.

Mr. Townsend: My hon. Friend will know of the importance of the housing industry in pulling Britain out of the recession. Can he offer any hope and further

assistance to that sector? Does he agree that the stamp duty has some basic flaws? Can he forecast its total demise?

Mr. Nelson: I must point out that stamp duty on property alone raises about £1 billion, which is a considerable sum to the Exchequer. On the problems of the housing and property industry, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced a significant package last December which included payments to building societies for those in receipt of income support. In the longer term, it is the reduction in interest rates, brought about by the economic policies to which the Government are committed, that will bring about the firmest and surest revival of the property market.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister confirm that the stamp duty holiday, which gave some limited help to home buyers and the building industry, was sabotaged this week when a group of Conservative Members did not have the guts to vote in the Lobby in accordance with their declared beliefs?

Mr. Nelson: I do not accept that for a moment. My right hon. and hon. Friends voted clearly, firmly and unanimously for the reintroduction of stamp duty because they recognised that that was an essential part of the public expenditure programme and the resources that must be raised through it to meet that balance.

Mr. Budgen: I wish to offer my support to my hon. Friend for his suggestion that interest rates are the most important thing in reviving the housing market. May I suggest, as a matter of convenience, that he arrange for the Bundesbank to communicate direct to the House, because it seems sad that he should have to second-guess what it says and go through the humiliation of being a mere messenger for that foreign body.

Mr. Nelson: I am not sure that my hon. Friend's point arises out of this question, but no doubt his comments will be heard as clearly by the Bundesbank as they have been by the House.

Dr. Marek: The Economic Secretary is more or less admitting that his initiative on stamp duty has failed, but we are still in recession, we still have a huge balance of payments deficit and an astronomic public sector borrowing requirement and the Budget forecast of growth is so much pie in the sky. If the Chancellor says that we must be more competitive and more productive, how exactly will that be achieved by Treasury Ministers?

Mr. Nelson: I do not accept that the stamp duty moratorium was of no help, because 540,000 property transactions took place during that time and the benefit gained was equivalent to £400 million. That real benefit has been left with home purchasers. To extend the moratorium, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, would cost another £430 million, which would be a significant burden on the PSBR this year.

Environmentally Friendly Projects

3. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to use tax incentives to encourage companies to invest in environmentally friendly projects.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The existing tax regime already gives relief for capital investment by companies on machinery and plant or industrial buildings, including investments in environmentally friendly projects.

Mr. Jones: In the light of what the Prime Minister said 12 months ago at Olympia about energy efficiency and promoting measures to help that, is it not about time that the Chancellor did a little more about that and did something useful, through the tax system, to promote energy efficiency? As a start, perhaps we could get rid of VAT on energy-efficient products.

Mr. Dorrell: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman concentrates on energy efficiency, because that is a good example of an environmentally friendly investment which any company can make and which is justified by the costs that are saved by saving that energy. Saving energy is not only green but saves costs. It does not need a tax incentive to justify that.

Mr. Chris Smith: Is it not eloquent testimony to the lack of interest in putting the environment at the heart of economic policy that not a single Conservative Member has risen on this question to participate? The Government, for all their fine words, have done precious little to include environmental concerns in their taxation policies. There have been no differentials on VAT, no real incentives for industry and no action on vehicle excise duty. There is an existing green agenda in which the Government should be interested—why are they not?

Mr. Dorrell: It is eloquent testimony to the fact that the Labour party is uninterested in reducing tax rates that right through the passage of this year's Finance Bill a range of alternatives for tax allowances—for example, against corporation tax—were pressed on us. The only way to pay for all those proposals, had we accepted them, would have been by raising the marginal rate of corporation tax and making this country uncompetitive with other developed countries.

Manufacturing

4. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of recent trends in manufacturing productivity; and whether he will make a statement.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): Manufacturing productivity stood at its highest ever level in April this year.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our successful economic policies during the 1980s promoted a vast improvement in manufacturing investment towards that end of the decade? What positive conclusions does he draw from that and from his reply?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is right to say that manufacturing investment grew by about 31 per cent. from 1986 to 1989. Manufacturing productivity today, as we come out of recession, is higher than it was when we went into recession. That is a reason for having a good deal of optimism about the future.

Mrs. Ewing: In considering the issue of manufacturing productivity, which is vital, does the Minister recognise the

role that has been played by workers in manufacturing in reaching targets? Is he aware for example, that 1,300 people are to be made redundant at Ardersier yard in Scotland by the end of September, representing the largest single redundancy measure in the onshore oil engineering industry every recorded in the United Kingdom? If the right hon. Gentleman really cares about productivity and production, will he examine what is happening in the oil fabrication industry and, in particular, consider the possibility of the Government's giving some direction on where the construction of the Claymore jacket for Elf Caledonia is to take place?

Mr. Portillo: I share the hon. Lady's regret about individual redundancies. At the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, we had the highest ever level of manufacturing output, yet about 5 million people were employed in manufacturing, compared with 9 million in the 1960s. Manufacturing productivity has risen steeply and the number of people employed in manufacturing has declined, yet manufacturing output has recently been at its highest ever level. That does not help with the individual redundancies to which the hon. Lady referred, but I want to set the role of manufacturing in the context of the economy as a whole.

Mr John Townend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it has been an enormous achievement to increase productivity at a time of recession, when one would have expected it to go down? To what extent does he think that that increase in productivity has been due to improved industrial relations, with the number of days lost through strikes being at an all-time low? Does he agree that that has been due to the industrial relations reforms introduced by the Conservatives in the past 13 years?

Mr. Portillo: The improvement in industrial relations has played an important part. I am pleased to note that earnings are responding to the economic cycle and that the earnings increase has recently been at its lowest level for 25 year. That means that the prospects for employment growth in the future are much better than they would have been.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: It is something of a novelty to hear a Treasury Minister boast about manufacturing industry, and I congratulate the Chief Secretary on his nerve. Will he confirm that about 2 million jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector since 1979? In those circumstances, is he now willing to revise his forecast of unemployment at 2·4 million to a more realistic 2·7 million for this year?

Mr. Portillo: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations, although I do not congratulate him on how carefully he may have been listening to what I said. I go further than the figure that he gave. I have told the House that employment in manufacturing has decreased by 4 million since 1966. We are talking about a very long-term trend in this country under various Governments which has occurred in all advanced industrialised countries around the world. My answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about forecasting unemployment is that the Government make no such forecasts.

5. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest assessment of the trend in manufacturing investment.

Mr. Portillo: Manufacturing investment rose strongly during the late 1980s and has fallen back during the recession.

Mrs. Knight: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the record investment of British manufacturing companies such as the engineering and lace business in Erewash is now serving those companies well in the difficult world trading climate? Does he agree that the successful conclusion of the talks on the general agreement on tariffs and trade will help world trade and the British economy? Will he press European Finance Minister colleagues to conclude a successful deal—especially the French?

Mr. Portillo: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating business men and women in her constituency on their investment performance. During the first quarter of this year, business investment rose by 3½ per cent., including a 3¼ per cent. increase in investment in plant and machinery. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that a successful conclusion of the GATT round will be in the interests of all of us. As she will know, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stressed that point strongly at the Group of Seven discussions in Munich.

Mr. Sheldon: Is it not clear that one of the great barriers to manufacturing investment is the high level of interest rates? Why does the Chancellor of the Exchequer consider himself so bound to act as the poodle of the German Bundesbank on interest rates? Why does he not listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and think about a reduction in interest rates, which he could well get away with?

Mr. Portillo: First, I repeat to the right hon. Gentleman that, in the first quarter of this year, business investment showed a sharp and welcome improvement. If he considers the underlying rates of inflation, he will find that real interest rates in the United Kingdom are a little lower than those in Germany. He should take that fact into account in his calculations.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Coming as I do from a business background, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether he will accept from me that it is time that the Government and the House realised that the British economy is in a serious state, unemployment between now and the middle of next year is likely to rocket through 3 million and that, unless the Government reduce interest rates, they will compound the problems facing this country and hinder its ability to recover?

Mr. Portillo: I believe that my hon. Friend, who is indeed a great friend of manufacturing industry, will be pleased that manufacturing output reached its highest ever level in the early 1990s. He will be pleased at the figures that I have given this afternoon on manufacturing productivity, which was at its highest ever level in April. I do not accept what my hon. Friend says about the rising rate of unemployment. If the Government were to give up trying to control inflation—which I fear is the outcome of what my hon. Friend would like us to do—the economy would be in grave difficulty and we would face much higher unemployment.

Mr. Beith: Does the Chief Secretary realise that the call from the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) was relatively moderate compared with the call for a large cut in interest rates that came from the former Prime Minister? What went wrong with the policies which she followed and carried out and which were meant to lead to generally lower interest rates? Was she just plain wrong?

Mr. Portillo: The policies that we followed have led to lower interest rates. Interest rates have been cut on nine separate occasions. They are now 10 per cent. and were previously 15 per cent. That cut has been of tremendous benefit to both business and householders. The right hon. Gentleman is trying to imply that if we had followed a different set of policies, we could have had lower interest rates today. I see no evidence for that.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whereas the money supply is under Government control, where that money is lent is wholly under the control of the banks? In the late 1980s some banks lent to businesses that should never have been allowed to get off the ground in the first place. It is ridiculous to suggest that the matter is a Government responsibility—it rests with the clearing banks.

Mr. Portillo: I take my hon. Friend's point. She speaks with the experience of having spoken to some of her business people. Any of my hon. Friends will understand that it is the Government's responsibility to maintain downward pressure on inflation. All our hopes for the recovery of industry in general and for the improvement of our employment prospects rest upon there being absolute certainty that the Government will continue the fight against inflation. I am pleased to say that the markets can have that absolute certainty.

Mr. John Smith: Is the Chief Secretary aware that the most recent report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development shows that manufacturing investment in Britain fell by 11·9 per cent. in 1991 and that, even worse, it is predicted to fall by another 3·8 per cent. during the current year? Is that a satisfactory state of affairs? What action will the Government take to promote manufacturing investment, without which there is no prospect of recovery from the recession?

Mr. Portillo: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has just quoted a forecast, and he is often sceptical about forecasts. I shall give two facts. First, manufacturing investment rose by 30 per cent. between 1986 and 1989; therefore, we are starting from a high base. Secondly, business investment rose by 3½ per cent. in the first quarter of this year, 3¼ per cent. of which was in plant and machinery.

National Economic Development Council

17. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the abolition of the National Economic Development Council.

15. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning his announcement on the abolition of the National Economic Development Office.

Mr. Lamont: I have received a small number of letters commenting on my announcement.

Mr. Merchant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this apparently massive outburst in public concern shows that the only tears that have been shed for the abolition of the National Economic Development Council are the crocodile tears of Opposition Members who are as out of touch with popular sentiment on this issue as they are with economic reality? Does he further agree that he was absolutely right to abolish the NEDC?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I explained to the House when I made the decision, I did not think that the National Economic Development Council any longer reflected the needs and realities of the United Kingdom economy in the 1990s. Of course, we want to talk to industry and to hear its concerns, but I do not think that discussions in the council were helpful or enlightening. In terms of the work carried out by the sectoral working parties, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has announced plans for the reorganisation of his Department and the sponsoring divisions. That is a much more sensible way to listen and talk to industry about the future as industry sees it.

Mr. Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his decision puts the final seal on the former way of running the British economy—the corporatist way?

Mr. Lamont: As I have repeatedly said, the only way to improve our living standards and increase our share of world trade is by improving our competitiveness and keeping down inflation. That is the responsibility of Government. The discussions at the National Economic Development Council did not contribute to policy in any way.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Chancellor nevertheless agree that one of the unfortunate side-effects of the abolition of the National Economic Development Council is that the Chancellor will no longer have the opportunity to hear views on economic policy that do not coincide with those of the Treasury? On the same lines, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the study by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research of economic modelling during the 1980s, which was paid for by the Treasury, showed that the Treasury's performance in such modelling was disastrous? The Treasury's thought police attempted to ban from public funding institutions such as Wynne Godley's outfit at Cambridge university, which correctly forecast the appalling levels of the previous depression and this one. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there should no longer be an attempt to create a monopoly on economic policy by withdrawing public funding from universities whose ideas are different from those of the Treasury?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman must surely know that decisions about funding individual universities, individual research bodies and individual eocnomic groups are not taken by the Treasury or by the Government. As for the hon. Gentleman's first point, of course I have made it clear that I am prepared to talk to the Trades Union Congress and to hear its views, but I do not believe that the confrontational talks which took place

so regularly in the National Economic Development Council were of any use to anyone—indeed, many people who attended them were sheer bored by what went on.

Mr. Tony Banks: Why, then, do the Japanese and the Germans find it valuable to have continuing dialogue with their trade unions when their countries are a damned sight more successful economically than ours? Why will the Chancellor not treat the trade unions as valuable partners within the economy and start talking to them and stop treating them like traitors?

Mr. Lamont: Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not believe that decisions in the economy are made at the level of the sector. They are made by individuals and by firms. That is the way the economy of this country works. If there are such institutions in Germany or Japan—I am not sure whether what the hon. Gentleman says is right—perhaps that is a comment on the nature of the discussions that take place.

VAT (Bait)

8. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will review the current VAT liability placed on fishermen buying fresh fish for bait.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have no current plans for a formal review of the VAT liability of supplies of bait generally. However, Customs and Excise have been asked to contact the fishermen's representatives with a view to identifying specific problems that they may be experiencing in the application of the current rules and exploring possible solutions.

Mr. Steen: The problem is very simple. If an old lady goes to buy some fish for her cat from the fish trader, she pays no VAT. If the same fish is delivered to the quay on a shell fishermen's boat, immediately the fish is delivered for bait he has to pay VAT. That seems a crazy arrangement as anything to do with shell fishermen's boats is zero rated, so why should they pay VAT on that fish when the little old lady does not? More importantly, will the Minister do something to stop the terrible cash flow problems of shell fishermen who face serious difficulties on the south coast of Devon?

Mr. Nelson: I know that my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) has championed the cause of crabbers in south Devon and a particular case of arrears of tax. I am pleased to advise him that Customs and Excise will not be calling for arrears of tax in the particular case about which I know that he is concerned, nor in others where a genuine misunderstanding has arisen as to the correct treatment of supplies of bait. However, VAT is applicable to fresh fish when it is bait and is held up for sale as such.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

9. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made towards joining the narrow band of the exchange rate mechanism and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Sterling will move to the narrow band of the ERM in due course at the current central rate of DM2·95.

Mr. Enright: If the Minister is so confident in what he is doing, when will he bring down interest rates?

Mr. Dorrell: They have already been brought down nine times from 15 to 10 per cent.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the former Prime Minister whose Government forced the ERM business through the House now appears, according to *The Evening Standard,* to be having second thoughts about the ERM business, would it not be wise and helpful for the Government in a quiet and scholarly way to reconsider the whole ERM business and ask where is the logic of pretending that the pound is worth something that it is not when it is being accompanied, and probably partly caused by, huge Government borrowing, massive unemployment and a chronic balance of payments problem? Is there not a case for the Government quietly and thoughtfully to ask whether there is any sense in that at all?

Mr. Dorrell: The logic of our determination to maintain our position within the ERM is our wish to match our standards of monetary control and discipline not, like the Labour party, to the average but to the highest standards in Europe. Our determination to do so is based on our recognition of the fact that not to do so would be to impose a quite unnecessary competitive disadvantage on British industry.

Mr. Bell: Regardless of when we shall be joining the narrow band of the ERM, can the Financial Secretary share with the House the Treasury's views on a general realignment of currencies within the mechanism?

Mr. Dorrell: Our policy is clearly to move to the narrow band at DM2·95. There is no realignment in prospect and we do not seek one.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that those who wish to cut and run on interest rates would once again inflict on this country the inflationary problems which have made us uncompetitive and would, through inflation, once again try to disguise the failure to adjust to international markets? Will he therefore reaffirm the Government's intention to maintain the central rate against the deutschmark and to move to the narrow band as soon as possible so that this country can once again be competitive in the international arena and British industry can flourish?

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that absolute affirmation. If we consider 30 years of economic history, we should be conscious that not to provide that discipline is to provide a background which is a needless impediment to the development of investment and long-term planning in British industry, especially the manufacturing sector, which is so often espoused by hon. Members.

Mr. Boyce: Will the Minister be kind enough to tell the House who was responsible for increasing interest rates to 15 per cent. in the first place?

Mr. Dorrell: This Government have always made clear their determination to use interest rates to bring inflation under control to match, as I said earlier, our standards of monetary control with the highest in Europe.

Financial Services Regulation

10. **Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the reform of financial services regulation.

Mr. Nelson: I have received a number of such representations.

Mr. French: Does my hon. Friend recall Sir David Walker, on his retirement as chairman of the Securities and Investments Board, saying that the regulatory organisation is too fragmented, especially as it relates to enforcement and policing? Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a growing feeling among practitioners and members of the public that the Financial Services Act 1986 needs revision, and will he apply himself to that?

Mr. Nelson: The overall effectiveness of the regulatory structure is a matter of great importance, as my hon. Friend acknowledges. Following the Treasury's assumption of responsibility for regulating financial services, I intend to keep the arrangements carefully under review. This is a matter which I shall want to discuss with the new chairman of the SIB in due course.

Mr. Hain: Is the Minister aware of the reports of Sir Jeremy Morse and Sir David Walker in respect of the Lloyd's insurance market? There have been more than half a dozen such reports in the past 20 years, each followed by small reforms and further scandals. The latest report shows evidence of financial mismanagement, insider dealing and fraud. Is it not time for the Government to introduce proper statutory regulation of Lloyd's to ensure that it stops acting as a law unto itself and that there is modernisation of Britain's financial services sector?

Mr. Nelson: I take careful note of what the hon. Gentleman says. I have read the reports to which he refers. Matters relating to the insurance industry are more properly the concern of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that we are fortunate to have the most developed financial services market in Europe? Regulatory regimes are essential for consumer protection, but is it not also essential that we have a simple regulatory structure to ensure that we maintain our European competitiveness in financial services?

Mr. Nelson: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for reminding the House of the signal importance of the financial services and banking industries to the economy and to the balance of payments. The expertise, prosperity and ingenuity of the financial services and banking industries are of tremendous importance, and very often we denigrate them to the great disadvantage of the national interest.

Mr. Boateng: Given that more than 40,000 old and vulnerable people stand to lose their homes as a result of the home income plan scam and the Minister told us yesterday that some building societies are refusing to co-operate with the building societies ombudsman and he has no power to compel them to do so, will the hon. Gentleman consider bringing forward measures to extend the powers of the ombudsman so that he can protect all vulnerable consumers?

Mr. Nelson: As I made clear to the hon. Gentleman during our extensive debate on this important issue yesterday, the majority of building societies are permitting investigations by the ombudsman concerned. It is to be hoped that the expressions of opinion from both sides of the House will be heard by those few remaining building societies which are having difficulty accepting the inquiries. That is the proper line to pursue for the time being.

Public Expenditure Planning

11. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on forecasting public spending planning totals in the proposed new budget cycle.

Mr. Portillo: Next year the public expenditure planning totals will continue to be agreed by the Cabinet following discussions between ministerial colleagues and the Chief Secretary.

Mr. Bradley: In the Budget last March, the Chancellor forecast a public sector borrowing requirement of £28 billion. What is the forecast today?

Mr. Portillo: We publish forecasts twice a year and we shall publish our next forecast when it falls due.

Mr. Wilkinson: In last autumn's expenditure statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that the net contribution of the United Kingdom to the European Community this financial year would be £2·5 billion, with slightly higher figures for the two subsequent years. Is that still the forecast or can my right hon. Friend give us any hope that there will be an alleviation of that unnecessary burden?

Mr. Portillo: I have no change to announce to the published forecast. The flows vary from time to time. If my hon. Friend is saying that it is important to continue to bear down on the expenditure of the European Community, and hence on the contribution that we make, I entirely agree with him. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been engaged upon that exercise. It was good that we negotiated an abatement at Fontainebleau, which so far has resulted in a saving to the United Kingdom of £12 billion.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Is it still the Government's policy to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement to the percentage level—3 per cent. of gross domestic product, I believe—established by the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, it is our intention to meet the criteria for convergence set out in the Maastricht treaty. Indeed, it is our intention to reduce borrowing to about zero over the medium term.

Inflation

12. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which EC country had the largest fall in retail price inflation in the year to May 1992.

17. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which EC country had the largest fall in retail price inflation in the year to May 1992.

Mr. Lamont: Of all EC countries, Greece had the largest fall in its headline inflation rate in the year to May 1992; the United Kingdom had the largest fall of the major EC countries.

Mr. Duncan: I welcome that news. Is my right hon. Friend aware that producer output inflation is now down to 2·7 per cent? As that is the lowest figure since 1969, does he agree that it puts British industry in a strong position to emerge from the recession and to prove increasingly competitive in world markets?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Producer price inflation is a good forecast of the headline rate of inflation. My hon. Friend will be aware that the underlying rate of inflation—the retail prices index minus mortgage interest payments—has already fallen sharply recently. All that is good news for exports, for competitiveness and for recovery.

Mr. Ottaway: Does my hon. Friend realise that whatever the mixed feelings about the exchange rate mechanism, his answer shows what an effective weapon it is in the battle against inflation? At the same time, does it not provide a stable platform for smooth recovery, with no necessity to resort to the stop-go policies advocated by the Opposition?

Mr. Lamont: There is no doubt that the exchange rate mechanism has been extremely effective in lowering inflation in those countries that are members of it. Furthermore, my hon. Friend makes the good point that if this country were ever to leave the ERM, we should still have to compete against countries with a low level of inflation gained from membership of the ERM. That is why we should stick with the discipline of the ERM, which we believe is good for recovery and will be good for the medium-term competitiveness of this country.

Mr. Pike: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that he is talking a load of bilge when he claims a reduction in the inflation rate? Was not the high level that it reached a result of Conservative policies? Is it not nonsense for the Government to claim credit for bringing down the inflation rate when they were responsible for its rise?

Mr. Lamont: If I had compared the level of inflation with that of previous Labour Governments, the hon. Gentleman would not have found that a very happy comparison either.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Does the Chancellor accept that if a Government who fail to bear down on inflation are financially dodgy, a Government who have no policy for full employment are morally bankrupt?

Mr. Lamont: The fallacy in the hon. Gentleman's approach is thinking that we can have growth in employment without an inflation rate equal to or better than that of our competitors. Britain is dependent upon trade. More than 30 per cent. of Britain's GDP is exported and imported. Britain cannot compete, cannot have growth in employment, unless it has a level of inflation equal to the best in the EC and among our major trading partners.

Mr. Butcher: I agree with my right hon. Friend that the exchange rate mechanism is an external discipline bearing down on inflation, but is it not possible to legislate for internal independent bodies which can perform the same function? Bearing in mind the history of the Bretton Woods agreement, the gold standard and the sterling area, each of which collapsed for good reasons, does my right hon. Friend think that it may be prudent to have alternative domestic policies in place in case the same thing should happen to the ERM?

Mr. Lamont: If my hon. Friend looks back at the period of fixed exhange rates, he will find that the inflation performance, not just of Britain but of many other countries, was a lot better than during the period of floating exchange rates. The ERM has a proven track record in reducing inflation. I repeat: even if we were not part of the ERM, we would have to compete with those countries that have succeeded the hard way in reducing inflation, and we must do that if we are to provide for small businesses, to provide for employment and to achieve growth in the future. That is the way the Germans and the French have done it. I do not know why my hon. Friends think that this country cannot succeed where other countries have.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is on his way to Helsinki to attend a conference on security and co-operation in Europe.

Mrs. Jackson: Will the Leader of the House be so kind as to ask the Prime Minister whether he agrees that the prompt and efficient administration of public money is his responsibility and therefore, that it is his and his Government's responsibility that many of my constituents are waiting more than six months to have their disability living allowance claims processed? Will he ask the Prime Minister to join me in commiserating with Mr. Michael Bichard who has had no fewer than 26 parliamentary questions and hundreds of letters of complaint referred to him from hon. Members?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that I shall invite my right hon. Friend to agree with all that, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree about the duty that we all have to ensure the proper administration of public money, about the satisfaction, which the hon. Lady has not expressed, in the level of demand for the extremely successful new disability benefits, and about the Government's determination to ensure that those benefits are effectively delivered.

Q2. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir John Hannam: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the tremendous success of the health service reforms, especially in my part of Devon where the general practitioner fund holdings and the trusts are working for

the benefit of staff and patients? Will he welcome the changed attitude of the British Medical Association, which shows the popularity and success of the reforms?

Mr. Newton: Yes, I very much welcome that. It reflects the fact that practical experience throughout the country is demonstrating the benefits of those reforms. There is clearly also a wide welcome for the announcement made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, which will build further on their success.

Dr. John Cunningham: What reasons does the Leader of the House give for the Prime Minister's failure to achieve his objectives at the economic summit in Munich?

Mr. Newton: An economic summit, whether it takes place in Munich or anywhere else, is a gathering of people designed to achieve agreement on the pursuit of common objectives. No one member of such a gathering can force the others to agree. It is clear, however, that useful progress was made at Munich on key objectives relating both to western relations with Russia and to advancing the objectives of the GATT round. Progress was also made in a number of other ways.

Dr. Cunningham: Is it not clear that no amount of vacuous communiqués can disguise the fact that, for the second year running, Britain is bottom of the G7 league in relation to growth, investment and job creation? As even Lady Thatcher is now warning of economic catastrophe in Britain, is it not time for new economic and industrial policies for our country? Will the Government act now or will they simply continue to wring their hands and do nothing?

Mr. Newton: It is clear that the action taken by the Government in recent months is creating a secure foundation for the country to emerge from the recession in the latter part of this year. If the hon. Gentleman is in a quoting frame of mind, he may wish to know that in a press release issued only three or four days ago the Institute of Directors said that half the directors questioned in June were more optimistic. That is the highest level of sustained optimism since August 1988.

Dr. Cunningham: Twelve months ago, the Prime Minister claimed a triumph for the economic summit in London, and the Government did nothing. Will they do nothing again about the appalling misery that they are creating in this country?

Mr. Newton: The Government will continue with the sustained application of policies which are producing the conditions for recovery, and doing so successfully.

Q3. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hague: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming this week's announcement of an order for the fourth Trident submarine? Does he agree that the three best recent additions to the future security of the nation are the ordering of the submarine, the re-election of a Government who had the consistency and good sense to proceed with the order, and the defeat of Opposition parties whose recommendations vary from scrapping this important deterrent altogether to sending submarines out to sea with no weapons on board?

Mr. Newton: In a word, I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said.

Ms. Lynne: Can the Leader of the House explain how we can take the proposals on health promotion seriously when the Government are presiding over the collapse of national health service dentistry?

Mr. Newton: It is absurd to suggest that the Government are presiding over the collapse, as the hon. Lady puts it, of NHS dentistry, given the increases in NHS treatment, the number of dentists and their remuneration over the past few years.

Q4.**Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Haselhurst: In the light of the targets set in the Government's White Paper, published yesterday, will the Government consider removing tobacco products from the calculation of the retail prices index? If we believe that price is the main deterrent to smokers, is it not ridiculous that the Chancellor should feel any inhibition about increasing duty on tobacco products because of the effect that that would have on the cost of living and on benefits related to it?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will know that an advisory committee looks carefully and independently at the proper make-up of the RPI. I would not wish to dictate to that committee how it should do its work. I should point out, however, referring to the figures given yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, that the increases in tobacco prices in recent years do not suggest that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been suffering from any inhibition in that respect.

Q5. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Barnes: At 4 o'clock this afternoon in the Jubilee Room the Spastics Society will launch a report on the problems of disabled people in the 1992 general election. Is the Leader of the House aware that many disabled people could not gain access to polling stations in the election and also had problems with the postal voting system? Will he ensure that the report, entitled "Polls Apart", is studied at the highest level and that action is taken to ensure that everyone, able-bodied or disabled, who is entitled to exercise the franchise, is given access to the procedure?

Mr. Newton: As a former Minister for disabled people myself, I would not wish to do anything with such a report other than to examine it carefully and draw it to the attention of those concerned, returning officers and others. The hon. Gentleman's concern is legitimate.

Q6. **Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Now that Germany has made it clear that it intends to continue for a long period in the maintenance of economic policies which are driving the rest of Europe from recession into slump, so as to re-equip its eastern provinces, is it not more than ever necessary for British Ministers to show the same resolution in supporting British industry? As this country has determined its own money supply for several centuries, why do Ministers suddenly find that they can no longer do that without having their hands held by a group of German bank clerks? Has not the time now come for us to leave the exchange rate mechanism, at least until such time as German interest rates are reduced to a level compatible with the needs of the whole of the rest of Europe?

Mr. Newton: The British Government—with support from both sides of the House, in my recollection—accepted the disciplines of the ERM as the essential basis for a British policy designed to bring down inflation and to create the conditions for a sound economy. I see no basis for departing from that.

Q7. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Primarolo: Will the Leader of the House explain why, under the citizens charter, someone whose train is late is entitled to claim compensation, but when the Government fail to ensure that people's applications for disability allowances are speedily processed, those people are not entitled to claim compensation against the Government? Will the right hon. Gentleman suggest to the Prime Minister that proposals for such compensation should be produced as a matter of urgency, to ensure the efficiency of government?

Mr. Newton: As I believe the hon. Lady knows, in certain fairly limited circumstances compensation may be payable for a failure of the Department—for negligence, perhaps. The key is to ensure, as the Department is actively seeking to do, that the high level of demand for the new disability benefits—having introduced them myself, I welcome that high level of demand—is met by the administration. That is what my colleagues in the Department are seeking to do.

Q8. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Robinson: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming yesterday's White Paper on "The Health of the Nation"? Will he also welcome the fact that, at a time of vastly increased resources for the health service, the Government are pushing ahead to make further improvements to the health of the nation and will continue to do so?

Mr. Newton: I agree with my hon. Friend. Yesterday's White Paper is a significant development in the success of the national health service and in its further success for the rest of this century and beyond. It marks a significant move from the health service's being, in old-fashioned terms, an illness service, to its being a genuine health service.

Q9. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Darling: Why did the Government forget to mention in their manifesto of just three months ago that they intended to privatise water supply in Scotland?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has had those matters under consideration. He will also be aware that my right hon. Friend will set out the basis of Government policy in the appropriate way, at the appropriate time.

Mr. George Howarth: Is the Leader of the House aware that this is national housing week and that housing provision and the construction industry are gripped in a crisis? Would not this be an appropriate time to organise the phased release of the £7 billion of local authority capital receipts to solve the housing crisis and the crisis that the Government have engineered in the construction industry?

Mr. Newton: I am tempted to refer the hon. Gentleman to a reply that I myself gave on that point on Tuesday. The Government are in the process of making £6 billion available to housing associations over the next three years. That will produce about 150,000 new homes for rent or low-cost ownership.

Mr. Moate: Recalling the visit to London by thousands of fishermen earlier this week, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is wrong to ask Parliament to impose tough restrictions on British fishermen which will not be applied to Common Market fishermen—including those who fish in British-controlled waters, with some taking British quota? As the proposals are clearly unfair and will almost certainly be doomed to failure without the industry's co-operation, will my right hon. Friend consult his colleagues about withdrawing them now and starting new consultations?

Mr. Newton: I certainly cannot undertake to enter consultations with a view to withdrawing proposals which are most important in relation to the conservation of fish stocks and, therefore, to the long-term future of our fishing industry. Other member states will be subject to Community targets. Our aim is, and will remain, to ensure that the burden of adjustment is fairly shared.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 13 JULY—Debate on the report from the Select Committee on sittings of the House on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motions relating to the nominations of departmental Select Committees.

TUESDAY 14 JULY—Remaining stages of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill.

Proceedings on the Protection of Badgers Bill *[Lords]*, the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Bill *[Lords]* and the Tribunals and Inquiries Bill *[Lords]*. These are consolidation measures.

Motion on office costs allowance.

WEDNESDAY 15 JULY—Proceedings on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Disclosure of Information) Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on the Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations.

Motion on the Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) Order.

Motion on the Value Added Tax (Cars) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order.

THURSDAY 16 JULY—Debates on the Adjournment.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet on Wednesday 21 October at 10.30 am to consider European Community document No. 5894/92 concerning relations with Libya.

It may also be for the convenience of the House to know that the provisional business for the first week after the summer Adjournment will be as follows:

MONDAY 19 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill

WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER—Opposition Day (4th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 22 OCTOBER—Debate on the White Paper "Health of the Nation", on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 23 OCTOBER—Debate on the policing of London, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

[Wednesday 21 October:
EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEE B
Relevant European Community Document
5894/92 Relations with Libya
Relevant Report of the European Legislation Committee
HC 79-ii (1992-93)]

Dr. Cunningham: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us notice of the business for the first week following the long summer recess. However, is it not rather curious that he has been able to give us that information three months in advance but has not yet adopted one of the simplest recommendations of the Jopling Committee—to give us the business two weeks in advance? If he can give us the information three months in advance, why has he not been able to adopt that Jopling Committee recommendation, which does not need a resolution of the House for its implementation, before now?

Why are we to debate the Jopling Committee report next week once again on a motion for the Adjournment of the House? Why is the Leader of the House not producing some specific recommendations for action to change the hours and working practices of the House, which would be widely welcomed?

May we have an assurance that, before the House rises for the recess next week, there will be statements in the Chamber on the Bingham report into the collapse of BCCI? Can we also have statements while the House is still sitting about the Government's White Papers on transport and education? Does the Leader of the House accept that it would be an abuse of the House for those very important White Papers to be published once the House has gone into recess, when hon. Members would have no opportunity to question the Cabinet colleagues of the Leader of the House about them?

Can the Leader of the House assure us that he will table today the Government's motion on Members' allowances for employment of staff and the financing of their offices? It is surely important that we see the terms of the Government's motion in good time for possible amendments to be tabled and so that we can all clearly understand the Government's intentions in that regard.

May I press the Leader of the House to ask his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to make a statement before the summer Adjournment on the future of the primary-purpose rule, which affects people and their families the length and breadth of this country? That is an essential matter for almost all hon. Members. It affects many of our constituents and we should have a statement from the Government clarifying their position.

Mr. Newton: Taking those questions nearly in reverse order, I can confirm that I expect to table later today a resolution on the office costs allowance for the consideration of the House. I will also obviously transmit the requests of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) for various statements to those to whom the requests are directed. I will do my best to ensure that important statements which need to be made are made in the appropriate way to the House.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the timing of the Bingham report is a matter for Lord Justice Bingham and not for the Government. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the undertaking that he sought in that respect.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's questions on the Jopling report, perhaps we might leave the first of them for discussion in the debate. His question appeared to be an advance contribution to that debate.

The debate is taking place on a motion for the Adjournment of the House for two reasons. First, as I have said on several occasions, it seemed appropriate with a substantial number of new Members and with an entirely different House of Commons that there should be a further general debate on the proposals before we proceed with what will, in some circumstances, be very complex details, on which we may need further guidance from the House. It is appropriate that, in the light of the general indications that the House provides on Monday, there will have to be further discussions between the usual channels, of which no doubt the hon. Member for Copeland may be part.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to make a statement in the House next week? It is widely rumoured that a consultation document will be published on Tuesday which will lead to the closure of a number of REME depots, including one in my constituency, with a loss of more than 200 jobs. The consultation for such a proposal will expire during the recess. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if there are to be changes in the support establishment for the British Army, the House should debate them before the decisions are taken?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will not expect me to comment on whatever speculation he has picked up, but I will undertake to draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): May I in parenthesis support the shadow Leader of the House in arguing that the matter of the primary-purpose rule should not be left until the middle of the summer recess? It must be dealt with before we rise. Will next Tuedsay's debate on office costs be cast wide enough to allow the argument to be put that those cash allowances, demeaning and misleading as they are, should be abolished altogether in favour of providing hon. Members with the staff and equipment necessary to do the job?

Mr. Newton: It will ultimately be for the Chair rather than for myself to determine the parameters of the debate, but I should be surprised if it were not open to the right hon. Gentleman to raise that point if he wished to do so.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I should be much obliged if hon. Members would ask one question. I could then call all hon. Members who wish to ask a question, and we could have speedy answers. That is a much more efficient way of conducting our business.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Is it correct that the Government's promised proposals on the change of the law on gipsies is to be deferred until the autumn? If that is the case, is it to be hoped that that is because officials and Ministers in the Department of the Environment now realise that my constituents and many others will not put up with those parasites continuing to live off the backs of law-abiding property owners and citizens? We want some draconian legislation to deal with the matter.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has obviously registered that I have not been able to announce a debate on those matters in the two weeks that I have covered in my statement, but I do not think that anyone is under any illusions about the strength of feeling among my hon. Friend and others: I certainly assure him of that.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Will the Leader of the House recognise that, in the uncertain international situation that exists and could persist until October, the House would expect to be recalled before any British forces were committed to military action or British bases were made available for military action? Will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance on behalf of the Government that the House would be recalled before any of our bases or troops were involved?

Mr. Newton: I note what the right hon. Gentleman has said. Obviously, if it were judged that the situation required it, I would be prepared to make the necessary arrangements, but the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that such matters would normally be the subject of discussion through the usual channels, and that is appropriate.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May I ask my right hon. Friend for a debate next week on school organisation so that I may bring before the House an application from the London borough of Ealing for a reorganisation of 108 schools which have been without permanent heads for nearly two years? A decision from the Government is urgent, and the matter should be debated in the House as soon as possible.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend would probably be somewhat surprised if, in response to his question, I immediately changed the business that I have announced for next week. He will be aware that there are several opportunities for raising all sorts of matters, one of which is to occur as soon as this business statement is over—the three-hour debate on the Adjournment.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Does the Leader of the House recall that I asked him last week whether there would be a statement from the Minister of Agriculture on the outcome of the International Whaling Commission conference in Glasgow? He said that he would pass on that request. Did he pass on that request? As we did not have a statement, could he pass it on again, because we need to hear what the Minister feels about the disgraceful decision of Norway and Iceland about the possibility of taking up commercial whaling?

Mr. Newton: I will certainly undertake to re-pass on the hon. Gentleman's request. He will be aware, however, that my right hon. Friend gave quite an extensive written answer last Friday, in which he made clear his views and the views of most other participants about the Norwegian action.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): May I add my voice to those who would like to hear a statement on the Government's proposals for the primary-purpose rule? May I offer my apologies to my constituents for the support that I gave the Government on the primary-purpose rule? I was unwise enough to believe that the House still decided immigration policies. Since we now find that our European masters decide such matters, will the Government please make a statement to explain to the House what little power is left to it?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will find that the judgment to which he refers was a great deal more narrowly drawn than the conclusions that he has drawn from it. Of course, I undertake to pass on his observations to my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): May we have an early statement on the Amnesty International report published today which, of course, largely repeats and amplifies the usual propaganda against the security forces in Northern Ireland? Such a statement would be

[Mr. David Trimble]

particularly useful because we can see from the Press Association's summary of the report that the propaganda has been too effective. The Press Association uses the word "notorious" about Northern Ireland's Diplock courts—a regrettable lapse from its usual standards of impartiality. As the Leader of the House will know, the record shows that there is cause for more concern about English juries than about Northern Ireland judges.

Mr. Newton: I will draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the headlines in the *Evening Standard* this afternoon? Are we to have our economic policy led from the other place, or are we to have an economic debate here? Can we not answer the vague remarks that have been made in private? Is it not time that the Prime Minister and the whole Cabinet took hold of the situation and arranged for a separate debate in the House on the economy?

Mr. Newton: We have very recently had a debate on the economy. I have seen the newspaper report to which my hon. Friend refers. It appeared highly speculative. All that I should like to say is that I have read it with interest.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Following the sad misjudgment of *The Sunday Times* in employing the services of that hero of the modern Nazis, David Irving, could we have a statement on the defects in the Public Order Act 1986 and the Race Relations Act 1976, which allowed that to happen? Does the Leader of the House agree that it is an abomination and an incitement——

Madam Speaker: Order. We are asking business questions for next week. We are not asking whether Ministers agree on various matters. We must stick with business questions.

Mr. Janner: As part of the Government's statement, could they express their view on the denial of the holocaust, which was an incitement not only to those of us who suffered grievous loss as a result of the holocaust, which happened with the knowledge of Irving's heroes Goebbels and Hitler, but to all of us who remember the past and are determined that it shall not happen again?

Mr. Newton: Many on both sides of the House will understand the hon. Gentleman's reasons for raising that matter. All of us would wish to join in the condemnation of what happened in the holocaust.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Following his welcome answer to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), does my right hon. Friend recognise that there is strong support in many parts of the House for the Government's cautious line on risking British lives in Yugoslavia? Does he agree that, before some of our hotter-headed friends on the continent try to talk us into further action, they should consider their position and perhaps consider sending German fighters, French lorries——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am a most tolerant Speaker —[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—but I will certainly not have political statements made during business questions. If the hon. Gentleman is prepared to put a question that is in order to the Leader of the House, I shall hear it. Otherwise, I shall call the next Member.

Mr. Brazier: I ask again, and I reinforce the point made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), that there should be a debate in the House before British troops are committed in Yugoslavia. There is widespread anxiety among people from all parts of the political spectrum and many parts of Britain about the idea of British troops being put at risk in combat roles on the ground.

Mr. Newton: I very much note what my hon. Friend has said. He is certainly right to expect that the Government will remain cautious in their approach to the matter.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Employment to make a statement about 120 unemployed constituents of mine who worked at a company called Lawtecs, six of whom are still waiting after almost a full year to receive their redundancy pay? Surely that is a disgrace which the House should not tolerate.

Mr. Newton: Clearly, I am not familiar with details of the case, but I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend looks into what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): May I put it to my right hon. Friend that there is a case for an urgent debate on the future of civil aviation? The Government were recently euphoric over an agreement in Brussels about the liberalisation of European air services, but people who have studied the small print and the deferral of the effect of that agreement feel that many British airlines will not gain very much very quickly from it. Surely the House should have the opportunity to debate the issue, in the best interests of British aviation.

Mr. Newton: Again, my hon. Friend will be aware that there are a number of opportunities today and before the House is due to go into recess to raise a variety of matters. I hope that he will be fortunate in achieving one of those opportunities. I cannot promise to change the business in the forthcoming week to accommodate such a debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it be possible before the House goes into recess for the Prime Minister to make a statement giving his views on how keen he is to have the ever ready advice—although it is friendly advice, I am sure—of his predecessor? Would it not be useful for us to know what he feels about Lady Thatcher giving her views on various subjects at every opportunity?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has good reasons for asking the question. I do not want to add to what I said a few moments ago to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill).

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): May I urge my right hon. Friend to go a little further than he did in answering my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) on the subject of caravan sites? It is a most important subject, and the Caravan Sites Act 1968 is proving unworkable. May we urge him to produce a statement on Government policy before we rise for the recess?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend not only can but evidently has urged me to do so. While acknowledging the strength

of feeling on the matter, I cannot give him quite the undertaking that he seeks. As was the case with my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East, who raised the matter earlier, I shall ensure that that concern is brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is there not the strongest case for a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland on the 1,300 job losses at Ardersier, which represent 5 per cent. of the Highland region's work force? In such a statement, would the Secretary of State have any policy initiative to announce, whether it be seeking objective 1 status, accelerating oilfield development, studying competitive tendering, or moving oil jobs from London to the north of Scotland? Or will the Government stand idly by and watch an economic blizzard descend on the north of Scotland?

Mr. Newton: On behalf of my right hon. Friend, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that he will certainly be concerned to do everything that is proper and appropriate to assist with the difficulties faced by the people to whom the hon. Gentleman has referred. Of course, the Government's efforts in developing the work of the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Board, which I am sure will seek to help in that respect, is a good example.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), is my right hon. Friend aware of an article in *The Guardian* on 8 July, headed "Euro court punches holes in migrants laws", in which it states that our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has promised that a copy of the draft convention on European frontier controls will be placed in the Commons Library? As yet, the paper is not in the Library. Could my right hon. Friend ensure that it is there soon, as the summer recess approaches rapidly?

Mr. Newton: I made some comment on the first point to which my hon. Friend adverted in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen). On the latter point, I shall certainly make inquiries about the position and seek to ensure that what my hon. Friend has asked for is achieved.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week to announce the extension of the Jubilee line, which would provide thousands of construction jobs in London and many jobs for those who manufacture trains, such as the work force at GEC in my constituency?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady is well aware of the repeated statements by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and others about the basis on which the Jubilee line would proceed. I do not think that I can go beyond that today.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Before my association with the Select Committee on Health is arbitrarily terminated, may I, on behalf of that Committee of the previous Parliament, ask my right hon. Friend when the Secretary of State for Health will come to the House to make a statement on the Government's reaction and response to the Committee's report on maternity services, which I remind the House was published on 4 March and should have been responded to long before now?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman, to my knowledge and from my observation——

Mr. Winterton: No longer friend?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend, whom I observed and listened to with care, was in the Chamber yesterday for the statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on "Health of the Nation" and he will be aware that that very report was raised by the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise). I do not believe that I can add to the comments that my right hon. Friend made at that time.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In view of the fact that we have a most tolerant Speaker, will there be a statement next week on the extraordinary information which has emerged from the Appeal Court, in relation to the case of Mr. David Mackenzie, whose sperm count and fertility make it quite clear that he was not responsible for the murder of Hilda Murrell? Could we have a statement on that, of which I have given notice to the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Newton: I have nothing to add to the categorical assurance that was given—and repeated subsequently—by the Minister of State, Home Office in his letter to the hon. Gentleman at the end of 1984 of his belief that the security and intelligence services were not involved in any way in the death of Mrs. Murrell.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will there be a statement next week on the water industry, bearing in mind the fact that a Government discussion paper on this topic is imminent and the terrible hardship endured by the people in the south-west, who last year experienced a 16 per cent. increase in their water rates, had another 16 per cent. increase this year and are likely to face a third 16 per cent. increase next year? Water metering is an extremely important issue. Will my right hon. Friend please arrange a statement either next week or certainly in the week when the House returns?

Mr. Newton: We have had a substantial debate on water issues within the past fortnight, and I do not believe that I can promise another within the next week. I will, of course, ensure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has his attention drawn to my hon. Friend's comment.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Could we have a statement at the earliest opportunity about whether any improvements will be made to this building during the recess to allow disabled people at least to rest somewhere and perhaps to have a meal as well, given that there are so few facilities for them at present?

No doubt the Leader of the House will have seen the story of Nicholas Killen, the little lad who has had his sight completely removed, of his bravery and the courage of his family. That little boy is now going to Temple Bank school for the partially sighted and blind in Bradford——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will come to the point about next week's business.

Mr. Cryer: Members of that school came round here 12 months ago, and I raised the question of facilities for disabled people then. There are absolutely none in this building, yet the Dining Rooms are booked by organisations where the fat cats can stuff themselves. I was

[Mr. Cryer]

promised 12 months ago that something would be done. Nothing has been done. What will happen during the recess?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that it is entirely appropriate to draw the particular comparison that the hon. Gentleman has drawn between facilities of one kind or another. It is certainly true that all of us would want further improvements in facilities here for disabled people. I am sure that the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee, now happily set up, will wish to pay heed to the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I remind my right hon. Friend that, at the end of the previous Parliament, his predecessor refused to have substantive resolutions tabled on the Jopling report on the sittings of the House? My right hon. Friend is following that sorry precedent even though, at the end of the previous Parliament, there were inevitably more senior parliamentarians than now. Could my right hon. Friend use the period after Monday's debate, before the recess, to table substantive resolutions drawing on the conclusions of that debate, so that we can implement them, hopefully in the first week back or very soon thereafter?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that it would be practicable to table resolutions during the recess, but I shall tell the House on Monday that it is very much my hope that during the recess we shall make progress in precisely the way my hon. Friend wants so that we can take substantive decisions at an early stage after we return.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I again draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 113.

[That this House contrasts the willingness of the British Ambassador to America to meet an American citizen, settled in the USA, to discuss why he was refused permission to visit the United Kingdom with the unwillingness of the British High Commissioner to Pakistan to make enquiries about a Pakistan citizen, settled in the United Kingdom for the last 18 years, who has been imprisoned in Pakistan for more than a year; again urges the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the honourable Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale, to instruct British officials at our post in Islamabad to contact Pakistani authorities to obtain full information about Chazanfer Ali, a constituent of the honourable Member for Bradford West who first asked the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for information on Mr Ali's case on 25th March; understands Mr Ali's wife and children, living in Bradford, are desperately worried about Mr Ali, who they have not seen for the past 22 months; and believes Mrs Ali and her family are entitled to expect the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to obtain full information about Mr Ali's circumstances, especially news as to when he is to be released from prison and allowed to return to his home and family in Bradford.]

It concerns my constituent, Mr. Chazanfer Ali, who is in prison in Pakistan, who next Wednesday will lose his automatic right to return to this country and who on Thursday will be making his first court appearance.

Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that, despite requests for information about Mr. Ali that I have made in the last three months to the Foreign Office, to the Pakistan High Commission, to the Prime Ministers of Britain and Pakistan and even to you, Madam Speaker, not a single crumb of official information has been passed to me about my constituent? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the Prime Minister that I am grateful for his letter of this week, that I am determined to ask for information about my constituent, and that I am equally determined that he does not become a forgotten man, separated from his wife and five children in my constituency?

Mr. Newton: I understand that there has been considerable correspondence between the hon. Gentleman and Ministers and that the principal difficulty is that Mr. Ali is a Pakistani national. As my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd) told the hon. Gentleman in a letter of 8 May, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has no standing to intervene in the case of a Pakistani national detained in Pakistan.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): May we have a foreign affairs debate on the question of the decorum of those who represent us abroad? If, by losing his seat, the new Governor of Hong Kong obtains his position, is it appropriate that everybody who greets him should dress properly in uniform while he discards his uniform and dresses like Harry Lime?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that I would wish—indeed, I am sure I would not wish—to be associated with that description of my right hon. Friend, a former Member of the House, now the Governor of Hong Kong. But, even from this distance, I hope to find some way of drawing his attention to what my hon. and learned Friend said.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the deep concern that has been expressed by hon. Members in all parts of the House about the environmental problems that arise from opencast coal operations? Is he further aware that, more than two years ago, we raised with the Department of the Environment the issue of what are called the mineral planning guidance notes, and were promised that the environmental issues would be looked into and consultations held? Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to make a statement next week on the results of those consultations and the changes that will be made to the MPG notes?

Mr. Newton: I shall, in the ordinary way, pass on the hon. Gentleman's request.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I refer the Leader of the House to the motion on the membership of Select Committees and, in particular, draw his attention to the fact that his hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) has been nominated to serve not only on the Scottish Select Committee but also on the Select Committee on Defence. Is he totally confident of his hon. and learned Friend's ability to apply his notable talents to two Select Committees at once—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must ask a question about next week's business; he must not make debating points. What is his question about next week's business?

Mr. Home Robertson: I was asking——

Madam Speaker: Order. I heard the preamble. I now need to hear the question.

Mr. Home Robertson: The question is whether it would be appropriate to debate a motion in those terms next week.

Mr. Newton: My task as Leader of the House was, first, to table a motion enabling the Select Committees to be set up, which we have successfully done, and then to table a motion to provide time for a motion to be debated to provide the complement of the Select Committees. Happily, the content of that motion is a matter for the Committee of Selection, and I direct the hon. Gentleman in that direction.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that the Minister of Agriculture has decided to have a meeting with Bolsover council and other groups next Wednesday on the subject of dioxin, may we have an assurance that a statement will be made by that Minister before or after the meeting, if he still feels up to it?

Mr. Newton: It seems highly unlikely that my right hon. Friend will be able to attend a meeting of the sort outlined by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) without making a statement of some sort.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The Home Secretary this week confided to *The Guardian* that he intended to reconstitute police committees in the same way as he had reconstituted health authorities. Will the Leader of the House arrange for his right hon. and learned Friend to come to the House next week to explain on what principles he will reconstitute the police committees? Are there not sufficient estate agents any more?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I should make it clear, in case there was any misunderstanding on the part of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) over my previous answer to him, that I was saying that, if my right hon. Friend the Minister has a meeting of the sort to which the hon. Gentleman referred, he will say something in the course of that meeting.

I shall bring to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary the issue raised by the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright).

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Defence to make a statement next week about the report published today by the marine accident investigation branch of the Department of Trade and Industry into the sinking of the Antares? In particular, will he state whether or not the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Navy accept the eight recommendations included in that report? It is absolutely essential that those recommendations are accepted if we are to ensure that the tragedy of the sinking of the Antares is not repeated, in the Clyde or elsewhere.

Mr. Newton: I will bring that request to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the Leader of the House find time next week for a statement on the Post Office? The President of the Board of Trade recently authorised the dropping of the Royal Mail prefix from the Post Office's Parcel Force. Is it not outrageous that that clear step towards privatisation was not even reported to the House, let alone debated properly?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is right to record the fact that that change of name has taken place. It reflects the fact that Royal Mail and Parcel Force are significantly different enterprises.

Mr. Jimmy Boyce (Rotherham): Can I urge the Leader of the House to set aside time before the onset of winter and a return of the scandalous deaths through hypothermia to debate cold weather payments at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Newton: As I well know from my role in a previous capacity, significant improvements were made in the cold weather payments system before last winter. My experience and view is that the new arrangements worked extremely well last winter, and a large amount of money —I think about £23 million—was paid out under them.

Adjournment of the House

Madam Speaker: I must remind hon. Members that, on the Motion for the Adjournment of the House on Thursday 16 July, up to nine hon. Members may raise with Ministers subjects of their own choice. Applications should reach my Office by 10 pm on Monday next. A ballot will be held on Tuesday morning and the results will be known as soon as posssible thereafter.

Adjournment (Summer)

Motion made and Question proposed,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 16th July, do adjourn until Monday 19th October.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

4.8 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I shall speak briefly on a subject which is of great importance. Before the House adjourns for the long recess, I want to refer to the serious problem of car crime in our community. Everyone is deeply concerned about the increase of crime, about which we have heard all too frequently. The figures show that the rise is almost entirely caused by the wholly unacceptable increase in crimes involving motor cars. In that respect we compare unfavourably with European and many other countries. It is a disgraceful stain on our reputation.

I should like to declare an interest in the matter. I have the honour to be the president of the Guild of Experienced Motorists, which represents about 70,000 motorists who are greatly concerned about road safety and have made many useful contributions. Car crime affects all parts of the country. It is especially worrying in my area of Cambridgeshire, where the level of general crime compares reasonably favourably with other parts of the country—but not in respect of crimes involving cars.

Not only does car crime affect the convenience and way of life of us all: it also leads to appalling incidents of what people foolishly call joyriding. I call it misery riding, because it leads to death and appalling maiming. The substantial increase in general crime is often facilitated by the use of motor vehicles which are used for burglary, attacking retail stores and bashing into premises and stealing from them.

The Government and responsible bodies should take every step to curb this menace in society. Motor manufacturers and insurers should accept responsibility. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, and certainly his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), met the motor manufacturers and endeavoured to persuade them of their responsibilities. I am not at all certain how successful they were. I do not necessarily expect the Leader of the House to tell me about that, but perhaps he would inquire of the Home Secretary.

My impression is that motor manufacturers are not over-keen to do anything other than making cars that will sell. They had to be persuaded by legislation to install safety belts, and other safety features in motor vehicles have emerged only because of Government action. I sometimes maintain that if it were not for the law, motor manufacturers would not bother to fit brakes. We must take a firm line with the manufacturers. It is essential for all new vehicles to be fitted with an alarm system or, better still, an immobilising system, because the only way to reduce car crime is to have vehicles properly immobilised.

I drew the Home Secretary's attention to advertisements for devices which could cancel car security systems. I wrote drawing his attention to devices called car grabbers. The Guild of Experienced Motorists and others have said that the device should be outlawed immediately. Apparently the grabbers can be used to open any vehicle with impunity, even when a security device is used. The manufacturers of the device say that it is to be used only by car recovery people, whatever that means.

In reply to my letter, the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), said that he appreciated concern about the matter but, speaking for the Home Office, he said:

"We do not . . . have any evidence that alarm deactivators are in fact commercially available in this country".

I alert him to the fact that they are available. I shall not mention the name of the firm, because I do not want to give it any publicity, but there is a firm in London which is producing leaflets about devices which can overcome any security system. They are called interceptors.

The publicity states:

"As more and more vehicles are . . . fitted with remote control alarm systems, recovery is often difficult".

The interceptor can intercept any system. The splendid advertising also states that the device

"has the outstanding ability to disable any remote control alarm system. Specially designed to assist in the recovery of vehicles . . . simply prevents any remote control alarm system* from being armed during the recovery of the vehicle."

After the asterisk, it is stated that the device is "DTI approved", which means that the Government know about the device and appear to have approved it. It strikes me that there is a serious lack of liaison between the Home Office and the Department of Trade and Industry.

The publicity warns:

"It is a criminal offence to use this device for vehicle theft."

Ooh-er—thank you very much. I am sure that all potential burglars and car criminals will immediately desist when they have seen that notice.

The Home Secretary has been rather naive, and I ask him and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to put a bomb under the Home Office and try to get the problem sorted out. It is absolutely disgraceful that we are wringing our hands and saying how appalling it is that vehicles are stolen and used for serious crimes and that people are maimed, injured and killed, yet we do not seem to take the slightest interest in the highly skilled technological devices available to criminals—which are approved by the DTI, if you please. I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to consider the problem seriously—it is not a joke but a subject of immense importance.

Next door to me is the county of Bedfordshire, which has one of the best records for containing crime. As I represent a Cambridgeshire constituency, it sticks in the gullet to praise Bedfordshire, but Bedfordshire has been so successful because the police there took the problem of car crime very seriously.

I shall now sit down because many other hon. Members wish to participate in this short debate, but I ask my right hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues to consider the issue seriously.

4.17 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): This is the earliest summer Adjournment I can remember. It may well be the earliest that any present Member of the House can recall. Everyone knows the reason: in the last few weeks, Government business has collapsed in the shambles over the Maastricht Bill. Yet many important matters merit urgent consideration and at least an oral ministerial statement before the House goes into recess.

The first of the two matters I want briefly to raise is one to which it would be very appropriate for the Leader of the House to respond since, for much of the past 13 years, he has had some responsibility for social security, latterly as Secretary of State.

He will know from our debates last year that the Opposition viewed with considerable scepticism some of the Government's claims about the disability living allowance and the disability working allowance. We felt strongly that false hopes of new help were being raised among people who would not qualify for a single penny piece from the allowances, particularly large numbers of elderly disabled people, and that in consequence there would be not only widespread and bitter disappointment but very considerable delays in processing the applications of entitled claimants.

That is exactly what has happened. In fact, protests from disabled constituents speak of the collapse of the whole benefits apparatus since the turn of the year. They are complaints from people who know only too well that, whereas average earnings have increased by over 20 per cent. since 1979, disability benefits have risen by only 1 per cent.

After the election I had complaints from the Terrence Higgins Trust that applications for attendance allowance for the terminally ill were being delayed by two months or more. What use is that? The right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton), who is now Leader of the House, took credit for introducing the special rules; but who takes the blame for the present chaos?

The Benefits Agency told me by letter that targets for delivering attendance allowance have not been met even, in many cases, to people in the final weeks of life. Failure to deliver benefits to the terminally ill must surely be a deeply serious matter. What good is financial help that comes posthumously? Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us how many cases are still outstanding and how long applicants can expect it to take to process their claims?

On 12 May, in reply to a parliamentary question, I received a letter from Mr. Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, giving details of the increase in claims. He told me that due to

"the extraordinarily high but rewarding level of interest that has been shown in the benefits, prompted by a major publicity campaign and the surge of claims that has resulted, we naturally faced early problems."

He added that it was not, therefore, surprising that the agency had been unable to meet the targets set for delivery of the attendance allowance. Rewarding to whom? It was not rewarding to disabled people, who now complain of trying over 20 times a day to phone the agency, without even being able to make contact.

I have been informed by the Terrence Higgins Trust —this was before raising the issue in the House—that the attendance allowance unit had been drained of staff and, in particular, of adjudication officers. This was glossed over in the letter to me, but in one to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) on 13 June Mr. Bichard was more explicit. He wrote:

"The national publicity campaign has had a knock-on effect in generating new claims to attendance allowance, at a time when staff were being released for retraining on the new disability living allowance work."

He added:

"I should explain that it was always expected that there would be a backlog of applications to deal with in the early months of operation as a result of the advertising campaign."

I do not blame Mr. Bichard or the agency for the shambles and nor, to my knowledge, does any other right hon. or hon. Member.

Ministers must take responsibility for what has happened. That the shambles has taken so long to come to light is due to the ease with which Ministers are now able to hide behind the Benefits Agency. When the right hon. Member for Braintree set it up, he promised that information to Members and the responsibility of Ministers to the House would in no way diminish. Yet almost all the facts are hidden in the Library and parliamentary questions are answered by the standard rubric. It is hard at times fully to understand the system. I still occasionally receive substantive replies from the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott), the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. As on the last occasion he had to apologise for giving me the wrong figures, I suspect that this courtesy may now cease entirely.

To test the availability of information to Members, I asked the Library to supply me with copies of all the replies from the Benefits Agency since the election. I was told:

"Unfortunately, owing to the large number of letters concerned, the Library is unable to supply photocopies of all the letters."

I was sent the latest 15, of which seven concerned delays in the administration of the attendance allowance and the disability living allowance. I have no quarrel with the Library, but in previous years all the information would have been in *Hansard*. It was the right hon. Member for Braintree who changed the system, making it difficult for Members of Parliament, and almost impossible for outside agencies, to obtain data that previously had always been readily available to them.

Apart from two exchanges at Question Time, there have been no opportunities to call Ministers to account. Unquestionably, we should have the opportunity to do so before the summer recess. We should also be told before the debate concludes whether the Benefits Agency's responses to parliamentary questions are covered by parliamentary privilege. That is a deeply important question. At the same time, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would tell us how many people have now qualified for the disability working allowance. As he knows, the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People has disclosed that only 588 claimants were awarded disability working allowance up to 8 May. That is only 6·5 per cent. of the 9,107 who applied. I understand that, in all, there were no fewer than 295,000 inquiries about the allowance.

Another matter that needs clarification before the House rises is the Government's attitude to civil rights for people with disabilities. In a parliamentary reply on 29 June, the Prime Minister said:

"The Government's view was stated principally on 31 January during Second Reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People".—[*Official Report*, 29 June 1992; Vol. 210, c. *375*.]

The clearest statement by the Minister in that Second Reading debate was when he said:

"I remain unrepentantly and benevolently neutral in my attitude".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1252.]

About that, one can only echo the Biblical words,

"He that is not with me is against me."

Perhaps the true position was stated by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment at oral

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

questions on 10 March. In straight conflict with what had been said by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on 31 January, the hon. Gentleman said:

"I do not believe, and the Government do not believe, that such a legislative approach is the right way to deal with the problem."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1992; Vol. 205, c. 735.]

For further obfuscation of the Government's position, I turn to Lord Henley. On 15 June, during the debate on the Bill in another place—following its introduction by my noble Friend Baroness Lockwood—Lord Henley intervened in a speech by my noble Friend Lord Ennals and said:

"I did not oppose the Bill. I said that I could not offer the Government's support. There is a considerable difference between the two concepts."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 June 1992; Vol. 583, c. 86.]

Perhaps the Leader of the House would explain the difference in practice and, at the same time, tell us how to reconcile the three ministerial versions of the Government's attitude to the Bill.

On 5 June, the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People sent me an extraordinary letter claiming that my proposed disablement commission

"would conflict with the work of advisory and enforcement bodies which already exist to oversee the implementation of legislation."

What are those bodies? In a reply on 26 June, he revealed —in a bizarre attempt to explain his previous letter—that those bodies included the Social Security Advisory Committee and the Sports Council.

Can the right hon. Gentleman think of one way in which the work of those admirable bodies could be impeded to any extent by my Bill—or, indeed, the work of the British Standards Institution or the War Pensions Committee? Clearly, the strain of being "benevolently neutral" is beginning to tell.

The Leader of the House was, as I have recalled, a Social Security Minister for many years. Understandably, at that time he had to uphold the departmental view, right or wrong. Now that he is Leader of the House, he has a responsibility to Members of Parliament as a whole, irrespective of where they sit in the House. Since becoming Leader of the House, he must have learnt, merely from reading the Order Paper day by day, that there is strong and increasing support, not just on both sides of the House but in every party, large and small, for the enactment of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. For example, he must have seen the range of support from all parties for early-day motion 330 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Dr. Berry), which states:

"That this House believes that anti-discrimination legislation is necessary to ensure equality of opportunity for people with disabilities; and calls for the early introduction of a Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill."

The support here for my Civil Rights Bill reflects closely the range of backing for it among the organisations of and for disabled people. They are utterly united in wanting the Bill enacted and nothing would give them more joy today than to hear from the right hon. Gentleman that the Government have now come down from the fence to help forward its enactment. I most strongly urge the right hon. Gentleman to do all that he can as Leader of the House to respond positively to their views before the recess. In so doing, he would be agreeing with colleagues in all parts of the House that this is not now a difference between right and left, but one between right and wrong.

4.30 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): I am most grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to make my maiden speech and, in advance of the summer recess, to raise matters of great concern to my constituents.

At the outset, however, I wish to pay a warm personal tribute to my predecessor, Christopher Hawkins, who served High Peak so well for the past nine years. He was a man of tremendous intelligence and many new and good ideas. Perhaps in a way that is less normal for a politician, he was much more interested in obtaining results than in obtaining publicity for them. He did an enormous amount for High Peak, which has earned him the great respect of people there and for which he will long be remembered. Fortunately, he is now enjoying much better health than when he decided to retire and I am delighted that his skills and talents will continue to be used as deputy chairman of the Black Country development corporation, continuing the good and important work of my noble Friend Baroness Denton.

In the few short weeks I have been in the House, I have already become extremely well aware of the immense affection also for Christopher Hawkins' predecessor, Spencer Le Marchant. None of us will ever forget that, in the early days of the broadcasting of proceedings of the House, it was Spencer's voice that told the world and a hushed and expectant nation the result of that important vote of confidence in 1979. It was those words which we now know spelt the end of socialism in Britain, which was so clearly confirmed by the results on 9 April this year. However, I must advise hon. Members not to expect from me the largesse of Spencer Le Marchant—obviously not in physical terms, nor also, for the sake of my bank manager, in terms of his legendary generosity.

I should like to express my thanks to two other people who, over the past couple of years, have given me a unique opportunity to see the workings of the House and Whitehall and to play an extremely small and minor part in the development of policy. They are my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and John Moore, who I am delighted is now rejoining Parliament in another place, to whom I was special adviser. At the risk of embarrassing my right hon. Friend, I could not have hoped to work for two more honourable, decent, far-sighted and fair men. I rather suspect that I learnt far more from them than they ever might have done from me.

That was certainly a far cry from the days when I first came to work in the House 10 years ago as a humble researcher for my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) in one of his many previous incarnations in the House. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend in the Chamber today. He paid me the princely sum—or whatever his equivalent would be of a princely sum—of £10 a week. I must have been one of the first people to realise, despite many other signs to the contrary, that my hon. Friend was already an ardent supporter of Thatcherite housekeeping principles. At that time I also worked for Peter Fraser—now my right hon., noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate—who paid me no money at all. Only in retrospect did I realise what sound judgment both must have had.

My first election campaign, in 1983, took place in Clackmannan. Contrary to the impression gained by some of my colleagues, I had not applied to stand at Clapham but, having stuttered, ended up 400 miles away in the

middle of Scotland! There I learned the importance of brevity. When I asked my agent why he had scheduled no public meetings for me, he said, "Well, Charles, it is better that people wonder why you do not speak than that they wonder why you do."

I want to draw attention to a number of issues relating to High Peak. Listening to the excellent maiden speeches by hon. Members on both sides of the House, I was slightly surprised to note how few of them had been there. If they had, they would have had to be satisfied with representing the second most beautiful constituency in the country.

High Peak is a constituency of unique and wonderful contrasts. It combines the rolling valleys of Hope Valley and the charming villages within it with the foreboding splendour and magnificence of Kinder Scout. It combines the majesty of Longden dale with the breathtaking beauty of the Derwent valley; and it incorporates towns such as Buxton—a magnificent Georgian town—with the industrial heritage of the manufacturing centres of New Mills and Glossop. It contains a variety of small towns such as Chapel-en-le-Frith, Whaley Bridge and Hayfield—delightful little places—and a host of small villages rejoicing in such names as Dove Holes, Sparrowpit and Wormhill. I have yet to find out why the birds in High Peak live underground while the worms apparently do not. Anyway, it is an area of tremendous contrasts, and it is a delight and a privilege to represent it.

High Peak, however, is not merely an area that people wish to visit; it is much more than that. In many ways, it provides the lungs—the breathing space—for Manchester and Sheffield, being less than a dozen miles from the centres of both those great cities. I simply do not believe that the people of a rural area such as High Peak can claim that the problems of those cities do not matter to them. We depend very much on them; many of my constituents work in them, and are making an important contribution to their revival.

High Peak contains problems as well as opportunities, and it is on those problems that I wish to comment. The first is the problem of access. In the past year, some 24 million people have visited the Peak district, which makes Blackpool seem like a minor resort. The road infrastructure that they have used has scarcely changed in the past 40 years, and we now experience tremendous problems of traffic clogging in places such as Glossop, and on the A628 to the north of that town. Those traffic problems urgently need relief: on weekday mornings the rush-hour traffic is as bad, as slow and as frustrating as it is in any city in the country. Towns such as Buxton also need a bypass if they are to enjoy the growth that they deserve. In places such as Dove Holes, a bypass could be built simply, cheaply and rapidly. I hope that the Government will consider the possibility of building roads in those areas.

Because High Peak is an area of such outstanding natural beauty, I hope that the Government will also pay particular attention to the environmental impact of those roads. The A6 badly needs relief as it is seriously clogged, but it would be a tragedy if that relief destroyed the environment that people wish to visit. I hope that the serious concern felt by people in New Mills will be taken into account.

I also wish to raise the general issue of conservation. Buxton is one of the brightest jewels in the shining crown of High Peak. It is a magnificent Georgian town, and we are fortunate enough to have one of the country's smallest and most special opera houses. Owing to the diligence of those who run it, the opera house has one of the most successful records in the country: it manages to put on new productions that people actually want to see and, more important, it does so with a fraction of the subsidy given to other opera houses. Buxton's subsidy is 27p per seat; the average for similar theatres is more than £3. So, for less than 10 per cent. of the average, people are being looked after and have a tremendous asset.

Next week the international Buxton festival will open, which will bring people flooding into the town not only from the surrounding area but from all over the country and from overseas. Sadly, this year visitors will be shocked by the state of the magnificient Georgian crescent in the centre of the town. It is boarded up and derelict, posing an increasing danger to people passing through the town who visit it. I urge my right hon. Friend to contact his colleagues in Government to find out what can be done by bringing together people who could assist in the restoration of the crescent. I am encouraged by the way in which High Peak borough council, Derbyshire county council—it is rare for that council to be praised—and English Heritage are working constructively together to secure the future of the crescent, but I also urge the Government, through the Secretary of State for National Heritage, to do whatever they can to assist.

In spite of those few problems, we are fortunate to live in High Peak. I invite those who do not live there to come to the festival, or to see something else at the opera house. I consider myself the luckiest Member of the House, because I can be in Westminster during the week and in my constituency in the Peak district for the rest of the time. If some attention could be paid to the small matters that I have mentioned, High Peak would become an even more attractive place in which to live and work, and a more attractive place to visit.

4.41 pm

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): I congratulate the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) on his interesting maiden speech, which gave us a graphic picture of his constituency. Those of us who know Derbyshire know how beautiful his constituency is. The important issues that he raised about the environment, infrastructure and conservation are all germane to many of our constituencies; they are important matters and should be brought to the attention of the Government. I congratulate the hon. Member on his speech and hope that we shall hear many more contributions from him. When he listed his hobbies and recreations, I was struck by the contrast between his—he talks of skiing and tennis—and mine, which are beer drinking and all card games. I also appreciated his earlier contribution to public welfare when he told us about all the charity work that he did for his colleagues both inside and outside the House in the years before he entered this place.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in the debate and I shall make my points briefly as I am aware that many other hon. Members wish to speak. Earlier this week, we had an interesting and important debate on the recession. On Monday, particular mention was made of the continuing difficulties that we are experiencing in the west midlands. In my constituency in Wolverhampton there are continual job losses, company closures and bankruptcies. Unemployment is at a high level. In most

[Mr. Dennis Turner]

parts of my constituency and the rest of Wolverhampton, male unemployment is more than 20 per cent. That is a serious situation for many of my constituents, who are unable to make a contribution to our society and have no opportunity to live a decent life, because the standard of living on the dole is not, and should not be, acceptable to us.

A further blow to my community in Wolverhampton has been the recent hostile and unwelcome bid made by Kalon plc for the Manders paint works in Wolverhampton. We all understand that in the business world there are times when a merger or takeover is regarded as desirable and is accepted, when a company faces difficulties and needs assistance, but Manders is a company which has traded successfully for the past 200 years. It is the foremost company in Wolverhampton; it has first-rate industrial relations and a first-rate product, and we in Wolverhampton are all proud of it.

The hostile bid is a serious blow to the town, first, because of its effect on jobs. We may lose as many as 500 jobs in Wolverhampton and in a subsidiary company in Yorkshire which will be wiped out if the bid is successful. Furthermore, the company making the bid serves the own-brand paint market, and if it were successful it would control more than 70 per cent. of that market. A serious competition issue therefore arises. If the competition were taken out, the bidding company would be able to increase prices and act not in the interests of our economy or of consumers but against the public interest. Neither Manders and its workers nor our town accept that that bid is in any way helpful to the economy or to Wolverhampton.

The bid should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. It is a classic case for the anti-competition rules. If it is not a classic case for reference to the MMC, that body and that method of dealing with such issues must be a complete waste of time, and the whole apparatus should be abandoned.

Having listened to my speech, will the Leader of the House be prepared at least to ask the President of the Board of Trade kindly to consider the matter? We are worried about the jobs, about lack of competition in that sector of the market, and about the future of a great company.

Manders was the first company to sign the 40-hour working week agreement with the trade unions back in 1927, and since then it has always operated a policy of good industrial relations. Manders has an excellent product; we in Wolverhampton are proud of the company and of its work force, and we need to keep it in our town. I therefore ask the Leader of the House kindly to refer the matter to the President of the Board of Trade so that justice can be done and we can continue to have that profitable and successful company in Wolverhampton.

4.48 pm

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I join the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) on a confident and excellent maiden speech. I remember how nervous I was when I made my own. I admire my hon. Friend for seeming not to have a care in the world, but no doubt a great deal of fluttering was going on inside.

I was grateful that my hon. Friend paid a particular tribute to Spencer Le Marchant, who was one of the most generous people ever to sit in the House. It was brave of my hon. Friend to reveal that he had worked for a pittance for one of my Scottish hon. Friends, and for nothing at all for my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate. When we debate the subject of people living on small incomes, no doubt my hon. Friend will be able to speak with experience. The people of High Peak made a good choice when they elected him as their Member of Parliament in April. I am sure that he will receive congratulations from every right hon. and hon. Member who heard his maiden speech.

Ticket touting is a serious problem, which must be tackled sooner rather than later. Touts operate in various forms—as private individuals, as organised groups on the streets outside theatres and sports venues and masquerading as ticket agents by operating from apparently authentic premises. The latter present a particular danger in the west end. They have the semblance of respectability. By displaying publicity material for various shows, they give the impression that they are genuine agencies, such as the Keith Prowse chain which collapsed a few years ago. The public are taken in because they believe that they are using a respectable business.

All too often, however, an unsuspecting tourist will find that he has paid well over the odds. Touting can mislead and defraud the public, who may pay an extortionate price that is way above a ticket's face value. It often transpires that the seats purchased have a restricted view, contrary to assurances given at the time of purchase. If one goes to a theatre box office, one will be told if the seats offered are located behind a pillar or at the back of the stalls. It is disgraceful to pay an agency a great deal of money for a ticket, only to find that one's view of the stage is obstructed.

It has also been known for people arriving at a theatre to collect their pre-paid tickets to discover that they are not available because the agency has gone out of business or has moved to unknown premises.

The Society of West End Theatre produced a dossier of cases. Two German tourists paid £75 each to see "The Phantom of the Opera", when the ticket's face value was £8·50. Two Norwegian tourists paid £50 for tickets for "Starlight Express", only to find that their seats offered a restricted view from the back row. A tourist from Essex paid an agency £54 for a ticket that had a face value of £7·50. Tennis fans have paid as much as £650 for finals day tickets having a face value of £36. Football supporters have paid £250 for FA cup final tickets with a face value of £35. I can only imagine that they had more money than sense to pay such prices. Such practices do a great deal to harm the British tourist industry and to deter tourists from patronising certain events.

Touts also enjoy substantial profits without making any contribution to the state in the form of income tax or value added tax.

In February, my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) made a widely reported speech at Brunel university in his capacity as Under-Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms. He announced plans to give consumers more protection and greater redress, including a proposal to

ensure that when agencies resell tickets for theatres and other public events, they disclose the location, face value and other relevant information to the prospective buyer. I shall be grateful if my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will say when that commitment will be implemented.

Urgent action is needed if London is to avoid the description of ticket tout capital of the world. Of course we must acknowledge market principles, and I know that one of my hon. Friends is in favour of ticket touts. Everyone is entitled to his opinion—but the market mechanism is free and fair only if the buyer of goods or services has full knowledge of the proper market price and can be confident that the vendor is authorised to sell.

Why cannot the code of practice in the Consumer Protection Act 1987 be made statutory so that it becomes a definite offence to deface the face value of a ticket, and amended in such a way that it is legally clear and easier to enforce? Ticket agencies should also be licensed so that tickets can be bought only from authorised establishments. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment should have powers to make regulations allowing local authorities to license ticket sellers and third parties to sell tickets on closely controlled terms. All other sales to the public would become illegal. Licensing must be the ultimate long-term objective.

We can learn from the experience of another great theatre city—New York. There was a time when touting in that city was creating enormous problems, so the state legislature introduced laws forbidding it. New York ticket sellers are required to be licensed, submit a bond of $1,000, print the mark-up on the ticket, display their licence in a public place and keep a record of all their transactions. If such arrangements are possible in New York, why are they not in London and other parts of the United Kingdom?

Most right hon. and hon. Members regard touting as morally reprehensible. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education, when Minister of State, Home Office, described the practice as obnoxious. I would never buy from a ticket tout. Some years ago, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jnr. and Liza Minnelli starred at a concert in the Royal Albert hall, for which tickets were at a premium. My wife and I very much wanted to attend the last night, but could not obtain tickets anywhere. Someone suggested that I should stand outside the hall with cash in my pocket, because the chances were that just as the show was due to start, the touts would sharply reduce their asking prices. I would rather that they burnt their fingers by being left with unsold tickets and making a loss on their transactions.

Tourism is important to our economy, and tourists are a particular target for the touts. A few years ago, Westminster city council—which covers most of the west end theatres—undertook an investigation that confirmed that foreign visitors were the most likely to be overcharged. The report stated:

"This has important implications for tourism. Why should tourists pay more for the same product?"

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will inform the Department of Trade and Industry's consumer affairs division that many people, including myself, are impatient for the pledge that was given on 20 February by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle to be implemented. I hope that an announcement will be made before the summer recess.

4.58 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I congratulate the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) on what I, too, thought was an excellent maiden speech. However, he suggested that many hon. Members had not visited High Peak. My parents lived and worked in his constituency for many years and I had the opportunity to visit it on many occasions. While I accept the way in which he extolled the beauty of his constituency, I am not prepared to relegate my constituency to second place behind his.

I want to raise an issue that is very important for people in my constituency and for those in the constituencies of many other hon. Members. It relates to a group of people who, if we are not careful, may become the forgotten victims of the Maxwell scandal. I gave the Leader of the House warning that I was going to raise the issue and I hope that I will, therefore, hear positive news when the right hon. Gentleman replies to the debate.

Hon. Members will be aware that a few weeks ago the Secretary of State for Social Security announced that he was making available a sum of £2·5 million

"to provide temporary, emergency funding to help Maxwell schemes which are unable to maintain pension payments over the next few months."—[*Official Report*, 8 June 1992; Vol. 209, c. 20.]

That announcement was warmly welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House and many people sighed with relief. For many Maxwell pensioners who already receive a pension, it provided some certainty that those pensions would continue for at least the next few months.

However, there remains a great deal of uncertainty for many other people affected by the Maxwell scandal. I particularly want to draw those people to the attention of the House and hope that before we go into recess we shall be able to resolve their anxieties and uncertainties.

As hon. Members will be aware, the winding-up arrangements of the Maxwell pension schemes mean that people who reach pensionable age after February of this year are still treated as deferred pensioners. In many cases, they will not receive a pension through a Maxwell pension scheme unless the Secretary of State for Social Security and his newly established Maxwell pension unit are prepared to arrange for that to happen.

I have spoken to the Maxwell pension unit and I am grateful for its help. However, it told me that, to date, no decision has been taken on whether that group of deferred pensioners will receive assistance from the £2·5 million fund. It is important that we are told, as a matter of urgency, whether they will be helped in that way.

Another group of victims of the Maxwell pension scandal have been affected in a more complicated way. They are victims of the Maxwell scandal, but they are not currently members of a Maxwell pension scheme. To illustrate the complexity and importance of the situation, I want to refer to a group of my constituents.

In the mid-1980s, Robert Maxwell acquired the Hollis Engineering Group of companies, which included Stothert and Pitt in my constituency and Floform in the constituency of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). The companies that formed the Hollis Engineering Group each had their own, well-funded pension schemes. However, when Robert Maxwell took over the companies, they were brought together in a single, new pension scheme now known as AGB.

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Subsequently, as a result of a management buy-out, yet another pension scheme—the Victoria Works pension scheme—was established. It was independent of AGB—the Maxwell scheme. An agreement was reached that a sum of about £4 million of transfer-valued assets would be transferred to the Victoria Works scheme. However, only about £1·3 million was transferred, leaving a shortfall of more than £2 million in the new Victoria Works scheme.

At that point, the Maxwell saga blew up. The scandal broke and we discovered that AGB was unable to transfer the remaining amount into the Victoria Works pension scheme. Because of the fraud, AGB cannot hand over money owed to the Victoria Works scheme which affects 70 of my constituents. As the scheme has no other source of funds, it will very shortly be insolvent.

In short, that means that 70 of my constituents belong to a pension scheme which, because of the Maxwell fraud, will become insolvent. They will stop receiving their pensions very soon. In a few months' time, more of the 250 deferred pensioners will not receive pensions. At the moment, they are not part of a Maxwell pension scheme. Therefore, they do not appear to fall within the remit of the £2·5 million fund. Can that £2·5 million emergency fund be extended to the Victoria Works pension scheme?

George Busby is 67 years old and he is one of those affected in my constituency. He paid into a pension scheme for 30 years and retired at the end of 1989. He told me today that he is now seriously considering selling his home and that, with the threat of the loss of pension hanging over him, he is unable to make plans for a holiday. He said:

"The strain of not knowing whether you're going to be able to provide for your wife and dependants is intolerable. All the years of planning for retirement are destroyed."

Given that the Leader of the House has had notice of the matter, I hope that he will be able to assure me that active consideration is being given to the possibility of money from the £2·5 million fund being transferred to the Victoria Works pension scheme, which is not the only scheme affected. There are nine other schemes, with asset values close to £10 million, that still have not been transferred from AGB, and their pensioners are in a similar position. I understand that some other Maxwell pension schemes may also face similar problems.

The issue is complex and it will require a great deal of sorting out. However, I hope that that can be achieved very quickly because many people are affected.

5.7 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I am most grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye and so make my maiden speech. I follow the conspicuous and eloquent maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry). Mine is very much a valley after his great heights.

I have the honour of succeeding Sir Ian Lloyd, who was the Member for Havant for 25 years. He was a most assiduous and well-respected constituency Member and he was ably assisted by his wife Frances who made a particular contribution to the local work of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Ian was a most distinguished parliamentarian. He was never cramped by day-to-day political argument but always took the long view. In his maiden speech in 1965, he reminded the House of an ancestor of his who successfully introduced a measure in 1693 to denationalise the mines—one of the preconditions for our industrial revolution. It is particularly apt, therefore, that we will be able to celebrate the 300th anniversary of that measure by setting the mines free once more.

Perhaps Ian's influence was strongest in science and technology. It is one of those ironies of political life that, within a few months of his taking his retirement, two measures for which he fought long and hard have finally been implemented. On 1 May, we saw created the Office of Science and Technology, falling within the responsibilities of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Ian had also fought for the creation of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. For a while, it was financed entirely through private sponsorship, but again, only a few weeks ago, the House of Commons Commission finally voted public funds to support that office. I hope that both measures can be regarded as our tribute to Sir Ian Lloyd on his retirement.

Before the House adjourns, I should like to raise several matters that are of concern to my constituents. Havant stands literally at a crossroads and has done so since Roman times. It stands where the A3 from Portsmouth to London intersects the A27 coastal road. A new A27 was recently constructed. It was intended to bring relief to the area, but sadly it has blighted the lives of many people in Warblington and Emsworth. Its deeply ridged concrete surface produces the notorious A27 roar. When the road was opened, the Department of Transport described the surface as "experimental". It is an experiment which has failed. We in Havant are fighting a battle for bitumen. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and I look forward to meeting our hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic next week, when we will argue forcefully for resurfacing the A27.

Hon. Members have often referred in their maiden speeches to the sense of community in their constituencies. Havant has its sense of community, too—but perhaps that sounds a trifle worthy or even dull. I assure the House that it is not like that at all. The other week, I had the honour of taking part in the Havant annual town parade, and was preceded by giant Sooty and Sweep puppets, an array of teenage mutant ninja turtles and the south coast's finest Norman Wisdom impersonator. It was a most enjoyable event.

The borough of Havant comprises several distinct communities, and few issues arouse as much emotion as proposals to build on the remaining green land that survives between them. The last thing that we want Havant to become is one long anonymous urban agglomeration. Each part of the constituency, from Hartplain to Emsworth, values its own identity. Waterlooville, for example, is the place where British soldiers camped before embarking to defeat the forces of Napoleonic centralism at Waterloo, that famous battlefield 100 miles south-east of Maastricht. Napoleon, of course, had a notoriously limited grasp of the important idea of subsidiarity—it extended only as far as making his brother King of Spain.

Emsworth used to be famous for its oysters, until a most unfortunate incident at a banquet nearly 100 years ago, when civil dignitaries, local grandees and councillors became extremely ill on eating Emsworth oysters, and I am afraid that some died. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that that is no way to treat local councillors.

There are also the people of Hayling Island, who have taken the sensible precaution of preserving their distinct identity by arranging to be an island. It has rich agricultural land and a very fine beach—one of the 16 in the country to have been awarded the coveted blue flag. It was a Hayling islander who first had the idea of putting a mast on a surfboard, and thus windsurfing was created. I am pleased to say that Hayling remains one of the world centres for that sport.

The names of some parts of my constituency may ring a faint bell with hon. Members who have read their P. G. Wodehouse—Lord Emsworth, Lady Warblington, even the Duchess of Havant. P. G. Wodehouse lived in the area for a time, and parts of it are now immortalised as the titles of upper-class eccentrics in his novels. But my constituents are very far from being characters in a P. G. Wodehouse novel, because, above all, what we do in Havant is make things. We have a concentration of world-class manufacturing firms. We are therefore particularly concerned about the state of the economy.

There is no disguising the recession. Our firms in Havant are going through a difficult time, just like many firms around the country. It is no good gloating over the recession and taking a snapshot of the economy when it is at the bottom of an economic cycle. Instead, we have to compare the full economic cycle—the upswing and the downswing—with the previous economic cycle. That way, we can take a step back and measure the changes in the underlying performance of the economy. We find that a lot has changed for the better in the 1980s. During the full cycle from 1981 until now, the British economy has had an average growth rate of more than 2 per cent. a year. That compares with the previous economic cycle from 1975 until 1981, when we had an average growth rate of a little more than 1 per cent. per year. It is a measure of the conspicuous improvement in the underlying performance of our industry, and I see in Havant the practical evidence that lies behind those statistics.

IBM has a large factory in Havant. Its output has trebled in the past few years. Only the other week, an IBM manager was telling me how his Havant plant could compete with its rival IBM plant in Germany and outperform IBM's Japanese point in both quality and cost control. I asked him how that was achieved and he said that it was because of

"our more flexible employment legislation."

We are now beginning to gain back from the far east the technological lead in computer disc drives which was lost 10 or 20 years ago.

The other day, another Havant firm was floated on the stock exchange—Kenwood. It was created by Mr. Ken Wood, although he was not, as far as I know, a chef. That firm had languished in a large conglomerate, but, after a management buy-out a few years ago, its performance has been transformed. Kenwood's sales have been booming and it is now beating competition from France and Germany. There are many other such firms, such as De la Rue systems, Apollo fire detectors and Colt ventilation systems. They are all at the sharp end of British industry and they are exporting much of their output. The dynamism of such firms lies behind the transformation of our trade performance, with our share of world trade increasing in the past three years, having stablished during the 1980s, after years—decades—of decline.

Several of our exporters in Havant have criticised the performance of the Dutch firm that has taken over some of the short-term insurance responsibilities of the Export Credits Guarantee Department. I have written to my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade about their concerns. Other firms still feel that they do not yet have completely open access to the European market and that we in Britain are more serious about free trade than some other member states of the EC. I therefore welcome the fact that the Government have made completion of the internal market one of their priorities for the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community.

Havant is a young constituency, so we are very interested in the standards of our schools. Many were built during the 1960s and, sadly, are in need of repair or even complete rebuilding. We are worried that educational planners are so preoccupied with the decline in the number of secondary school pupils that they have lost sight of the baby boom and the increase in the number of very young children. We now have nearly 4 million under-fives, compared with a little more than 3 million in the early 1980s.

In 1998 there will be about 15 per cent. more primary school pupils than in 1984. Therefore, we need to be wary of closing infant and junior schools precisely when we can see an increase in the number of young infants who will soon join them. I shall fight to ensure that changes to our schools proposed by Hampshire county council take account of these trends and the clear wishes of parents and teachers.

Some people ask me why my constituency, which contains Leigh Park, one of the largest council estates in Britain, returns such a substantial Conservative majority. That is the old snobbish assumption that Conservatism is just for the upper crust. One of the best aspects of the count in Havant on 9 April was when the ballot boxes from Leigh Park were opened and we saw the voting papers pouring out, so many with a cross for the Conservatives. It was evidence that the modern Conservative party understands the aspirations of the people on the council estates as well the people on the Bovis estates.

They are people who have bought their council house thanks to Conservative policies. They are people who work in private firms and know that the success of those firms, their jobs and their prosperity depend on a healthy private sector. They are people who care about standards in their schools. They are people who try to bring up their children decently and have no truck with the sociological defences of the criminal. They are people who want more choice in health and education, who want to keep a greater share of their pay packets to spend in the way that they know best. The modern Conservative party speaks for them. I am proud to represent them.

5.21 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): It is with pleasure that I congratulate the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on his maiden speech. He showed a great deal of self-confidence and a clear and intimate knowledge of his constituency. I am sure that his constituents will realise from what he said that he is keen to represent them. I am sure that they recognise that his voice will be heard on many occasions on their behalf in the House.

I listened to the hon. Gentleman's views on education with some interest. I also noted his comments about the state of the British economy. I know that it is a tradition

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of the House that maiden speeches should not be controversial, so I wait for further comments from the hon. Gentleman on the state of the British economy. I wonder whether, in view of one of his previous incarnations and his close relationship with a new Member of the other place, he has read in tonight's *Evening Standard* the criticisms of the state of the British economy. But perhaps that debate is better left for a later occasion.

I also heard with interest and welcomed the comments that the hon. Gentleman made about his predecessor, Sir Ian Lloyd, who was well known and respected in the House. As the hon. Gentleman said, he was particularly respected for his work on science. It is appropriate that the issue that I wish to raise relates to science. It is one in which Sir Ian Lloyd would be particularly interested.

I wish to raise the case of Dr. Chris Chapman, who is faced with the sack from Leeds general infirmary. Dr. Chapman is, in the new journalistic jargon, a whistleblower. He is a man who has told the truth. In the new world of the national health service, he is about to lose his job because he has courage, integrity and a willingness to tell the truth. He will lose his job on the day before his 50th birthday, so he will not receive the enhanced pension to which he would be entitled 24 hours later.

So keen was the senior managment of Leeds general infirmary trust to ensure that Dr. Chapman lost his job on the last day of his 50th year that the notice of his dismissal was sent by a courier on a motorbike. There was no personal notice for Dr. Chapman, but simply a motorbike to ensure that the enhanced pension was lost.

Dr. Chapman has served our national health service for more than 20 years. He has given his life to the national health service; he has given considerably more years than those who wish to get rid of him; he has made a significant scientific contribution; he is respected widely as a scientist; he has saved the national health service an estimated millions of pounds.

According to one of Dr. Chapman's colleagues quoted in one of our national newspapers, Dr. Chapman is

"probably the most competent scientist in the department, a good innovator and has an excellent relationship with his staff."

One would think that those were good attributes which would allow someone to maintain his job. In the new national health service and the new Leeds general infirmary trust, that seems to be a condemnation.

Dr. Chapman is a man of service who has made a scientific contribution and, above all else, he is a man of integrity. He has played the game by the internal rules; he has never rushed to the papers; he has never uttered a word to the newspapers, television or radio. At all times he has raised issues internally within the national health service.

On three occasions, in 1987, 1989 and 1991, Dr. Chapman raised issues of substantial importance. Now we are told that he is to lose his job. The reason given is that he is redundant. I put it to the House that there are 200 people in the department and only one person is to be made redundant. The man to be made redundant is the one described by one of his senior colleagues as the best scientist in the department. Some of us have had experience of industrial relations in private industry. I have never come across a departmental reorganisation involving 200 people which has led to the sacking of only one person. It is a unique experience.

Who are the people who have made the judgment that Dr. Chapman, this able scientist, is no longer needed at Leeds general infirmary? Let me name them. They are Stuart Ingham, the chief executive, on £90,000 a year. He was charged by the statutory auditors in 1987 to have a more direct responsibility for what has happened in the department in which Dr. Chapman works. Ingham has failed to fulfil that responsibility. He survives, Chapman is sacked.

Professor John Whicher has been involved all the way through as head of department. He failed to fulfil his responsibility. Not only does he survive, he has been promoted. Dr. Ian Barnes was also involved in the decision about Chapman's redundancy. He survives despite his involvement, to which I shall refer later.

On the first of the three occasions, in 1987, Dr. Chapman raised issues about money and financial irregularities in Leeds general infirmary. Those allegations were proved correct by the statutory auditors, who said that various people—Ingham, Barnes and Whicher—had a managerial responsibility to ensure that there was no repeat of the events in that department. Yet we now know that they did not fulfil their responsibility and further transgressions took place. Dr. Chapman made two further allegations, both of which have sadly proved correct.

The first allegation involved Dr. Barnes, the head of the immediate unit in which Dr. Chapman works. Dr. Ian Barnes has worked for the Leeds general infirmary since 1987. He has had a consultancy contract with a Belgian firm called Medgenix. That firm, that contract and that consultancy have all operated against the NHS circular HS62/21 which, as hon. Members on both sides of the House will know, asks that consultancy arrangements between NHS staff and outside organisations should be clear and known and that the details of the financial transactions should be available. In Dr. Barnes's case, that simply does not seem to have happened. The substance of the evidence is that Dr. Ian Barnes was employed by the national health service and was also engaged as a consultant for the biochemical supply firm, Medgenix. That engagement has never been properly declared by Dr. Barnes and, in contravention of NHS procedures, he received payments from that firm.

Dr. Chapman made that allegation and it was subsequently substantiated. Dr. Barnes was on the committee that decided that Chapman should lose his job —that there is no causal relationship stretches belief.

The Leeds general infirmary management and senior executives of the trust argued that Dr. Barnes was not immediately in receipt of money and therefore the relationship with Medgenix did not exist. At the hearing on Dr. Chapman's appeal against the redundancy notice, Dr. Barnes confessed that he was a consultant with Medgenix and he pushed their products and science into the department, even though they did not stand up to examination, as Dr. Chapman rightly said.

Barnes is part of the group which sacked Chapman, who was the whistleblower and man of integrity. Barnes is the man who failed to disclose what was going on.

In 1991, Dr. Chapman made another serious allegation about a project headed by Professor Whicher and indirectly involving Dr. Barnes. He alleged that there had been scientific fraud and that, in essence, results were being fabricated. The project was called Interleukin 6—IL6—and it was crucial to the development of biochemistry. It was believed that the project would give the Leeds general

infirmary a head start over other organisations in a commercial world. The research findings and processes were fraudulent.

Chapman argued for an inquiry and, to its credit, the university of Leeds set up an internal inquiry. Sadly, although the inquiry came to a conclusion on 9 March 1992, its report was not published. Yet Dr. Chapman's allegations were proven to be correct. It is worth studying the panel of investigators, which comprised Professor Willoughby of the experimental medical college of St. Bartholomew's hospital in London, Professor Gowland of the immunology department of clinical medicine at the University of Leeds, and Professor Brown of the department of biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of Leeds. They are three eminent people and not three junior scientists. They all came to the conclusion that the allegation of fraud against Dr. Evans had been proven. They said that the balance of evidence supported the view and that there had been fraud in so far as Dr. Evans has falsely claimed to have had bioassays performed on his putative IL6. That was the substance of the allegations and findings.

The management of Leeds general infirmary, under Mr. Stuart Ingham, said that it was not a matter for them, but it is, for two reasons. First, while a university employee committed the fraud, NHS moneys were involved. At least £100,000 of NHS money has been wasted on fabricated results. As taxpayers, we have a right to ask questions about the money. We also have the right to ask other questions. If scientific fraud has been committed in one of our great institutions, surely we should know what is going on. The results of the inquiry should be published.

Secondly, Professor Whicher was head of department. The university report criticised him for negligence. He was also a founder member of the hospital trust and a close friend of Ingham. Whicher was accused of negligence, and was promoted, and his friend Ingham is sacking Chapman. Only one conclusion can be drawn from that—the man of integrity goes down and the others survive.

The general infirmary management has an interest. It has been said that the matter solely concerned the university and that supervision of the project was nothing to do with the infirmary. Let us forget about the NHS money involved for the moment, although it is important. If a journalist fabricates stories for 12 months, one would expect him to be sacked and would ask questions about the editor of the journal. In the case of the Leeds general infirmary, the person who fabricated the story is still in a job and the editor's equivalent, Professor Whicher, has been promoted.

These are serious matters. We are dealing with an injustice against one person. I know that Conservative Members do not like it and I know why. We are talking about injustice and they are not bothered about people who suffer that sort of injustice. They are not bothered about the new-style management of the NHS, which has so little time for men of integrity. That is why it is prepared to sacrifice Dr. Chapman.

If Dr. Chapman is sacrificed next week, it will be a blow to the integrity of British science and a blow to the way in which we manage the NHS. Even at this late stage, the Government have a responsibility to intervene. I do not want a world or a national health service in which people are afraid to speak out and are not allowed to tell the truth because they fear for their jobs.

Since 9 April, health service trust managers have had a green light to sack whistleblowers. Dr. Chapman is one of a small and courageous group of people who want to defend the taxpayer and British science. The House has a responsibility to save that man's job, his future and the reputation of our science.

5.36 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor and Maidenhead): Before the House decides to adjourn for the summer, with its leave I shall bring some concerns of my constituents to its attention. I warmly congratulate the two other Conservative Members who have been called to address the House for the first time today—my hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) and for Havant (Mr. Willetts).

Windsor and Maidenhead, the constituency that I am honoured to represent, unlike the pudding which so disagreed with Sir Winston Churchill, has a clear theme. It is provided by the silvery thread of the River Thames in its most appealing reaches. The Thames flows softly from one end of my constituency to the other. To the west lie the charming settlements of Hurley and Bisham, which were both originally monastic foundations, where the former ecclesiastical buildings tell a fascinating tale. The Cookhams come next. They are famous for swan-upping and were once the home of that very individual painter, Stanley Spencer. Then comes Maidenhead, which owes its local pre-eminence to the bridge which made it an important post town on the road from London to Bath. Originally sited some way from the river, in recent years it has grown substantially and was one of the many towns in southern England which flourished in the 1980s. That growth has led to problems in the more recent past. Boulters Lock is more popular with my constituents in Maidenhead than the too many office buildings which are standing empty.

Maidenhead is a purposeful and popular town. Nevertheless, it should strongly resist further domestic in-filling and should not encroach on precious green belt land that surrounds it. I am utterly opposed to further erosion of the green belt.

Further downstream is the village of Bray, which is famous for its remarkably flexible vicar. As those who know the old English song will recall, the vicar of Bray changed his heart to match the political conditions of the day. He did so from

"Good King Charles's golden days"

to when

"George in Pudding time came o'er".

I dare say he is a model for some contemporary politicians.

On the north bank of the Thames we then come to Eton, except that one does not just "come to Eton"—not even the many former Prime Ministers who went to that school. Facing across the river is one of the jewels of our universal heritage: Windsor. I almost feel like apologising for this embarrassment of riches. That town was honoured when King George V took its name for that of his family.

My predecessor in this House, Sir Alan Glyn, represented the royal borough of the royal county for 22 years. His attendance in this House was praiseworthy and, almost uniquely among Back Benchers, he had a recognised place of his own in this Chamber. With his indefatigable wife, Lady Rosula, he served the people of Windsor and Maidenhead loyally and assiduously. My constituency association recently honoured Sir Alan and

[Mr. Michael Trend]

his wife in Sir Christopher Wren's magnificent guildhall at Windsor. On that occasion we also welcomed Sir Alan's predecessor and his wife, Sir Charles and Lady Mott-Radclyffe. Sir Charles represented the constituency for 28 years, so between them they chalked up half a century of service. Some Members and Officers may well remember Sir Charles; he is certainly still a legend in cricketing circles in the House.

While on the subject of former Members, I might add that Sir Christopher Wren was once a Member for Windsor, but unfortunately, for a few days only, following which he was debarred from the House because of an "irregularity" in his campaign. He was obviously not the best architect of electioneering.

With its outstanding buildings and extensive parks, Windsor struck the poet Michael Drayton thus:

"Windsor, where abound
All pleasures that in Paradise were found",

Paradise or not, however, the problems brought by millions of visitors each year have to be paid for in financial and environmental terms by my constituents. It is a matter of some concern that the community charge raised by the royal borough contains a substantial element —about £10 per year each for the people of Windsor and Maidenhead—to cope with those problems. That is a full 10 per cent. of the borough's standard spending assessment.

The Department of the Environment insists that day tourism affects many parts of the country and that it is difficult to measure, and I accept that that is probably the case on a national scale, but the evidence of one's own eyes in Windsor is too strong to be denied. Every year some 4 million day tourists come to Windsor, which is not by any means a large town. It is not difficult to visualise what that means in terms of traffic management, litter disposal, and other amenities that visitors require, the cost of which falls directly on my constituents. It cannot be beyond the skill of Government to develop a formula that would recognise those specific financial strains. If ever there was a special case, this is it.

I am also disturbed by the effect that the all-ages social index has on the SSA. Again, I refer to the evidence of my own eyes. It is nonsense to suggest that the differences between my constituency and the neighbouring town of Slough are so great as to justify the £100 per capita difference in Government support. That decision is largely due to the social index.

I cannot help feeling that the social index is an anachronistic way in which to judge local expenditure and that it has not kept pace with changing times. I hope that the Department of the Environment will be prepared to look at this matter afresh before entrenching the present arrangements in the new council tax.

I have endeavoured to take the House on a brief cruise down our great River Thames and to describe some of the riparian delights of my constituency. I recommend that as a form of leisure for all under pressure and in need of relaxation. In this House we are familiar with our own historic part of the Thames. I hope that others will share my discovery of another more gentle stretch which commends itself unselfishly to all.

I have covered the water and the land, and now I want to turn my attention to the skies. Maidenhead, and particularly Windsor, are continually affected by aircraft on their way to or from Heathrow airport. From living in Windsor, I know that the horrendous noise of aircraft coming in to land can shatter the good night's sleep to which my constituents and I are entitled. I am conscious of the many benefits brought to the area by the airport and of the important part it plays in the local economy, but I believe that more can and should be done to control aircraft noise. In particular, I should like a total ban on night flights, much closer monitoring of the decibel levels produced by individual aircraft, and fines for irresponsible carriers.

My constituents share anxieties common to people in other parts of the country. In Windsor and Maidenhead, there are a number of victims of the criminal acts of Mr. Robert Maxwell. Many angry dentists come to see me in my surgeries. Other people are unhappy about the fate of whales which are slaughtered for commercial gain and of the distressing circumstances in which battery hens are kept. I would not be honest if I did not add that there is concern about the proposed combining of the two Household Cavalry regiments—the Lifeguards and the Blues and Royals. Hon. Members may know that Combermere barracks in Windsor is the present home of the Blues and Royals.

In common with other Members, since I was elected to the House I have been impressed by the amount of correspondence which comes our way. It has been instructive to see which public services have been most responsive and helpful. I have been pleasantly surprised at the speed and sensitivity with which local hospitals and doctors deal with complaints. Other letters, however, betray what I regard as a potentially dangerous development which faces parliamentary democracy in all parts of the developed world—the current tendency to blame Governments and legislatures for all life's ills. Such writers are often encouraged—irresponsibly, in my view —by insidious single-issue lobby groups. I believe that we are heading for troubled times unless we can be more precise in the limitations of government and the obligations of people.

Some years ago we talked of the nanny state. It is time that the influence of such a state was further curtailed. The Governments of the 1980s achieved much in that regard, but more needs to be done. Many different people have a part to play in that—the Government, Ministers, Members of Parliament, religious leaders, teachers, judges, parents and others with influence.

The essential order which lies at the heart of civil life is based on simple courtesies which must be transmitted from generation to generation. The spiritual element of life must also be given prominence in an increasingly materialistic world.

On the domestic side of politics, I warmly welcome the great education reforms introduced in the past 10 years. My constituency is blessed with excellent maintained schools, and the pupils are intensely proud of them and of their teachers. That represents best practice and the best guarantee for the future.

On foreign affairs, I believe that our country still has many important responsibilities throughout the world. In particular, we should never cease to speak up for the human rights of those unable to do so for themselves. I have a particular interest in the people of Tibet and on future occasions I may bring their plight to the attention of the House.

Like many colleagues on both sides of the House, I have now fulfilled a long-standing ambition to become an elected Member of the Chamber. I am not in the least bothered by the fact that for a number of weeks I lived out of a locker, nor that I have now acquired one desk, alongside many others, and one telephone, nor that I am not provided with hordes of researchers and that I have to spend long hours in this beautiful building when I could be spending more time with my family—as they say.

I do not believe that having to rough it slightly, compared with being de luxe middle management of a company or a pampered shop steward of a union, calls for any complaint. I am honoured, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and indeed humbled to be a Member of this great House of Commons. It is, I may say, an added bonus to be sitting on the Government side.

I also regard it as a privilege to have the opportunity to follow on the service of distinguished predecessors for my constituents of Windsor and Maidenhead, on whose behalf it is my intention to work to represent their interests. I intend to support the policies on which I was elected and the principles in which I believe.

5.50 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): It is my pleasure to speak following the able maiden speech made by the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend). I trust that he will not suffer the fate of Sir Christopher Wren but will join his two immediate predecessors, who gave long and distinguished service in the House on behalf of their constituencies.

We have enjoyed three excellent maiden speeches today. I appreciated the humour of the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), who commented on the poor salaries that he had received from his employers. As an Ulster Scot, I appreciated his humour, but I know that he was not suggesting that the Scots were niggardly. Indeed, I am sure he knows that they are warm-hearted.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) paid an excellent tribute to his predecessor, but I particularly appreciated his tribute to Lady Lloyd. Let us not forget that the spouses of hon. Members contribute much, and Lady Lloyd has served the community at large in her own right. I feel that we sometimes take for granted the services that our spouses provide to our constituencies and to the country in general.

I wish there had been time before the recess to deal with a number of other major issues, especially as we have gone astray with Masstricht. I should have liked time for the House to examine the whole question of constitutional and political reform. With the fervour in that direction that is evident in the country, it is a pity that the Prime Minister has not been able to express in the House his views about how the constituent parts of the nation should be governed as one part. I believe that in the onward evolution of democracy there is a place for a federal system, even in our nation.

I wish today to probe the role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, particularly in its dealings with a part of the nation: Northern Ireland. I do not object to the Foreign Office representing us internationally. My gripe at times is that it does not represent us internationally as eloquently and efficiently as it should.

I have been puzzled at having received in June, and again this month, background briefs from the Foreign Office, one entitled "Northern Ireland: The Economy and Employment" and the other entitled "Education in Northern Ireland: A New Direction." I wonder whether the Foreign Office gives the same service to the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office. Does it all mean that, despite the tributes paid to the Northern Ireland education service, there is a lack of education and ability in the Northern Ireland Office? Or is it simply that the Foreign Office is playing the same role as it has played on those issues over the years?

The briefs are helpful and interesting and I do not intend today to analyse or criticise them; I am simply probing them. Does the Leader of the House agree that it should be the role of the Northern Ireland Office, rather than of the Foreign Office, to explain the policies, economic issues, matters affecting tourism and the development of education in the Province? Are such briefs provided for all Government Departments for the benefit of people overseas who wish to know what is happening, for example, in the Department of Trade and Industry, in the Scottish Office and in the Department of the Environment?

To ask the question in a more sinister way, is it the continuing policy of Her Majesty's Government to keep Northern Ireland as a satellite in orbit, controlled by Foreign Office computers looking after international affairs rather than representing the rights of British citizens in Northern Ireland? Is it, as some have feared for a long time, part of a process of seeking to break up the Union? When talking to a distinguished servant of the British Government yesterday, I discovered again that there is speculation that the way forward might involve an independent Northern Ireland.

I wish to place on record the fact that if Northern Ireland—little Scotland, the Ulster Scots—goes, we would like to think that the House would go on to consider where Scotland goes in future. Lest some do not understand the analogy and relationship, Scotland means the land of the Scoti—the land of the Irish. We believe that we are part of that nation, where the O'Donnells of the glens of Antrim are similar to the O'Donnells of the glens of Scotland. Some relationships are conveniently forgotten.

Some of us wonder why the Foreign Office, in supplying talent on a regular basis to the Northern Ireland Office, including writing briefs, seems to be acting in a contrary manner in Yugoslavia. There, I gather, the Department believes that small groups who were part of other groups have a right to self-determination. Apparently a British warship is to be deployed off the coast of Yugoslavia. Does that suggest that one should be deployed off Dundalk bay because a Government there are giving, directly or indirectly, sustenance to those who seek the break-up of the United Kingdom and who act against the democratically declared wishes of the people of Northern Ireland?

As many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, I shall not deal with other issues that I would otherwise raise. Recently the Prime Minister went to Czechoslovakia —among other places, to Prague, the home of Jan Huss, an outstanding reformer of an earlier day—and I sympathised and empathised with the right hon. Gentleman as he apologised on behalf of our people to the Czech people for the actions of a previous British Prime Minister who returned to Britain with a piece of paper proclaiming, "Peace in our time."

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

Can we look forward to the Prime Minister coming to Northern Ireland in the near future to apologise on behalf of another British Prime Minister who signed a piece of paper that was supposed to lead to peace, stability and reconciliation? While I have empathy with the former Prime Minister, who is now in another place, in some of her thinking, I have been amused by the fact that she now wants a referendum when she refused to accept the will of the people of Northern Ireland, democratically expressed at the ballot box, and imposed on Northern Ireland a programme which had the effect of taking us out of the normal role of government in this place. That is why I ask whether Northern Ireland is now being ruled by the Foreign Office rather than being accountable to the House of Commons through the Northern Ireland Office.

5.57 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I wish at the outset to congratulate warmly my three hon. Friends who have made maiden speeches. My hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) and for Havant (Mr. Willetts) are both well known on these Benches for their previous service, before arriving here, to the Government—to the Leader of the House in one respect—and to the Conservative party. Their speeches were elegant, witty and effective, and we have high hopes of them. My hon. Friend the Member for Havant was the author of a pamphlet on the Government's national health service reforms which was the only presentation at the time that I found comprehensible in explaining those reforms.

My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend) raised in his maiden speech a number of matters of interest to all hon. Members, such as whales, battery hens and low-flying aircraft. He also, justifiably, criticised in part the way in which Government grant to local government is assessed and the standard spending assessment arrangements, and many of my hon. Friends will appreciate those remarks.

All three maiden speakers showed great interest in raising problems affecting their constituencies. I shall raise three matters affecting my constituency, all of which have wider implications. Two of them have been long-standing matters of concern.

The first issue involves the problems faced by a number of my constituents in a part of Taunton called Galmington. They are owner-occupiers, and living in Woolaway homes that were constructed in the early 1950s. There was a public sector connection at the time, as almost all the people who originally lived in the homes were public servants of one sort or another, but they were ineligible for specific grants for repairs or improvements by virtue of the original arrangements drawn up by the company that built the homes.

The problem is that those homes are non-traditional build. They do not have faults now, but their owners are finding it extraordinarily difficult to sell them. I believe that there are 29 such homes involved; they are three and four-bedroomed houses. Ten of them are occupied by elderly people, several of whom want to sell them to move to smaller residential accommodation, and six are occupied by single people. Therefore, there is this unused housing space in Taunton, but people cannot move due to the problems associated with non-traditional build houses.

An estate agent wrote to one of the couples stating that last year,

"there were a number of viewings, ranging between 25 and 30 applicants, although for one reason or another none of these applicants wished to proceed further. Some of these applicants, as you know, were concerned that the property was not of traditional construction."

The estate agent spoke of another applicant who had discussions with a surveyor and builder. He said that, while they did not inspect the property, they said:

"the type of construction may prove to have problems in the future and . . . there was some doubt with regard to the saleability of properties of this type."

Last year, another couple with a similar residence found that several sales fell through once purchasers discovered the nature of the construction. An estate agent from a different firm told them:

"I entirely concur with your views regarding the saleability of the properties you occupy in that the construction of the properties is deemed by Building Societies and other lending Institutions to be of a standard which is unacceptable to them as a security, unless, of course, remedial works"—

which would cost large sums of money—

"have been carried out to the main structure and a certificate to that effect presented. It would, therefore, not be unreasonable to state that the properties, in their present condition and at this time, are unmortgageable."

Those are the problems that my constituents face. Due to various rules on the use of its resources, the local authority cannot take over those properties, although a number of the occupiers wish it to do so. I have been in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for housing construction, but we are faced with a growing dilemma, which has existed since before I was elected to the House.

The second problem I wish to raise has also existed for some time. I spoke about it just before Christmas, when we discussed the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill in Committee. As Mr. Moynihan, then the Minister with responsibility for energy, confirmed in Committee, 2,400 properties in the United Kingdom are not connected to the electricity grid. Quite a concentration of those properties exist in the south-west, including some dozen or more on the edge of Exmoor in my constituency.

Since I raised the matter before Christmas and it attracted publicity, South West Electricity has offered to connect those properties to the grid. However, in return, it requires an extraordinarily rigorous mortgage, which is unattractive to those involved. The cost required by SWEB is far too high for my constituents to contemplate, and I fear that there may be no likelihood that their properties or others in the south-west will be linked to the grid. I know that my hon. Friends who represent constituencies with the same problem are trying to pursue the matter. In the year of grace 1992, I think that properties—apart from those that are very remote, and those involved in this case are not—should be connected to the electricity grid.

The third problem has recently developed and typifies debates that we have had, and will have, in the House on the future arrangements of the railway system, particularly freight transport. I think that many hon. Members will have heard of Taunton Cider. A day or so ago, Taunton Cider floated its shares on the market after a successful management buy-out last year. But it faces problems in transporting its excellent—and in summer, very popular—goods about the country by rail freight.

Since the withdrawal of British Rail's Speedlink, which served Taunton Cider well, and the collapse of Tiger Rail, Taunton Cider is allowed to move by rail one full train

load a week. That is adequate for its purposes in winter, but inadequate in the summer months. Only this Monday, my wife and I were driving through the village of Norton Fitzwarren, where Taunton Cider is based, when we passed in the space of four or five minutes three large lorries transporting the company's products. The village has a winding main street and those large lorries will pound up and down it, clogging up the roads of Taunton as they pass to the motorway.

As the Government consider the future of British Rail, particularly its freight as the channel tunnel comes on stream, I am anxious that we should find a way of servicing not only Taunton Cider in my constituency but the many other companies in the south-west that face similar difficulties transporting their goods by British Rail. I was informed of the wider scope of the problem by Taunton Cider this week. I hope that those problems will be addressed.

6.6 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a pressing case to the Leader of the House on a constituency matter. I have made the right hon. Gentleman aware of my intention to speak today. The Government plan to introduce privatisation measures that will affect the Clyde submarine base and the Royal Naval armament depot at Coulport—two of the most sensitive military establishments in the United Kingdom. Trident submarines are berthed at the Clyde submarine base.

The Ministry intends to introduce market testing and privatisation measures into the base. That fact came to our attention through a report in one of the Scottish newspapers last week when we discovered that, despite ministerial agreement to the contrary, the Ministry was to go ahead with the plans. Alarm and concern was expressed not least by the unions at the base, and by the national organiser, Jack Dromey. He was quoted as saying that the privatisation of the support services could lead to the handling of the nuclear warhead being transferred to private contractors. The security implications of that would be considerable. Indeed, one commentator referred to the policy as a potential backdoor to nuclear terrorism.

Our concerns are threefold. The first involves the ministerial guarantee. I have a statement made by the Commodore Clyde in 1989 stating:

> "The Ministry of Defence at the highest level are prepared to exempt the Clyde submarine base work force and the rest of the base from contractorisation for the foreseeable future providing a package of sensible economic measures can be introduced within a realistic timetable."

Those economic measures have been introduced to the satisfaction of both management and unions at the base. However, although the issue was not raised in the Conservative manifesto, we find that, post-election, the Government intend to go ahead with the privatisation measures.

The ministerial guarantee was given on the grounds of security implications—on which I shall elaborate later—and operational considerations. The naval authorities do not want the work force to be privatised or contractorised, since it wishes to have direct control over it for the operational viability of Polaris and Trident submarines. That guarantee was given in 1989. Why does it now seem to be in jeopardy? That is the core of my case.

About 2,000 jobs could be in jeopardy in the constituency. That is bad enough in itself, but the security implications are the overriding concern on this occasion. As a member of the Select Committee on Defence in the previous Parliament, I am aware of the security implications. I was one of the members of that Committee who looked at privatisation measures and our sixth report in the 1989-90 Session examined the physical security of military installations in the United Kingdom. The report states:

> "With the trend of privatisation and contractorisation the MOD's responsibility for security cannot be diluted."

We were supported by the Public Accounts Committee which said that, in considering how to provide security services for departmental and service establishments, the Department's prime considerations must be the safety of the service and the people employed in it.

Our report on physical security highlighted some of the horrendous consequences of privatisation. There have been violations of security at the Clyde submarine base in the recent past. On 30 January 1989 three protesters forced their way into the base and entered the control house of HMS Repulse. No one stopped them. In October 1988 five protesters were taken into police custody for disrupting a major exercise designed to test emergency procedures in the event of a nuclear accident. In January 1986 the Ministry of Defence ordered a full inquiry into an incident in which three people dressed as Santa Claus walked on to two submarines at the base. If three people dressed like that can enter a nuclear submarine at Christmas without being stopped, sophisticated terrorists can do it without dressing up. The Leader of the House must address that issue.

The Select Committee on Defence investigation into physical security at military installations revealed some horrendous incidents. In one such incident the Ministry of Defence took on a private contractor and subsequently found that the base on which the contractor was working had been vandalised. An investigation revealed that it had been vandalised by the contractor's employees. Such are the dangers of privatisation and contracterisation without due regard to security and control.

The Select Committee on Defence said that the controller of naval security should conduct a searching investigation into all such aspects before further privatisation measures were undertaken. However, less than two years after that report I have to plead with the Leader of the House not to proceed with privatisation in the No. 1 military installation in the United Kingdom. There are lessons to be drawn form the report of the Select Committee on Defence and the incidents at the base. First, security does not come cheap. Secondly, Ministers are not always told about lapses in security and about the effect of their policies.

Mr. Hastie Smith, the under-secretary for civilian management, appeared before the Select Committee on Defence on 31 January 1990. A former right hon. Member, Sir Barney Hayhoe, asked him about reporting to Ministers and Mr. Hastie Smith said:

> "I am trying to phrase the answer as delicately as possible. Ministers who are told by officials that their policies are not working very well are inclined to doubt the enthusiasm of the officials for the policy."

That is to say, Ministers are not told because civil servants are scared to tell them that the policy is not working. A reckless policy of privatisation for the Clyde submarine base may not work, but perhaps in the light of Mr. Hastie

[Mr. John McFall]

Smith's comments Ministers will not know that. The Leader of the House should communicate that information to his ministerial colleagues.

I spoke about the unions. They tell me that their members will not accept the abrogation of the exemption clause, which was freely given by ministerial directive. But that does not mean that unions have not been working alongside management. First, they have accepted and welcomed the implementation of the MOD's guard force. Secondly, they have openly said that they do not like market testing but realise that the Government have a mandate because the White Paper "Competing for Quality" and the citizens charter were put before the people in the election on 9 April.

However, the ending of the ministerial exemption on privatisation measures in the Clyde submarine base was not put before the electorate. Naval personnel and unions do not want it and it is incumbent on Ministers to heed that and not to accede to any decisions that may have been taken by civil servants.

In *The Sunday Telegraph* on 22 January 1989 the late Simon O'Dwyer Russell wrote about the three protesters who entered the control room of HMS Repulse. He stated:

"Defence ministry officials told me that the armed forces Minister, Archie Hamilton, was 'absolutely hopping bloody mad' at this particular incident."

I share the Minister's sentiments, but, in addition, I am fearful of the future if privatisation proceeds and if the Government sacrifice quality and security to their obsession with what is cheapest but perhaps more dangerous.

As I said, security is not cheap. Will the Leader of the House arrange a meeting with the Minister of State so that we can look at the ministerial agreement and so that I can reassure my constituents and workers that the Government continue to consider the Clyde submarine base and the Royal Naval armament depot at Coulport to be the most sensitive security installations in the United Kingdom? I should like an assurance that security considerations will continue to be paramount in the eyes of the Ministry of Defence. In order to maintain such security, market testing must be rejected, and the Government must adhere to the line that was agreed as late as January 1989.

6.17 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): I add my congratulations to those that have been expressed to my hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), for Havant (Mr. Willetts), and for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend) on their elegant and interesting maiden speeches.

I should like to discuss a matter of considerable concern to most of my constituents. On 23 June, Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary published a report on policing in Derbyshire. It was the final report of a series and, uniquely for this country, a certificate of efficiency was not given to Derbyshire constabulary. That is in no way a reflection on that force or on the policemen and women who do an excellent job in the county. However, it is a reflection on the county council, which for some years has consistently failed to ensure that the police force was adequately funded to police the county satisfactorily.

While police numbers have risen elsewhere, numbers in Derbyshire have fallen and the force is now 140 below strength. The county has the worst police-to-population ratio of any force in England and Wales.

One of the conclusions of HMI's report was:

"The Council allowed the manpower situation to become progressively worse."

That situation has been developing for some time. In debates last year, my hon. Friends the Members for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) and for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) raised some of these issues, which I know are also of great concern to my hon. Friends the Members for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), for Derby, West (Mr. McLoughlin) and for High Peak (Mr. Hendry).

Some of the recommendations in the report of 23 June make extraordinary reading. They state that the police force should be brought up to establishment level, as should civilian support.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East) *rose*——

Mrs. Knight: I shall give way in a moment. The report's conclusions talk about training being reinstated and more resources being directed to tackling the record increases in burglary and crime. They might be obvious recommendations, but the fact that they have to be made is an example of how the police force has had to cut vital parts of its work because of the constraints put on it by the county council.

Mr. Barnes: The money that the chief constable asked Derbyshire county council for is the money which has been granted by the council for improvements in provision. The Government are asking that the improvements should be made in 10 months' time and the awarding of a certificate should then be re-examined. What difference will it make to the current position? There would be only three monthly reports and then an acceptance of a certificate on the basis on which the county council is already acting.

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Member has been too hasty. I shall come to that matter in a moment. I am sorry that he is not supporting the other hon. Members who represent Derbyshire constituencies in trying to ensure that there is adequate policing in the county.

I deal now with the police authority. As with other county forces, the police authority is a committee of the county council. The inspector of constabulary last year informed the chairman of the police authority, who is, incidentally, a Labour county councillor, that he considered the force inadequately resourced to provide an efficient service. The county council then requested an increase in the standard spending assessment, which it got.

At the end of last year, it emerged that in recent years the Derbyshire constabulary had not been allowed to submit a budget for consideration by the police authority. No other police authority is treated in that way. In the end, the chairman of the police authority agreed that the chief constable could submit a budget in February but, long before that date, the chairman said openly that he would not allow the police force a budget that was up to SSA level—the new SSA level which the county council had asked for. However, I am glad that the police authority took a different view, and granted a budget which was up to SSA level. The county council then overturned that decision. That is an appalling case of mismanagement of the police by the county council.

I make three further points. First, the recommendations of the inspector of constabulary's report should be implemented to ensure effective policing for my constituents in Erewash and for the residents of Derbyshire. To do that, the Home Office must continue to put pressure on the county council as that is the only way of ensuring that it discharges its duties. Although I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for his persistence in seeking regular progress reports, there is, sadly, no evidence whatsoever of the county council having a real determination to deal with the issue properly.

Secondly, in former metropolitan counties such as South Yorkshire, the police force is allowed to precept separately, to raise its money separately from the local authority. That means that it has greater financial independence and is not dependent on the whim of a local county council and its spending plans. The police authority is still there, but it is able to discharge its duties more effectively because its financial decisions cannot be overturned, as happened in Derbyshire. Consideration should be given to that proposal for county forces so that they are allowed to precept independently.

Thirdly, few people doubt that today's police have a tough job, as increasingly violent crimes are committed on people and property. The police have an unenviable job, because we expect them to protect us. We should do all we can to support them, but that has not happened in Derbyshire.

For those reasons, I believe that the House should not adjourn until it has discussed the matter more fully.

6.25 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I beg to move, as an amendment to the motion, to leave out '16th July' and insert 30th July'.

I am delighted to move the amendment and to provide an opportunity for the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) to engage in a wider debate. The three hon. Members who have today made their maiden speeches said that they were lucky to be here. We are all lucky to be here, but I suspect that they will be tumbling into the Lobby to vote for the House to rise on 16 July instead of voting for my amendment which would extend Parliament's sitting until 30 July.

Such an extension would enable my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), who has gone into the subject of the policing of Derbyshire in great detail, to deploy the arguments necessary to destroy the speech made by the hon. Member for Erewash, who criticised the county council.

Mr. Barnes *rose*——

Mr. Cryer: I shall not give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East because we are so short of time.

It is not a good sign when there is consensus between the two Front Benches, as there is about the date of the Adjournment. We have a three-hour debate because there was a consensus in 1981 that the Adjournment debate should be so limited. If the same rules applied now as applied in 1980, the debate would be open-ended and everyone who has been here today, hoping to participate, would have had the opportunity to do so. However, several hon. Members have now left the Chamber because they would have been unable to speak due to the three-hour time limit. I hope that they will vote for my amendment.

If the Government are short of subjects for debate, I can give them a string of subjects that we could debate in the extra fortnight between 16 July and 30 July. I shall be brief, because other hon. Members want to speak, but I shall mention two of those subjects, which are linked.

First, I hope that we have the opportunity—hence my amendment—to debate the vexed question of Menwith Hill near Harrogate where there was a demonstration last Saturday. About 150 people turned up to demonstrate against the listening base—or spy base—of the National Security Agency of the United States. I have here a copy of the *New Statesman* dated 16 July 1980. It contains an article headed "Phone tapping—America's big ear on Europe." The article reads as follows:

> "'Tinkerbell'—the national phone-tap centre which the *New Statesman* revealed in February—is only one part of a massive exercise in spying on civil and commercial communications. A much bigger role is played by America's highly secretive National Security Agency . . ., operating from a remarkable base at Menwith Hill, eight miles west of Harrogate in Yorkshire.
>
> Menwith Hill—unless the KGB has something even bigger —appears to be the biggest tapping centre in the world. From its heavily guarded operations room a special high-capacity cable runs underground to the Post Office microwave tower at Hunters Stones five miles away: this provides an umbilical cord link into the national telephone and telex system running through Britain. A direct tap which is placed on lines to France and elsewhere in Europe has been in operation for more than 15 years."

Phone tapping is being carried out in this country by the National Security Agency of a foreign power without any authority. Indeed, the agency does not even have Home Office warrants for tapping.

It can be argued—the Government advance the argument when they choose to release a few closely guarded words about Menwith Hill—that the facility can be used to tap into potential terrorist activity or other potential illegal activity. It may be that the Government had information about the Maxwell scandal through eavesdropping in this way, but they never used it.

The demonstrators at Menwith Hill found on Saturday that the station has grown instead of being reduced at the end of the cold war. It is becoming larger. There are eight radons instead of the two that were there when Duncan Campbell's article was written. Duncan Campbell was at the spy station addressing the demonstrators, as I was, and we intend to maintain the vigil against a foreign presence that is breaking United Kingdom law by tapping into the British Telecom network. There is a cable linking Hunters Stones tower and Menwith Hill that can carry 24,000 conversations simultaneously. It does not go into Menwith Hill to serve the telephone kiosks and the telephones of the 1,000 or more people who live there. Instead, its purpose is to ensure that the station at Menwith Hill can spy.

It is part of a system of intelligence eavesdropping. It is maintained by the National Security Agency of the United States, which was carrying out illegal activities in the United States. It was revealed to have been doing so in the immediate post-war period by the United States Congress. It is acting with impunity and the Government do not exercise control. That is why we should have some time over the next fortnight to go into all the details. There are

[Mr. Cryer]

not many opportunities to go into the sort of detail that is necessary and to put the facts on the *Hansard* record so that those outside know what is going on.

It is a scandal that the House is proposing to wrap up on 16 July when there are so many issues to be debated. It is in a lacklustre position because the Government have abandoned, thank God, the Maastricht Bill. They are short of material to put before the House, but there are many issues that need to be discussed. That is why my amendment is necessary.

Secondly, there has been a parliamentary question and a written answer about the extraordinary decision to order a fourth Trident. There should have been a statement followed by a debate. I am all for keeping people's jobs going, but surely we should investigate the lack of a diversification programme as we move from the cold war to peace. There are many things that people need and there are many in manufacturing industry who could undertake the necessary activity to meet their needs. We do not have to go to war; we do not have to spend the huge amount of money on the programme that the Government have decided to embark upon.

Why is it so difficult to obtain £30 million for the rolling stock for the electrification scheme from Leeds to Bradford, with crazy arrangements for leasing this, that and the other? The Industrial Bank of Scotland says that it cannot grant the leasing money because it is frightened of privatisation and the Toms, Dicks and Harrys are dubious organisations who will take over railway services. When it comes to mass extermination, however, by means of Trident nuclear warheads, the money is available. There is no question of going to the Industrial Bank of Scotland and asking for a leasing arrangement to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement—that is what it is all about.

How much money is involved? Greenpeace has produced a document entitled "The Rising Cost of Trident". I do not have time to go into it in great detail, but I shall refer to a few salient points. The Government's estimate is slightly more than £10 billion while Greenpeace claims that that is an underestimate by £22 billion. It states that only £52 million of a £1 billion construction programme at the atomic weapons research establishment at Aldermaston is officially attributed to Trident. Yet under the construction programme it will not be possible, unless it is completed, to produce the full complement of warheads for Trident.

If we did not go ahead with the fourth submarine, we would save £1·3 billion. According to Greenpeace, if we cancelled the entire Trident programme, we would save £16 billion. We are, of course, crying out for money for the national health service, for local authority housing and for other vital needs. Against that background we should be aware of the money that could be saved if we cancelled the Trident programme.

I am a long-standing member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and I shall not leave it. It is a principled campaign and we should sustain the argument. I say that Trident is a waste of money; it is a costly exercise in futility. That is why I want to deploy the relative arguments, but unfortunately there is not sufficient time to do so because other Members want to speak. The debate demonstrates the great need for Parliament to extend its sitting by a fortnight so that we can debate important issues before we get our buckets and spades and go on holiday.

6.37 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): I am sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you are looking forward to a break. Some press hacks have described the Session as a very boring Parliament so far, but only you and the other occupants of the Chair can judge whether that is so. I certainly shall not oppose the motion for the Adjournment of the House for the summer recess. However, if the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) had sought to bring the House back in September, he would have carried me with him.

Many of us will be looking forward to spending a little extra time with our families while we and our fellow citizens become tourists. The help that the tourist industry will receive will be concentrated in large part on rural Britain. It is on rural Britain that I ask the House to focus before we adjourn, tempting though other matters are, such as the late and unlamented treaty of Maastricht.

I put in a bid for a timed Consolidated Fund debate, which will follow this debate. I drew 27th position with a debate entitled "Quality of Life in the Rural Areas". I gather that there was some discussion between the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, neither of which thought that it should send a Minister to reply to my debate. That illustrates admirably the point that I wish to make. I want to know who is responsible for rural areas within the Government.

The traveller who fills his car with petrol may catch a whiff of country air and be under the impression that he has contracted the rural experience. The InterCity rail traveller may notice cattle in a field between housing estates and do-it-yourself stores as he travels from city to city. The name InterCity highlights a real divide, the rural-urban divide. It is what I call another divide, another country. It may not have the great appeal of the north-south divide, but it is real.

Just over five years ago, I made my maiden speech in the House. Describing my constituency, I said that support for inner-city priorities could be forthcoming from rural areas, but only up to a point. Most of my constituents live in or around Lowestoft, but more than 20,000 live in the market towns of Beccles, Bungay, Southwold and Halesworth or in the major villages and small villages. I am talking not about people who know that milk does not grow in bottles and packets but about those who make up the rural economy, those who are the rural community that so enriches our nation. Unfortunately, this community is easily forgotten. Few members of it can talk about being on the soil man and boy, but one in five people in England lives in a rural area.

Most hon. Members recognise that farmers in England have been going through a difficult period lately, but if we take any other issue—cottage hospitals, emergency services, prescriptions, village schools, housing, transport, planning, waste disposal, food-related industries, local services such as shops and pubs, the uniform business rate, the aging population or the shortage of youngsters—we find that there is a rural angle to it.

A million-member alliance of 10 national countryside organisations—as diverse as the Council for the Protection

of Rural England, the Country Landowners Association, the National Association of Local Councils and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations—has overcome tensions within its membership to speak with what it calls the rural voice. The members agree that it is essential to face and not conceal the tensions that often exist between different rural interests as well as the natural tensions between town and country. They seek from the Government a considered rural policy, wide in scope and as integrated as possible, which automatically considers the effects on the countryside of proposed legislation and spending programmes.

In the past, it has been suggested that there should be a House of Commons Select Committee for the rural areas. Of course, that is not feasible, but a rural audit of all policies would help a great deal. While rural residents do not expect special privileges just because they live in rural areas, they expect a recognition of the special needs and problems unique to rural areas. Their manifesto for rural England in the 1990s summarises the problems superbly and makes suggestions for overcoming them. That could form the basis for a rural audit for all Departments of Government, national and local. We already accept cost-benefit audits, a citizens' audit—which, in effect, is the citizens charter—environmental audits, which are becoming more popular, and even family audits. I ask my right hon. Friend to consider introducing a rural audit.

I had intended to raise two other points, but I am conscious of the time. I shall seek to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, at a future date.

6.40 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) for shortening his speech so that I can say a few words before my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) replies to the debate on behalf of the Opposition.

I checked with the Library and, going back to 1950, there is no record of the House rising as early as it will rise this year. There should be no illusion about this—it is not happening for the benefit of hon. Members on either side of the House. It is entirely due to the good people of Denmark, who made a good and correct decision in their referendum. Had it not been for that referendum result, the House would be sitting well into July and perhaps into August. There would have been a tremendous amount of arm twisting by the Government Whips to ensure that their people went into the Lobby to vote for the Maastricht treaty. When the House returns, we shall know whether Conservative Members who hold critical views on that matter will have the courage of their convictions and vote as their consciences and principles dictate.

Before I discuss the position in my area. I want to say that I fully agree with those of my hon. Friends who have said that if there is to be any further military development relating to the former Yugoslavia, the House should be recalled. I have taken note of what the Prime Minister and other Ministers have said, including what the Leader of the House has said today. If circumstances change or if the Government's policy changes, it is only right and proper that the House be recalled and its authority sought for any further military developments in that terrible civil war. I hope that that point is well taken by the Cabinet.

We shall be breaking for the long summer recess when there is little sign of any economic recovery in the west midlands and the black country. Far too many people in my area are unemployed. Far too many of them, having been made redundant, have not been able to find jobs. Far too many young people cannot find jobs after leaving school. I have said before, and I shall continue to say, that it is disgraceful that so many of our fellow citizens in their 40s and 50s—the same age group as many Members of Parliament—have been made redundant and day after day, week after week, month after month, try desperately to find work. It is a lie that unemployed people are work shy and do not want to work. A large majority of my unemployed constituents are only too willing to work, but they are denied that opportunity.

It was recently announced that 170 jobs would be lost at three lock factories in Willenhall and surrounding areas. Willenhall, which is in my constituency, is the home of the lock industry. Unfortunately and sadly, it is likely that during the summer recess more jobs than those that I have already mentioned will be lost in that industry locally.

Treasury Ministers and the Leader of the House may make optimistic noises, but the local chamber of commerce in my borough—I do not suppose that it has many Labour supporters—published a survey only yesterday showing little activity in the job market, with 64 per cent. of firms surveyed saying that they were not recruiting labour. All in all, it was not an optimistic survey of what is likely to happen in the borough and in the black country.

The talk of economic recovery that we heard repeatedly during the general election has come to nothing. Ministers kept saying that if the Government were returned to office there would soon be signs of recovery, but I am afraid that there are little or no such signs. Indeed, there appears to be a correlation—the more that Ministers talk of economic recovery, the more the economy takes a nose dive. If that connection is right, if Ministers started talking pessimistically about the economy, there might be some small sign of recovery.

Due to the local election results on 7 May, the Tories, with Liberal support, now run my council—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Those shouts of "Hear, hear" from Conservative Members will not be echoed by the 68 gardeners employed by the council who have been given the sack. They will not be echoed by the council's direct service organisation, whose workers face redundancy because of the determination of the Tories, with Liberal support, to break up the organisation. A great deal of maintenance and repair work will go elsewhere—*[Interruption.]* I make no apology for saying that that is disgraceful. Tory Members can mutter, but it is indeed disgraceful to add to the unemployment in my borough and the black country, which have gone through two major recessions since the Government took office.

Now in addition to all the redundancies and job losses, the Tory council is doing its utmost to sack its employees. The Tories on the council gloat about that, which is disgraceful. I shall take every opportunity in the House and outside it to make my views known, no matter how many supporters the Tories who now control the council, with Liberal support, find on the Conservative Benches in the House of Commons.

6.47 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): During recent years, it has often fallen to me to round up these debates. I have always tried in vain to find a general theme running through the speeches, because they are extraordinarily difficult debates to respond to. Today, I almost feel that I could say "Eureka", because a theme has run through virtually all the speeches from both sides of the House —that an enormous amount needs to be done, but little is being done by the Government. That theme was clear even in a number of speeches by Conservative Members.

I want to refer to the maiden speeches of Conservative Members. Even they unfailingly referred to the need for more Government action and often more Government expenditure. They were good speeches, and no doubt those who made them will return to the theme in future debates.

The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) made a speech of considerable wit, but he also called for more expenditure on roads in his constituency. The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) likewise made a witty speech, but he also called for, among other things, expenditure on the resurfacing of roads in his constituency. He was concerned about school closures and other matters that involve Government action and expenditure.

The hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend), in an affectionate speech about his constituency, called for a rescheduling of grants and the reallocation of local government expenditure. In particular, he wanted more Government regulation of aircraft noise.

Those were all very good maiden speeches, and I look forward to hearing those hon. Members again. It was interesting that they all asked the Government to do more and to spend more.

The speeches by Labour Members were more modest. Most did not call upon the Government to spend more money, because we all know the difficulty in approaching the Government on that matter. Instead, most called for the Government to recognise existing problems, where intervention is extremely important.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) called for a much more effective system of payment of disability benefits and a speeding up of the Government's administrative machine. I hope that the Leader of the House has noted that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), who has had to leave, had a particularly pressing constituency problem, in which I can declare some interest, having a nearby constituency, affecting some 500 jobs and requiring referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. He urged the Leader of the House to draw that matter to the attention of his Cabinet colleagues, and I reiterate that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), again not calling for great Government expenditure but in a speech which demanded a response from the Leader of the House, requested a proper inquiry into some unpleasant-sounding activities in the operation of the health authority in his part of the country. That was a reasonable request, to which I hope the Leader of the House will respond.

My hon. Friend the Member or Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) spoke for many hon. Members. It will be interesting to see how many Conservative Members raise such themes in the months ahead if the Government persist with present policies. I echo my hon. Friend's concern about the effects of privatisation on Ministry of Defence depots, again a matter on which I can speak with feeling with regard to my constituency. He made a case that needed a response.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was particularly concerned about phone tapping and possible intrusions into privacy. That again is a matter which requires a response from the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), another nearby west midlands constituency, effectively pointed out the continuing effects of the recession.

There was a collection of requests from both sides of the House. I have mentioned only those of Conservative Members who made maiden speeches, but there were many more requests for Government intervention, Government activity and very often Government expenditure as well.

What sort of response are such requests receiving from the Government? I do not anticipate any great responses. We have not been receiving any responses in recent debates of this sort. Can it be that the Government cannot respond to such requests because they are short of money? It is difficult for Labour Members to believe that, because for six years Ministers have been lecturing us on the Conservative economic miracle.

I recommend hon. Members to start re-reading the Conservative election manifesto. I found one phrase which has particular resonance in the light of today's debate. Under the section headed "Your choice at this election", it says:

> "We know how tough it has been for many but we are poised to move forward again, lacking only the spark of confidence with which a Conservative victory would ignite recovery."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Tory Members respond predictably. If they are waiting for ignition, my advice to them is not to hold their breath. We have seen no sign whatever of any economic ignition or recovery since the general election. There has been precious little in the constituencies that Labour Members have the honour to represent.

According to the Government's election manifesto, it cannot be a shortage of money which prevents the Government from responding to all the requests that have been made, so is it a shortage of parliamentary time? Governments are always complaining that there is no time to do all the things they want to do, so I thought that it was worth checking what sort of hours we have been sitting since we returned after the general election.

In the last year of the previous Parliament, the average daily sitting was eight hours 23 minutes. We all know—even the Government admit it privately—that the Government did not really know what to do for the last year of the previous Parliament. They were simply waiting for the general election and filling time as best they could. Since the general election, the average daily sitting has gone down to eight hours and 10 minutes. This is a Government whom one would expect and assume to be enthusiastic following the election, wanting to do all sorts of things. But there is no indication that that is the case.

We face a most bizarre political situation, which the Lobby correspondents recognise well enough and which the Government can barely recognise but which they know in private to be true. Just three months—that is all it is —after the general election, the Government are calling

for an early recess, the earliest that anyone can remember, as many of my hon. Friends have said, and they are having tremendous difficulty filling parliamentary time, with shorter sittings than we have been accustomed to.

The truth is that the Government have lost their way almost before they have begun. They are wondering how to fill the next four years—if they survive that long. We shall do our best at by-elections and by other means to prevent their survival. The Government must be wondering how on earth to pass the time. They have shown no evidence of any enthusiasm or vision—not that we often look to Conservatives for vision—in the three months since the general election.

What will the Government excite us with in the months that lie ahead? I am always trying to be charitable to the Government in circumstances such as this, but I looked in vain for any source of inspiration for them. It so happens that this week is the first anniversary of what the Government claim to be their bible, the citizens charter. I decided that we should monitor the citizens charter, particularly a nice little section—I am indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North for drawing one of the key elements in it to my attention in a timely way—entitled "A charter for job seekers". I am sure that Conservative Members carry a copy of the citizens charter around with them, but I shall remind them of that paragraph. It says:

"The Citizen's Charter will reinforce the Employment Service's aim of giving unemployed people, and others who use its services such as employees and those changing jobs, the individual approach that they need".

I want to let the Government share an insight which they seem woefully incapable of understanding. Unemployed people seek not an individual approach or a nice office in which to be told that there are no jobs, but jobs. That is clearly not understood by the Government. Since the Government published the citizens charter 12 months ago, the total number of unemployed in Britain has risen from 2,213,784 in May 1991 to 2,707,892, and that despite the charter for job seekers and the individual attention that they have all been guaranteed. That is an increase of 500,000.

We approach the summer recess with a Government who, in three short months, have managed to lose their way. They never had any vision, but now, particularly in the aftermath of Maastricht, they do not even know how to pass the time. They have no philosophy other than the hope that something will turn up, and no policies which will ensure that something does. They are deaf, as I am sure the Leader of the House will shortly demonstrate, to the pleas for more expenditure from their own Back Benchers and, I am sure, deaf also to my hon. Friends. The Government, three months on, are, unbelievably, past their sell-by date.

6.58 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Perhaps it is an interesting illustration of my deafness, but I entirely failed to hear the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) offer the House any advice about whether to vote for the amendment. I heard the speech of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), and the pleasure of listening to it almost tempted me—but not quite—to advise the House to accept his amendment. I shudder to think of the response that I would receive from my hon. Friends and, indeed, his hon. Friends if I gave such advice, but it struck me as notable that the hon. Member for The Wrekin refrained from doing so. My only other thought about his speech was that he appeared to be complaining about what amounted to the advance implementation of the Jopling report—I think that he referred to shorter hours and longer holidays—on which I was pressed to make progress by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) earlier today.

As ever, the debate has been interesting. This is the second occasion on which I have had the privilege of being asked to wind it up. We heard three elegant and attractive maiden speeches from Conservative Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend) took us on what he described as a cruise around the riparian delights of the Thames. Given some of what has been written about our rivers in recent weeks when we have been short of rain, I was pleased to hear that the Thames was still flowing through my hon. Friend's constituency. He paid charming tributes to his predecessors, whom we remember well—Dr. Alan Glyn and, before him, Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe. I had not realised that Sir Christopher Wren was another of my hon. Friend's predecessors, albeit rather briefly.

My hon. Friend's speech was remarkable in two respects. First, he almost tempted a Government Whip to break his normal vow of silence. My hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay)—who is, I believe, my hon. Friend's neighbour—was making distinct murmuring noises of approval in response to some of his remarks about aircraft noise; indeed, he is doing the same now. Secondly, by mentioning a number of issues on which he had been lobbied by his constituents, my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead managed to perform the equivalent of signing about 25 early-day motions in 30 seconds. I am sure that he will be duly noticed as a result.

I was greatly struck by the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), whose path has crossed mine many times. He, too, made a charming and attractive speech—an appropriate maiden speech. I can only say that my hon. Friend can hardly cause me more difficulty in the House than he occasionally caused me outside it. He was a frequent and thoughtful writer on social security matters, but I was not always able to respond to each and every one of his thoughts, and we had our differences of opinion. I well remember appointing him to the Social Security Advisory Committee, from which—unhappily—he has had to resign, but to which he made a distinguished contribution. He paid tribute to his predecessor, Sir Ian Lloyd: I am certain that Sir Ian would have been fighting for a place on the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which we are about to establish, and that he would have made an important contribution.

I do not know what to say about my hon. Friend's reference to the works of P. G. Wodehouse. My knowledge of the novels is not as extensive as it might be, although I remember reading a number of them in my youth. I can, however, assure my hon. Friend that I do not see him as the Jeeves of the House.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), I remember his predecessor, Chris Hawkins—another man with plenty of ideas, who nobbled me with a new one almost every time I passed through the Tea Room, and who made a lively contribution to all our proceedings. As my hon. Friend says, he and I had the

[Mr. Tony Newton]

pleasure of working together closely when he was my special adviser, both at the Department of Trade and Industry and later at the Department of Social Security.

I endorse all that my hon. Friend said about the beauties of his constituency, although I had better not endorse his claim that it is the most beautiful in the country. That would upset every other hon. Member—which I do not wish to do—and might even upset some of my constituents, because my constituency contains some pretty nice areas too. I can support what he said about the attractions of his constituency, however, having had the advantage of staying with him after the Conservative party conference the year before last, visiting the Buxton opera house with him and seeing the beauties of the Georgian crescent to which he referred. I shall draw his remarks to the attention of the Ministers whom they concern.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) made a number of comments about disability benefits and the legislation on disabled people's rights that he feels should be enacted. Some of what he said about disability benefits sits rather ill with the criticisms that he advanced when we introduced those benefits, claiming that few people would benefit and that they would gain very little.

We always expected that a major effort would be required to introduce disability living allowance, but there was an even larger surge of claims than we had anticipated. My hon. Friends do not consider the position acceptable, and—as I believe the right hon. Gentleman knows—they are taking firm action to try to accelerate the handling of cases. Nearly 400 extra staff have been added to the 2,000 already employed in disability living allowance and attendance allowance work, and I hope that that will contribute to the improvement that both the right hon. Gentleman and I want. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will understand if I rattle on, because I have only three minutes left.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) courteously informed me before making his speech that he would seek to raise the question of the Victoria Works Engineering Services pension scheme. He may know that, when I was Secretary of State for Social Security, I met some representatives of the scheme—along with his predecessor, who is now Governor of Hong Kong. The Government are well aware of the problems faced by the 73 pensioners to whom he referred, and, as the hon. Gentleman may know, officials are already in touch with the scheme's trustees to see what can be done to help. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will pay close attention to what the hon. Gentleman has said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) made a number of points about car crime, and spoke of Minister's efforts to persuade motor manufacturers to improve the security of vehicles. My hon. Friend is entirely right in thinking that my right hon. and hon. Friends continue to press the matter. The motor manufacturers have undoubtedly made good progress in some respects, but more action is needed, and the effort to introduce greater vehicle security will certainly continue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) referred to the problem of ticket touting. As he knows, we have an outstanding commitment to legislate on ticket touting in respect of football matches when parliamentary time allows. I am afraid that I cannot predict exactly when that will be.

Let me tell the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner)—who, I understand, has had to leave—that the takeover that caused him concern is now being considered by the Director General of Fair Trading. He will be aware that it would be inappropriate for me to comment further. As for the speech of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), I think that I would be wise not to enter into the details of the case that he raised.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 32, Noes 157.

Division No. 60] **[7.08 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Chisholm, Malcolm
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Eagle, Ms Angela
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gordon, Mildred
Harvey, Nick
Hoyle, Doug
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
McAllion, John
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Madden, Max
Meale, Alan
Morley, Elliot
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dixon, Don
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorst, John
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Home Robertson, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'rdshire)*

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Speed, Sir Keith
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thurnham, Peter
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 16th July, do adjourn until Monday 19th October.

Statutory Instruments, &c

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c).

Summer Time

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Summer Time Order 1992 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 23rd June.

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) Order 1992 (S.I., 1992, No. 1387), dated 12th June 1992, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th June, be approved.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

CONSOLIDATED FUND [APPROPRIATION] BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Motion made, and Question proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Homelessness

7.20 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the subject of homelessness at this stage in this series of today's debates. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I want to hear the hon. Member. Right hon. and hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber should do so quickly and quietly.

Mr. Raynsford: It is right that Parliament should debate homelessness before it adjourns for the summer recess. The extent of homelessness in Britain is a terrible scar on the face of society and a savage indictment of our failure to provide adequately for the housing needs of all our people.

Official figures show that the number of homeless households accepted by local authorities in England has trebled over the past 15 years—from 50,000 to 150,000. Homelessness has continued to increase relentlessly throughout the lifetime of this Government and, sadly, all the signs suggest that it will continue to do so until present Government policies are reversed.

The figures are only the tip of the iceberg, because they exclude all those who apply to local authorities but are refused help—usually because the council does not accept that they are homeless or decides that they have themselves contributed to their misfortune. The statistics exclude also those who have never applied to a local authority—usually because they are not eligible for housing even if they are homeless, including most single and childless homeless people.

It is a sobering comment on the official statistics that they do not include the majority of those who sleep rough on the streets at night. Because they are single and childless, they are unlikely to qualify for local authority help and so have not bothered to apply. Such figures as are available generally come from surveys made by voluntary organisations. Last year, a Salvation Army survey estimated that there were around 75,000 homeless single and childless people in London, including 2,000 literally on the streets—rough sleepers, 18,000 in hostels, 25,000 in cheap lodgings and bed-and-breakfast accommodation, and 30,000 in squats.

Other surveys confirm that homelessness is by no means confined to London and other big cities—even though numerically its incidence is much higher there. In countless rural communities throughout Britain, the problem is manifested as the sons and daughters of long-standing residents discover that they cannot afford or obtain housing in the area, and are forced to leave and to move elsewhere. Many end up in the big cities—some of them homeless and on the streets, and at risk.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend makes the point that homelessness is no longer a problem associated only with London and other big cities. Changes in benefits have contributed to homelessness becoming a national problem. That is the tragic and disgraceful result of 13 wasted years of Tory rule.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend highlights a point that I hope to raise later. I wholly concur with his view that wider economic and benefits policies also contribute to homelessness nationally.

The fundamental reason for homelessness increasing so alarmingly given by anyone who has seriously studied the problem over the past 30 years is the shortage of suitable affordable housing in places where it is needed—and particularly the shortage of rented accommodation. It is hardly surprising that more and more people are at risk of homelessness, when the past years have seen the biggest loss in rented housing in Britain's history.

The combination of the long-term continuing decline of private renting and the recent, dramatic decline in the supply of council accommodation has proved a lethal cocktail. More than 2 million rented homes have been lost from those two sectors.

The one and only growth area in rented housing is the welcome increase in housing association lettings—but it is nowhere near adequate to offset the losses. The appalling human consequences of that loss, which was deliberately fuelled by the Government's attack on local authorities, have been extensively documented over the past 10 years—most recently in the Audit Commission's devastating critique of the inadequacy of Government housing policy. The Government, however, turn a deaf ear to all the calls by experts holding widely diverse political and apolitical views. The most recent came in a new report from Shelter, which argues the need for between 30,000 and 90,000 extra homes a year over the next decade.

Even the Audit Commission's plea that the Government should publish projections of the need for social housing—the obvious starting point if policies are to be devised to respond to those needs—has so far met with no response. All we hear is the oft-repeated statement—I dare say we shall hear it again tonight—that the Government hope that housing associations will achieve a programme of 50,000 homes a year over the next three years. That will be welcome if it is achieved, but, as the commission proves, even if it is and if all possible empty properties in the public sector are brought into use, there will still be a critical shortfall, and the crisis will inevitably worsen.

A shortage of housing is not the only factor that contributes to homelessness. Personal, social, and economic factors are also at work. No one with any experience of working with and on behalf of homeless people denies that sometimes people contribute to their own misfortune. That is not a reason for turning away from their needs. In his classic 1970 study on homelessness in London, Professor John Greve commented:

> "There are chronically inadequate families among the homeless and there are families whose only misfortune is the loss of a home. The former need support: both need a home. Between these extremes is a large number of families who have a variety of disadvantages in addition to the lack of a home. In some ways their difficulties might be resolved or reduced to manageable proportions by adequate housing."

Sadly, those wise words have not prompted the response that they deserve.

Among the other factors at work is the evolution of policies towards institutional care. Most right hon. and hon. Members support the concept behind care in the community, but it is impossible to do other than express alarm at the implications of numbers of vulnerable people being pitched out of institutional care without making a success of the care in the community policy. The small supportive hostels and group homes which provide the right environment for the discharged mentally ill or recovering alcoholics are two of the most obvious examples of which there are many others. How sad it is,

therefore, to have to report that, when asked last month whether it could estimate the housing costs arising from the community care plans and the implementation of the Children Act 1989 for each of the main groups of people in need, the Department of Health had to reply that it had no such estimates available.

It is only nine months before that policy comes into effect next April. What a comment it is on the lack of preparation for the implementation of a major plank of Government policy when the lead Department cannot provide estimates of the likely financial implications of providing the new smaller supportive accommodation that is required to ensure the success of the care in the community policy. I fear that the outcome will be more distressed and vulnerable people at risk of homelessness or actually on the streets.

When considering the wider economic factors, there is also the crisis of repossessions, of which there were 75,000 last year. According to evidence published by *Roof* magazine and, most recently, by the Rowntree Trust, the number is likely to continue at a relatively high level for at least two years because of the huge overhang of people in debt. Some 275,000 people are more than six months behind with their payments.

Although there has been a short-term fall in the number of repossessions in the first months of this year, the number of people in long-term debt continues to rise. The consequence is bound to feed through in due course into a further high incidence of abandonments and repossessions as borrowers decide that there is no way out, that they cannot cope, that there is no way in which they can rescue their position and that it is better to hand in the keys, or as the lenders decide that they can no longer afford to allow the debt to continue to escalate.

I should be surprised if significantly more than half those 275,000 households more than six months in arrears at the moment manage to get through the next two years without losing their homes, either by handing in the keys or through repossession. That implies a home loss of around 70,000 a year over the next two years as a result of mortgage problems.

The Government's response to that crisis, as to so many other aspects of the housing and homelessness crisis, has been to resort to cheap palliatives to try to cover up the worst public signs of the problem, while doing nothing to attack the underlying causes. Hence the abortive mortgage rescue package, which appears to have attracted only 12 takers to date. It depended on the financial institutions to bail out the Government simply because the Government were not prepared to provide the subsidy necessary to ensure a really effective mortgage rescue scheme.

Similarly, the Government's rough sleepers initiative was designed to sweep the streets of London, but significantly not anywhere else in the country, in advance of the general election. That initiative is now coming to an end, and the signs are that there is no commitment for on-going finance to maintain it in the years ahead.

There is escalating dependency on temporary accommodation for homeless people, with 62,000 households, the highest number ever recorded, now living in temporary accommodation as at the end of March this year—the latest date for which figures are available. One third of those households are in expensive and unsuitable bed-and-breakfast hotels. That problem is left unresolved because of a shortage of adequate move-on accommodation. As the supply of permanent homes dries up and more and more people are waiting longer in bed and breakfast and other forms of temporary housing, much of which is not just squalid and unsatisfactory but actually more expensive than permanent homes, we must ask why the Government are dithering.

Looking at all those trends—the shortfall of affordable housing, the demand for new homes, the need for care in the community provision, the continuing loss of repossessed homes from the owner-occupier sector, the backlog of people in temporary accommodation—any informed observer can only conclude that the number of homeless people in Britain will continue to rise alarmingly over the next year or two. If the problem is compounded, as some commentators have feared, by further cuts in social security benefits, notably housing benefit and benefits for the young unemployed, the escalating crisis will become an unstoppable avalanche, the like of which we have never seen even in the grim history of the past 13 years.

The Government have no policy to deal with the problem. All that Ministers can offer is temporary palliatives which are short-term and limited in their impact, like sticking plaster on gaping wounds. Ministers may speak soothing words while stepping over the homeless on their way to the opera, but they have failed to reverse, or even halt, the escalating crisis. In doing so, they have betrayed a whole generation whose formative experiences too often comprise the seedy lodging house, the squat or the cardboard box on the street.

It is time for a fresh start. It is time for Ministers to recognise that their current policies are leading nowhere but towards ever more of the same human misery of which we have seen far too much in the past 13 years. We urgently need new initiatives which will attack the causes of homelessness in Britain today, not just tinker with the symptoms

We urgently need an expanded housing programme, using all available resources, including the tragically wasted local authority capital receipts, which would, if released, generate desperately needed move-on accommodation to take some people from temporary accommodation. The rough sleepers initiative should not be discontinued or watered down by the Treasury, as appears likely. It should be expanded to cover areas outside London where there are people sleeping on the streets. It should be expanded also to ensure that there is within London adequate provision of move-on accommodation as well as the much needed emergency housing into which people on the streets can move first of all.

The problem of mortgage default and repossessions should be attacked seriously with a combination of a mortgage benefit scheme, a properly funded mortgage rescue package and tough new restrictions on financial institutions to prevent them repossessing unless they can demonstrate that all available alternative options have been explored.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): The hon. Gentleman has described a number of areas in which we need a large volume increase in housing available for rent and for purchase. That will mean either a big expansion in public spending, as the hon. Gentleman obviously recommends, or, as Conservative Members would prefer, a big expansion in the amount of private sector finance attracted to those types of housing. Is not the problem the fact that, when we go for big expansion, we fail to deliver

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

the quality? Does he not agree that the citizens charter has a big role to play in ensuring that we achieve the quality of housing——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is becoming a speech.

Mr. Jenkin: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was about to finish.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, you will—right now.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman made one good point when he said that a rapid expansion of housing, which has occurred in the past, without concern for quality would be a mistake. However, he failed to make the point that a rapid contraction of provision has resulted in people on the streets and people living in far worse conditions. The bed-and-breakfast hotel is far worse than the worst jerry-built council housing of the 1960s.

I accept that we need the maximum use of all available resources: I made that point. We must attract more private investment by various routes into the provision of housing. We need to encourage housing association programmes, but we also need council programmes to be restored to a reasonable level to provide a mixture of housing options, choice for the customers and an adequate supply. Everyone who examines the issue seriously—I offer the Audit Commission as evidence of that—must reach that conclusion. Housing associations alone cannot deliver enough homes.

In addition to the various items that I have recommended so far, we must also consider benefit entitlement. Benefit entitlement should be restored for 16 and 17-year-olds, and the injustices done to the under-25s should be reversed. The concept of the boarders' premium, advocated very sagely in another place earlier this week, should be explored urgently to assist particularly young single people to allow them to survive without recourse to rough sleeping or squats.

There should also be a co-ordinated programme to ensure that unsuitable and expensive temporary accommodation is discontinued as soon as possible. That should include targets to reduce the number of homeless people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation by 50 per cent. in 12 months and by 75 per cent. within two years. A limited amount of targeted initial finance, which would be needed to achieve that, would of course in turn be more than offset by the long-term savings of getting people out of bed and breakfast into permanent housing, which all the studies show is cheaper for the public purse than bed and breakfast.

When the Secretary of State for Health outlined her White Paper yesterday and announced the new health targets, she failed to mention homelessness until prompted from the Labour Benches. She and her Government colleagues, as well as Conservative Back Benchers, must be aware of the extent to which homelessness and bad housing damage the lives, health and prospects of thousands of our fellow citizens.

It is time for those connections to be recognised. It is time for the Department of the Environment to recognise the need to set targets to tackle the needs of the homeless. I have suggested some targets tonight; hon. Members may be able to suggest others. Above all, it is important for the Government to recognise the alarming crisis. The matter is set to deteriorate further unless urgent remedial action is taken. The spectre of homelessness will cast an ever longer and darker shadow over our society unless those responsible wake up and accept the need for new policies and new energy to tackle and overcome that crisis.

7.40 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I warmly welcome the opportunity to discuss homelessness. I applied for a debate on it, and although I was unsuccessful in securing it, I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) on his great success and on his speech. The hon. Gentleman returns to the House with quite a reputation as a housing expert. In his moderate speech, he showed that he was prepared to embrace a wide range of options. Unfortunately, he made the same parrot cry that we hear time after time from the Opposition—that the Government should allow local authorities to spend more money building council houses. The hon. Gentleman failed to tackle two of the fundamental problems of homelessness: first, the appalling record of local authorities in the provision of public housing and, secondly, the difficulties that have been experienced by the private rented sector.

Last year, I visited a day centre for homeless people living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation just down the road in Westminster. Many of them were mothers with young children. Before I arrived, I expected that they would trot out the standard line about homelessness and attack the Government and their policies. However, I should have known better, because they were ordinary people living in the real world. Almost without exception, they had two common complaints. First, they complained about the way in which local councils treated them as homeless people. They were treated like dirt on the floor. That upset me greatly. Secondly, they would say, "I know of an empty council house just down the road from where I am living right now. Why can't I go there?" I would say, "Yes, indeed, why can't you go there? That is a very good question."

The hon. Member for Greenwich and his colleagues have often suggested that local authorities are the answer to the problems of homelessness. Local authorities are part of the problem. Because of the sheer incompetence of the way in which that housing is managed, the number of council houses that are allowed to lie empty, councils' refusal to co-operate with the private sector, and the political manipulation which drives many of our council housing policies, local authorities are one of the prime causes of today's housing difficulties.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): It is important to have some facts. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on Government figures which show that local authorities have an average void rate of 2·5 per cent., housing associations 3·1 per cent., the private sector 5·9 per cent. and his own Government no less than 16·1 per cent.? As local authorities have the best record of all put together, why does the hon. Gentleman not tell us about that?

Mr. Riddick: We hear that comment time after time. The reason why a significant number of Government houses are empty is that they are Ministry of Defence houses. Many of those service people are posted overseas. The hon. Gentleman must accept that. He knows that it is

true. Does the hon. Gentleman justify the fact that Liverpool has nearly 6,000 council houses, or 9 per cent. of its housing stock, lying vacant? Does he agree that that is an absolute disgrace? It is shocking that almost 100,000 council houses are standing empty, and it is shameful that local authorities have rent arrears of £430 million. Opposition Members say that local authorities should be allowed to build more houses and manage more of this country's housing stock. I just do not buy that.

I am sorry to say that such problems are not confined to the empires of lunacy based in Liverpool, Manchester or some London boroughs. I have some of those problems in my own back yard. My local council, Kirklees, which is Labour-controlled, has almost 1,000 council houses standing empty. That makes Kirklees council the 23rd worst-performing local housing authority out of 333 authorities. Kirklees also has rent arrears of almost £4 million, which makes it the 33rd worst-performing authority in respect of rent arrears.

I recently learned that, a few years ago, the local private landlords association in Huddersfield raised £25 million of venture capital for low-cost housing in the area. Private landlords offered to buy derelict houses from the council and provide houses for low-income families, but the council refused to co-operate.

For the past four years, investment in housing associations in Kirklees has been extremely low, not because the money for such investment has not been available, but because Kirklees council has been refusing to co-operate with housing associations on purely ideological grounds. The Labour-controlled council does not approve of housing associations. I wonder what the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) has to say about that.

My right hon. Friends might know that I raised that issue on the Floor of the House last year. I am pleased to say that, as a result of my exposure of that shocking behaviour by Kirklees council, that absurd policy has been reversed. The result has been dramatic. Housing association investment in Kirklees for the financial year 1992-93 will rise by almost £6 million to £18 million, which is a massive increase of 46 per cent. The number of homes provided by housing associations is to increase from 275 last year to 409 this year, as a direct result of that increased investment by housing associations and the change of policy by Kirklees council. Housing associations now feel able and willing to invest in our area, but no thanks to Kirklees council. Week after week, local Labour councillors bleat about homelessness in Kirklees and say that it is because the Government refuse to provide enough money for the council, yet the council's own dogma and pigheadedness have helped to bring about the problem.

Many private landlords in Huddersfield refuse to take tenants who are in receipt of housing benefit, not because they have anything against such people but because it takes landlords between three and six months to recoup housing benefit from the local authority. That is just not good enough. I plead with my hon. Friend the Minister not to allow councils to build any more houses.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): That is already happening.

Mr. Riddick: Councils are allowed to build a small number, as we know. Because of their record, they should not be allowed to build any more houses.

The Government need to be more radical and move the provision of public rented accommodation out of the hands of local authorities. That could be done by increasing the role of housing associations and contracting out the provision of housing stock to private companies. It might be necessary for local authorities to have a place in co-ordinating the placing of homeless and needy people in appropriate accommodation, but even that is dubious as long as Labour councillors regard public housing as something to be manipulated for their own political ends.

Mr. Raynsford: I accept that, for political reasons, the hon. Gentleman may not want to listen to what Opposition Members say, but has he read the Audit Commission's report? Does he accept its view that, even if the Government achieved their full housing association programme and even if local authorities brought all empty properties back into use, there would still be a shortfall and there is a need for a continuing local authority contribution?

Mr. Riddick: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point because it moves nicely on to my next point, about the private rented sector. That sector needs to be stimulated.

It is absolute nonsense for anyone to suggest that the Government have done nothing to increase housing provision. Today, there are slightly fewer than 23 million homes; back in 1979, there were slightly fewer than 21 million—an increase of 2 million. That is no mean figure. We should not forget that. One sad and telling fact is that, in the same period, the private rented sector has continued to decline as a direct result of rent controls and rent restrictions. Indeed, as a result of the Rent Act 1974, which extended security of tenure and so-called fair rents to furnished lettings, 400,000 private dwellings ceased to be available between 1974 and 1979. That was Labour's contribution to homelessness.

I am pleased to say that the Labour policy appears to have been arrested by the Government's new policy. At the turn of the century, 90 per cent. of housing was accounted for by the private rented sector. Today, that figure is 8 per cent. In Germany the figure is 45 per cent. and in countries such as Sweden, Switzerland and France, 23 per cent. There is clearly scope to increase the private rented sector in Britain.

There are hundreds of thousands of empty privately owned rooms, flats and houses. Many are not let because people still believe that they will have difficulty removing the tenants if they wish to do so. The way to improve the conditions in which private tenants live and to keep rents down is not to apply controls which act as disincentives to let but to increase the supply. That is why I welcome all the steps taken by the Government to expand the private rented sector.

Clearly, many people are still not aware of the more free and open situation. They are potential landlords. Their empty properties and rooms are potential homes. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to launch a crusade to turn potential landlords into real landlords and potential homes into real homes. That is the challenge. Let us stimulate the private rented sector. Let us fill those empty council houses. Let us build co-operation between local authorities and the private sector. Let us get politics out of local authority housing.

[Mr. Riddick]

Let us enable housing associations to build more homes. In that way, we could provide for the men sleeping rough in London and for the families in London and, indeed, in my constituency, living in cramped bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We could provide what they want—somewhere warm and comfortable to live, somewhere that they can call home.

7.52 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I support many of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford). He gave evidence of the increase in homelessness; it is increasing for a variety of reasons.

I looked up some of the figures for my local authority to see what had happened in the past year. I saw an increase of more than 40 per cent. in the number of people who need to be rehoused because they have been evicted by private landlords, whom we have just been told would provide the answer. There was an increase of 157 per cent. in mortgage defaults. Most striking of all, there was an increase over two years of 400 per cent. in the number of single people with a mental illness who had to be rehoused because they had been thrown out of institutions.

Of course, there is a great deal that the statistics do not reveal. Statistics tend to show only the people who are rehoused as priority cases. They do not include all the people who are actually or potentially homeless. Especially, they do not show how many young and single people are homeless. As has already been said, the figures are not available.

Various surveys show that in London at least 100,000 young people live in unsatisfactory accommodation such as squats and bedsits, sleep rough or are homeless at home —living with friends or relatives in precarious circumstances where they cannot expect to stay permanently.

Most of us welcome some of the Government's initiatives such as the sleeping rough initiative and so on. However, they are not enough, they are not long term or permanent and they are not countrywide. Other aspects of Government policy do nothing to address the problems of young single people. People receive less benefit if they are under 25. If they go to a private landlord, the landlord does not reduce the rent because the person is under 25. The benefit is cut, but the rent is not.

There is a further impact on single homeless people. Councils often have to house families in accommodation that could be used for single people. I know what happens in my area. The pressure on housing caused by coping with homelessness puts a great strain on the local authority's housing policy. Homeless families end up going into one-bedroom accommodation because that is all that is available. At first, they are grateful. It is preferable to being on the street or in bed and breakfast. But they quickly realise that they are trapped in accommodation where they will be overcrowded. They are added to the housing transfer list the moment that they are rehoused. For anyone else seeking a transfer, there is virtually no transfer activity.

People in temporary, bed-and-breakfast accommodation suffer perhaps the most of all. They do not know when they might be moved to other temporary accommodation. In many boroughs no support services are provided. Such families suffer a complete lack of stability and the consequences for the family and the children's education are terrible.

In newspaper reports today we see another aspect of the impact on people in temporary accommodation. In today's *The Guardian* there is a report on people who apply to the social fund for grants and loans. The research commissioned by the Department of Social Security shows that the decisions taken on whether to award a grant or loan are completely nonsensical. The researchers said that the only pattern that they could find in the decisions was similar to that which would obtain if awards and refusals occurred completely at random. One is just as likely to be refused a grant or loan as to be awarded one. One's housing conditions are irrelevant. About three quarters of the people who received loans found that the money taken out of their income support made it impossible for them to live.

The most crucial requirement is investment. The private rented sector has been in decline since the first world war —for 80 years.

Mr. Riddick: Why?

Mr. Gerrard: The hon. Gentleman asks why. The Government have been in power for 13 years and the private rented sector has continued to decline throughout that period because nothing that the Government can do will reinvigorate it. A measure of—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Tony Banks: The 1988 Act.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is difficult to hear the hon. Member because of seated interventions.

Mr. Gerrard: A measure of what has happened in investment in public housing is that the number of starts by local authorities in London in 1990 was 2 per cent. of the number in 1978. The lack of investment seems to be recognised by everyone except the Government.

In 1990, the then Conservative chair of the London Boroughs Association said:

> "A substantial increase in the financing of social housing provision and the release of more council house sales proceeds is urgently required in order to prevent a crisis becoming a catastrophe".

None of that has been done.

Last year there was a national inquiry into British housing in which the Duke of Edinburgh was involved. On the renewal of housing, it said:

> "So little housing has been demolished that every new home built today in Britain will have to last 2,700 years if present trends of repair and demolition continue."—

[Interruption.] That is not my figure; it comes from the national inquiry. The Audit Commission report said that, depending on the range of projections for the increase in the number of households during the next 10 years—that number is increasing—social housing provision, and not council housing, needs to be in the region of 60,000 to 90,000 per year. In 1990 it was 28,000. Under current plans, whatever happens, if the Government meet every target for housing associations, they will not make up that shortfall.

The Audit Commission clearly said that expenditure was required and that even if local authorities did nothing but maintain existing stock and support the private sector, there would be a shortfall of £1 billion in 1993-94, on present plans. The commission also said that, whatever

local authorities did about efficiency, there would still be a large gap between supply and need—not supply and demand.

I was first involved with housing in 1974, when I became the chairman of a London borough housing committee, in Waltham Forest. I inherited a mess. There were many empty properties, about 200 to 300 were squatted and there were long waiting lists. Now it seems like the beginning of the homelessness crisis, although it was bad enough then. The next four or five years were the only period that I can recall from my involvement in housing when it felt like real progress was being made. We did not achieve perfection, or cure all the problems, but there was progress, because there was real investment. At the end of four or five years of investment in that authority there was virtually no squatting, empty properties were being used, or given to housing associations, and people were being rehoused from the waiting list.

The reasons for the improvement were that we had done something about efficiency in management. There is no excuse for inefficiency and for properties standing empty when they could be used. We also used housing associations. I believe, as do many of my hon. Friends, that we should use housing associations, and we have no problem with that. However, councils were also building houses and buying properties on the open market and were able to make up some of the gaps in their provision.

The cuts started in 1978, and it is true to say that they began under a Labour Government. The famous speech by Anthony Crosland—when he said that the party was over in local government—signalled the beginning of cuts in investment in housing and it has never recovered. Until we make simple changes in policies and put real money into public and social housing, homelessness will increase.

8.3 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reflect on the cause of homelessness, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford). In passionate tones, he said that homelessness has caused a savage scare in our society and he feared that it would treble in 15 years.

Putting aside the natural human agony involved, I fear that the hon. Member was suggesting that homelessness was somehow the Government's fault. We must try to put things in perspective. Society has changed enormously. there are now more divorces than ever before, and each time that parents or a couple break up, the husband or wife must move into another home, which creates greater pressures. One family in three breaks up, so there are enormous pressures on local authorities and society to provide for homelessness. Therefore, when we consider homelessness, there is no point in saying that the Government should have done this, that or the other. It is more a question of what we are doing.

There has also been speculation about the number of people who have suffered from mortgage repossessions. I know that that is an agony and I have just had to deal with one such case in Sutton. The hon. Member for Greenwich mentioned that 70,000 families would come into that category, but my research shows that the overall figure makes up about 12 per cent. of people who are made homeless. A sense of proportion is relevant, although it is a tragedy for the families concerned.

The hon. Member for Greenwich gave the impression that the rough sleepers initiative was a poor effort by the Government, barely worthy of the enormous funds put into it. You spoke as if they were going to cast it aside, but that is not the case. The Government have committed £96 million to the rough sleepers initiative, to be spent over three years. You are absolutely right—the initiative is largely focused in London, because that is where all the assessors agree that there is the most acute need. However, more money has now been allocated, giving about £300 million to the south-east to renovate properties for the people who most need them.

It has been suggested that 16 and 17-year-olds are not on income support and are therefore tossed out on the streets. Again, we should have a sense of proportion. All 16 and 17-year-olds living at home have the option of going on a youth training scheme, of further education or of getting a job. We accept that some fall through the net, but there is no question of them being thrown into the gutter. Income support is made available for the disabled, for lone parents, for those estranged from their parents and for those who have left care and are living away from home.

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. Last week there was a meeting of the all-party group on homelessness in this place to consider the precise issue that the hon. Lady is talking about—single homeless 16 to 18-year-olds. Five young people were present. One had had to leave home because the domestic situation was unbearable and untenable, and three had been in care all their lives until now. Each and every one of them said that they had nowhere to go but the street. They were sleeping on pavements or in doorways. The severe hardship payments which the Government usually produce to explain that those young people are not without any financial support —*[Interruption.]* It is no use winding your hand in that fashion, hon. Gentlemen. Those young people are sleeping on our streets now. You may find it intensely amusing, but they do not.

If young people present themselves at offices where severe hardship payments are made, they only get the money in their hands if they are assisted by a voluntary worker. They do not know how the system works and no one within the system is helping them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I hesitate to interrupt new Members, as I do not want to throw them during their speeches, but it is an appropriate opportunity to remind them that they must not use the word "you" unless addressing the Chair, and that interventions are supposed to be short.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms. Jackson) for her comments, although from my experience there is no reason or excuse for young people to be in the circumstances she described. I should like to meet those young people and to help them, because there is no reason for them to be in such difficulties.

It is interesting to note that the number of people sleeping rough has dropped dramatically. Voluntary organisations in central London estimate that, since the rough sleepers initiative was introduced in January, the

[Lady Olga Maitland]

number of those sleeping on the street has dropped from 1,000 to about 400. It is expected that that number will fall to nil within a few months.

Another important factor is that, no matter how hard one tries to provide accommodation for those sleeping rough, they do not all want to take it up. When a journalist or someone else conducts an investigation down the Strand and taps people on the shoulder to ask why they have not taken up the accommodation provided, they answer that they do not like the discipline, there is not enough television and entertainment or that they do not like this or that. Some people do not want to be taken care of. Although we have a responsibility to make accommodation available, it is important to point out that people do not always want to take up that option.

I have particular concern, which I raised briefly a few weeks ago, about homeless people who are put into bed-and-breakfast hostels. Last year, I spent a week in a hostel for the homeless in Haringey as part of a television documentarry on the experiences of people in hostels. It was a salutary experience for me. I was put into a hostel despite the fact that Haringey has thousands of empty housing units. For some reason, it seems incapable of matching the homeless to its void properties. The hostel in which I stayed was clean and adequate. My bedroom was perfectly okay, although it just had one single bulb by which it was difficult to read.

During that week, however, I met other homeless people in other hostels, whose conditions were quite different. The communal kitchen was filthy, tiles were coming off the walls, the cookers had never been properly cleaned, the floors were ripped, the bathrooms did not properly function and the lavatory seats were often missing. The condition of the bedrooms was also intolerable, with broken furniture, cockroaches and so forth.

If it was possible to put me into an adequate, clean hostel, why has Haringey not ensured that all its other hostels are of the same standard? I suspect a lack of control. We should have independent inspectors to ensure that everyone has a decent, clean bed. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider setting up an independent inspectorate of those hostels. Certain standards should be insisted upon, and hostels should be subject to a code of practice. People may be homeless, but they are entitled to be treated as dignified human beings. That was not the case for the people I saw suffering in some hostels in north London.

It is also interesting to note how different local authorities handle homeless people. Haringey chucks its homeless into hostels. That may be an easy option, but it is not practical. Although Haringey tries to keep families together in the same building, they are sometimes separated. It is extraordinary to consider that the cost of putting a family of four into a hostel is about £400 a week. That money could be far more practically spent on placing those families in private rented property.

Mr. Soley: They cannot do it above a certain level.

Lady Olga Maitland: They certainly can.

My local authority, Sutton and Cheam, has gone to a lot of trouble to ensure that people can live in dignity and at a lower cost to the local authority. That authority has just 19 couples living in bed-and-breakfast hostels, while it has placed 110 families in private rented property, which it has rented for a set lease from the landlords. It has another 147 families living in temporary accommodation in empty council stock, and about 50 families living in housing association property.

Unfortunately, some local authorities display a certain laxity and lack of care about the condition of homeless families. I congratulate my local authority on putting so much effort into caring for the homeless—it is supported in that by the Conservative Government—and for ensuring that families are housed in flats rather than bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

We should make the arrangements governing rented accommodation more flexible, so that better use can be made of it. Part of the problem is that, in the past, landlords were afraid that they would be unable to get tenants out. It is important to remember that there are now 600,000 empty housing units—often flats above shops. I welcome the fact that the Government are now providing a grant to bring those flats back into the rented sector. I also welcome the fact that the Government are making it easier for young homeless people to rent a single room from householders. The householder can now let out a room, tax-free, for £65 a week. Such a system benefits both parties.

Sometimes, a family or a single person who may want to rent a flat cannot afford to pay the deposit in the first place. I was interested to learn that Colchester council helps those who have become homeless either through repossession or who have been discharged from the Army, who have the prospect of a real income but who cannot put the money up front for a deposit. That council has found that it is worth its while to pay the deposit in advance, and it is rare for people to default on their payments. The Government should consider such a scheme.

Thurrock council operates a scheme for those on income support. Sometimes there is a delay before someone receives housing benefit, and that means that that person is often refused rented property because the landlord is concerned about the delay in getting his money. The council has come up with a damage-limitation scheme, which guarantees the money to the landlord right away. It also operates a system for people who agree to have their housing benefit paid directly to the landlord.

I also agree with the call for greater flexibility in the housing market. Concern has already been expressed about the constraints on housing association tenants, who do not currently have the right to buy their homes from those associations. I would welcome a re-examination of that arrangement so that such purchases are possible in the future. That would make a tremendous difference to the housing market.

The important thing is to keep people moving and to get them into homes. Above all, we must ensure that people continue to live in the dignity that they deserve.

8.19 pm

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): I am not sure how to follow that rich mixture of prosperous, suburban, middle-class bigotry, fantasy and insensitivity, so I shall get on with the points that I had intended to make, for time is pressing and many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

It is particularly appropriate that we should be holding this debate in national housing week, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) on the good fortune and persistence which has led to our considering the whole issue.

To native Londoners, homelessness is not just an indication of the decline of this once grand city. Perhaps the finest metaphor for the London of the 1990s is the image of young people sleeping in cardboard boxes in the west end and along some of London's major thoroughfares.

An elderly resident of Sydenham, in my constituency, told me recently, as she recalled life during the war, that the situation was never like it is today. "Why is it like this now?" she asked. The Government have never adequately answered that question.

Homelessness can be defined in a number of ways. We can count the number of people who literally do not have a roof over their heads, but if we include in the definition of homelessness those who are in need of a decent home —of somewhere adequately to meet the needs of themselves and their families—the numbers rocket alarmingly. I shall not this evening trade figures, because my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich did that more than adequately. Nor shall I attempt a detailed analysis of the position. I shall concentrate on one theme—the inadequacy of Conservative policy for the homeless.

The winter weather initiative was part of the rough sleepers initiative. It was a totally inadequate response to a problem that had grown to epidemic proportions. If more care had been taken earlier, the scheme would not have been necessary. The fact that it was necessary was a condemnation of the inactivity of the Conservatives over the years.

I shall tonight draw attention to one scheme—I call it a project—in Lawrie Park road in Sydenham, in my constituency. It is not just a hostel. I call it a project because that is what it has become. It was set up with winter weather initiative money, but it has done far more than simply provide people with a place to keep them off the streets. The project has expanded into counselling and giving advice, and Conservative Members will be interested to hear that it is located in a leafy street close to the boundary with Bromley. A great advantage of that is that it is a long way from the west end and the temptations and influences—in particular for the youngsters for whom the hostel was created—there. It is also a long way from the royal opera house, so Conservative Members are not at risk of tripping over them.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Shame.

Mr. Dowd: It is a damn shame that Government insensitivity is forcing the scheme to close, throwing the youngsters back on to the streets. Perhaps it is suffering that fate because it is in a desirable location. I suspect that if it were located in a draughty church hall and was open for just a few months, with people being taken in to get them out of the weather, it might be treated with more sensitivity.

The project of which I speak was a purpose-built hostel constructed by the NatWest bank for its management trainees while in London, so the standard of accommodation is not just adequate but exemplary for most of the young people who are there. It is designed for youngsters aged 16 to 25, the most vulnerable group among the homeless in London. There is an equal number of young men and young women, and in terms of those most at risk, young women on the streets of London must be at the top of the list.

There are 40 places there, with a capacity for 80. It has never been fully funded to enable it to be used to its full capacity, so the scope for improvement is enormous. Of the 250 young people who have been through the project since 1991, nearly 50 have gone on to obtain permanent or semi-permanent accommodation. In other words, they have found homes and are now permanently removed from the streets of London and have been given a chance to make something of their lives.

The project was funded until the end of March, when the winter weather initiative money ran out. Surprise, surprise—more money was found to enable it to be run until the end of May. I leave hon. Members to conjecture what happened between the end of March and the end of May. Department of the Environment funding ceased, and unless arrangements could be made to enable the project to continue, 40 young people would have been thrown back on to the streets of London.

People need homes in all weathers, not just between December and March. They need permanent, decent homes just as much as we all need them, and Conservative Members have acknowledged that. We approached the Minister informally on a couple of occasions to see whether anything could be done to help the project, but the answer was negative. That is why I have felt compelled to raise the matter this evening, because if the project closes, neither I nor those connected with it will allow it to go with a whimper.

Various organisations are involved, notably the South London family housing association, the Tudor trust, the London housing trust and the London borough of Lewisham. Few of the residents came from Lewisham originally. The local council is trying to find money to keep it open, for it recognises that it has a role to play in providing homes for Londoners and people who come to London.

Those connected with the project have even approached Telethon to see whether money can be obtained from that source to keep the project going. That of itself represents a condemnation of Government policy, with money-raising game shows on television having to be devised to give young people a decent home and a reasonable start in life.

The youngsters came to the House of Commons a few weeks ago with a petition. It was, for many of them, their first visit to this place, and they were confused. I would not say that they were overawed; they simply found the place incomprehensible. As a result of the attitude of the Government over the project, I am forced to share their conclusion. I sent the Minister their petition and received a wholly inadequate response. Not once has the Department offered any assistance or advice on how the project might be kept open. The Government have adopted a Pontius Pilate-like approach and have said, in effect, "That is the end of the matter. You knew when the money was dished out how far it would go. It has now gone and you are on your own."

That happens in many areas of Government spending. Money is provided up front and, its having been provided on a one-off basis, it is left to others, notably local authorities, to go on dealing with recurring problems which are not amenable to one-off solutions. The idiocy

[Mr. Dowd]

and futility of that approach is demonstrated by the fact that come next December, if the winter weather initiative is introduced—there is doubt about whether it will be—it is admitted that the Lawrie Park road hostel will qualify under the scheme. That shows the bankruptcy of Government policy.

I implore the Minister to reconsider the matter, to provide some hope to the project and its residents and, by so doing, to give some hope to every homeless person in this city and throughout the country.

8.26 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): In view of the pressure on time, I shall not make the measured, well-balanced and reasoned speech that I intended to make. Instead, I shall concentrate on one issue that must be aired as a result of the comments of Opposition Members, who do not come to the debate with clean hands. They come here with hypocrisy and humbug. Why, when we discuss homelessness, will they not tell us about Southwark borough council, which is Labour controlled and which is owed £30 million in uncollected rents? Why will they not tell us of the 8,000 empty properties owned by that borough council? Imagine what it could do, if it collected those rents, to bring those unfit and dilapidated units back into occupation. Labour inefficiency is depriving the people of that borough of decent homes in which to live.

Instead of trying to beat the Government with a big stick, Opposition Members should describe the position in the borough of Newham, which has rent arrears of £11 million—*[Interruption.]*—and more than 5,500 units unfit for human occupation. If Newham collected those rents, it could renovate those houses and flats and people could move into them.

I speak with some knowledge of the area, for not only have I been to Newham but I worked for Southwark district council. I know what I am talking about. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) might refer to the rent arrears of £13 million in his borough. He should castigate his borough council for not collecting that money and using it to bring unfit units back into public use.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way in the middle of his litany of extremely worrying cases which, as he says, should be brought to the public's attention. Has he considered the fact that it has been reported in Southwark that three of the people with severe rent arrears are Labour councillors?

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has reinforced my opening remarks that Opposition Members do not come to the debate with clean hands.

If we are to tackle the problem of homelessness, we must take a radical approach to local authority housing management. We must make local authority landlords far more efficient. To that extent, I welcome the excellent consultation paper "Competing for Quality in Housing". I welcome the Government's radical approach in making local authority landlords contract out and buy in the services that they need, when they need them, at the best prices, to give their tenants the best service. That is the way forward if some of the unfit, unlet, empty units are to be brought back into public service.

When my hon. Friend the Minister considers his response to the consultation paper, will he bear in mind that I do not believe that it goes far enough? The consultation document states that the client will remain the local authority housing committee, still steeped in the local authority culture that we so desperately need to get rid of.

Will my hon. Friend consider converting housing committees and departments into semi-detached housing boards or companies, as the Institute of Housing suggested? We should do that, not so that they can build new properties but so that they can better manage the ones that they have. Unless we do that, many Labour-controlled local authorities will seek ways of getting round compulsory competitive tendering by making life impossible for contractors who win tenders or by ensuring that in-house people win them, thus gaining only minimal savings.

If we introduce those radical changes, we shall make great savings in housing management. Local authority landlords will become much more effective and one of the factors causing homelessness will have been diminished.

8.33 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) says that he knows Newham—I must test him on that some time, but not tonight. I shall tell him something about Newham and the voids that exist there. A large number of them are in the Taylor Woodrow Anglian tower blocks. The hon. Gentleman is probably too young to remember Ronan Point, but people had to be moved out of those tower blocks because they were unsafe. The Minister for Housing and Planning knows about those tower blocks as we went on an inspection together and saw how badly they had been built. They were jerry-built flats. We cannot place people in some of the accommodation units in Newham because the structures are too dangerous.

The hon. Member for Sutton might think it is a good thing for Labour party people to be placed in dangerous structures, but I do not think so. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know why there is a housing crisis in London, he does not have to look around to blame local authorities. It is a cheap and easy shot for Conservative Members to say that the housing crisis is caused by Labour local authorities. It is the crass, narrow-minded, narrow-sighted, stupid, ignorant attitude that I expect from Conservative Members as they know nothing about the subject.

What do Conservative Members know about living in rotten accommodation? How many Conservative Members are homeless? Most of them probably have two or three homes. We do not want lectures from a bunch of well-heeled Tory layabouts telling us what is endured by our constituents. If the hon. Member for Sutton wants to know why there is a housing crisis, I shall tell him.

In 1987-88, the London boroughs started building more than 13,000 new homes. In 1990, London boroughs started to build only 302 homes. The reason for the housing crisis is that the Government have ensured that the boroughs cannot provide accommodation for those who need it. It is absolutely disgraceful that in 1990 only 302 new homes were built—2 per cent. of the 1978 total. Between 1981-82 and 1989-90, the available permanent lettings to new tenants were reduced—a loss of 20,000 units.

One does not need a PhD in housing administration to know why there is a housing crisis in London. Some £8 billion is sitting in bank accounts, but no local authorities are allowed to use it to build new homes. The Government conned the House and the rest of the country by saying that if local authorities sold houses, the money would be available to build new homes—lies. The authorities have not been allowed to use their own money to build homes for their own people.

The reason for the housing crisis sits on the Benches opposite—the nasty, ugly face of Toryism. Until we get rid of that, I am afraid there will be more and more people sleeping on the streets and in the doorways of London. That is a damned disgrace and so is the Minister.

8.36 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): We have heard the usual emotional speech of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). The real reason for the housing crisis in London is socialism. We have suffered from decades of socialist legislation stating that it was immoral to make money out of renting properties or offices. The reason for the surplus in office accommodation in London today is that office rents have never been controlled.

Why is there a shortage of accommodation to rent? The answer is that for years and years there were rent controls, and today many potential landlords fear that a future Labour Government would reintroduce rent controls. Investing in property is a long-term activity, and no one will invest in property while there is a threat of a future Labour Government reintroducing rent controls. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West would do his constituents' cause much good if he said that a future Labour Government would never reintroduce rent controls, as that is the fear.

The second fear of those who are considering renting out their property is that of long delays if the tenant refuses to leave at the end of the lease. Some constituents told me that they had let out their property to a tenant for a specific period. At the end of the lease, the tenant said that he would not go. It took my constituents five months to get the tenant out and regain control of their home. Such legal delays prevent some people from renting out their property.

The final reason for the shortage of property in London today and why a few hundred people are sleeping rough is that five Labour councils have 8,163 empty houses. Why is it that vacancies in the London borough of Barnet constitute 1·1 per cent. of its housing stock, but in the London borough of Brent, which is Labour controlled, the figure is 5 per cent. and in Hackney the figure is 4·8 per cent.—excluding the illegal tenancies that Hackney council has decided to allow? In Tower Hamlets the figure is 4·5 per cent., in Newham it is 3·8 per cent., in Southwark it is 3·6 per cent. and in Islington it is 2·6 per cent. Those councils are the cause of homelessness in London today.

The Labour party, Labour legislation and Labour threats are the cause of homelessness in London. It is not for the Labour party to talk about homelessness. Labour Members should come to the debate and admit that they are the cause of homelessness.

Mr. Cryer: Homelessness was lower under a Labour Government.

Mr. Marshall: As the hon. Gentleman who speaks from a sedentary position should know, the long-term effect of Labour policies has caused homelessness. There is no shortage of any other commodity in London. If we did not face the threat of rent controls from a future Labour Government, there would be no housing shortage in London tonight.

8.38 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): In congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) on initiating the debate, may I say that he has left me with the difficult task of trying to tell some Conservative Members in about seven minutes why there is such a housing crisis in this country. Two of the Conservative Members have less excuse for not knowing than the other two as they are older. I think that one of them was elected in 1987, and the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) was elected before that. Both have had the advantage of gaining a knowledge of the subject from documents placed before the House, whether by the Environment Select Committee or the Audit Commission, or by reading the Duke of Edinburgh report or questions that I and other hon. Members have tabled.

The two new Members do not have that advantage and can perhaps be forgiven for not knowing all the facts. I reiterate some of the facts that I put to the hon. Member for Colne Valley who tried to avoid them. In percentage terms the Government are the worst owners of empty properties in the country and it is not just the Ministry of Defence which is at fault. But even it has no excuse for keeping properties empty.

I asked a question just before Christmas and was told that 24 good, well-appointed, centrally heated houses in the middle of Swindon were to be sold after remaining empty for two years. I tabled the same question last week and was told that they are still empty. One in five police houses in London was empty just a few years ago but, marvel of marvels, it is now down to about one in eight. It is disgraceful that houses are being sold when the market is flat. There are 36,000 Government-owned houses and if they are put on the market prices will be depressed. The ownership or management of the houses could be transferred to a local authority or a housing association. That would get people out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation and save taxpayers' money.

I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) to say that local authorities could not continue the lease-back scheme because the Government and, sadly, the Minister restricted the extent to which that could be done. When councils such as Haringey and others reached the limit, they were stopped from continuing such schemes unless they were prepared to lose subsidy. It is costing a fortune to keep people in bed and breakfast so as to conform to that bizarre rule. We pay more to keep people in bed and breakfast than it would cost to keep them in the flat or house from which they have been evicted. That is because the Government will not introduce a mortgage rescue scheme of the type that I have been suggesting for more than two years.

We saw the repossession crisis coming. The Duke of Edinburgh report, the second Rowntree report, which is not a Labour party document by any stretch of the imagination, showed that since 1979 we have lost more

[Mr. Clive Soley]

than 2 million rented sector homes. It was 1·9 million at the time the report was written. One million have been lost from the council sector and about 1 million from the private sector. When Labour left office, the private sector accounted for 14 per cent. of the rented market but it is now down to 7 per cent. That is the extent of the Government's failure.

The hon. Members for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and for Colne Valley seem to blame the decline in the rented sector on the rent Acts. They should know, because they have heard me say it often enough, that the rented sector has suffered a straight line decline since the turn of the century, about 14 years before the introduction of any rent Act. When the rent Acts were abolished in 1957 the decline became faster, and speeded up when they were abolished again in 1980. When they were removed in Northern Ireland in 1957—and no party ever advocated putting them back—25 per cent. of the rented market there was private. It is now 5 per cent.

The rented sector has collapsed because in this country, almost uniquely, there is an enormous subsidy for home ownership and no equivalent subsidy for renting. For landlords and tenants alike, it is not worth being in the rented sector. The Government's stance is hideously stupid. They should not worry too much about ownership. I am not too worried about who owns the rented sector, but I am worried about quality of management, affordability and tenants' rights. If the Government can get those three factors right, the local authority sector, the housing associations and the private sector can deliver good housing. The Government concentrate on attacking local authorities, and so ignore the problem that relates to the 2 million properties that I mentioned.

Another component of the problem is the cut in benefits for 16 and 18-year-olds. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam thinks that the problem is caused by the break up of families, but it is not because the rate of homelessness has accelerated faster than family break-ups which have slowed in recent years. The problem has everything to do with social security changes by the Prime Minister when he was a Social Security Minister and by the lack of rented housing.

It is a damning indictment of the Government that they do not have a housing policy. For the first time in 75 years homeless British children are begging on British streets. That is disgraceful and I never thought that I would live to see it in my country. There is no point in the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam saying that it is not the Government's fault. Is nothing the Government's fault —the slump, the health service, education, housing? The Government must be the most ineffectual of all time because apparently they have no effect on anything. They are so worried about winning a propaganda argument that they walk by the homeless thinking, "It is a great pity but we cannot do anything about it." The Government put those people there, it is their fault, and they could do something about it if they took on board the policies that we set out at the last general election. They must concentrate on quality, affordability and tenants' rights, and not take them away, as compulsory competitive tendering does. I am in favour of compulsory competitive tendering if the tenants can make it compulsory, but I do not want the sort that the Government are introducing because it is imposed by landlords on tenants and takes away their right to vote on it. Tenants' rights, quality of management, affordability and the building of houses could enable us to live in a civilised society again.

8.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) on introducing this debate, which takes place in national housing week. I always welcome an opportunity to expound the Government's policies on housing. Our clear housing strategy is to ensure that every family has a decent home. Of course, many people wish to make their own provision through owner-occupation. Many people aspire to owner-occupation and we have ensured that the number of people enjoying that has substantially increased. Of course, we are concerned when some people get into difficulties with their mortgage, but that must be kept in perspective.

The latest figures show that of the 10 million home owners with a mortgage, less than 0·4 per cent. were subject to repossession in the second half of last year. We are keen to ensure that mortgage lenders talk to people who may be in difficulty. The message that we need to get across is that people should not simply walk away from the problem but should get in touch with the mortgage lender. As a result of the difficulties that some borrowers have experienced, mortgage lenders are now beginning to appreciate that they will have to take arrears counselling much more seriously and introduce help schemes. They are doing that.

The initiatives taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor seem to have been judged by some people simply on the basis of mortgage-to-rent schemes. That is not the test. The test is how successful they have been in keeping people in their own homes. The mortgage lenders have committed £75 million to mortgage rescue. Only a small proportion of borrowers are in difficulty and a tiny minority face repossession. We must judge the initiatives on the fact that mortgage lenders are determined to do everything possible to ensure that people can stay in their own homes.

Of course, the Government recognise that, for some people, home ownership is not the way forward. There will always be a need for affordable social housing and we are committed to making sure of investment in such housing. We have a clear commitment to invest £2 billion in the Housing Corporation each year for the next three years. That money will go from the corporation to housing associations. I barely heard Opposition Members mention housing associations. They clearly do not appreciate our intention that new affordable social housing should, by and large, be provided by the housing associations, which are increasing the number of housing units. They are able to do that because they are increasingly successful in attracting private investment to add to that made available by the Treasury.

The hon. Member for Greenwich waved the Audit Commission report in support of his estimate of the number of houses that will be needed. In the second paragraph of its report, the Audit Commission stated:

"Considerable uncertainty surrounds projections in this area."

We are determined to ensure that local authorities, as enablers, work in partnership with housing associations to provide the number of units which is needed.

Of course, the Audit Commission's report was aimed at developing local authority housing strategies. The report set out initiatives that local authorities can take in working in partnership with housing associations to provide more units. Indeed, if local authorities let their properties faster, reducing the length of time that properties are left empty between tenancies to six weeks in London and three weeks in the rest of the country, which is perfectly possible, the result would be an extra 26,000 lettings in England in a year.

Mr. Raynsford *rose*——

Mr. Baldry: No, I shall not give way because I have only one minute to respond to the debate. What we are——

In accordance with Mr. Speaker's ruling—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1983; Vol. 36, c. 19]—*the debate was concluded.*

Merchant Fleet

8.50 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I am very glad to have the opportunity to open the debate on the defence implications of the reduction—and I immediately emphasise, the continuing reduction—in Britain's merchant fleet. The issue is not new: it has been raised in questions and debates in the Chamber and in Committee many times in the past decade, and also before that. Many right hon. and hon. Members and many Members of another place have, so to speak, hoisted the red ensign to express their worry and to warn the nation and to alert the Government to an increasing weakness in our defence system. Until now, those warnings appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

Until 1966, Britain's merchant fleet was the largest in the world, but since the mid-1970s there has been a dramatic and, some of us would say, catastrophic reduction in the size of the United Kingdom fleet and in the number of United Kingdom seafarers. The United Kingdom-owned British islands fleet—vessels owned and registered in the United Kingdom, the Isle of Man and the Channel Isles—has declined from almost 9 per cent. of the world total in 1957 to just 1 per cent. in 1991. By 1990, British seafarers employed on United Kingdom ships numbered little more than a third of those in 1975.

Early this year, the Chamber of Shipping reported that, unless urgent action was taken by the Government to arrest the decline, the merchant fleet could well cease to exist in three years' time. Even in recent months, major British shipping companies such as Blue Star and Shell among others have re-flagged some 40 ships to tax havens and hired foreign crews in order to remain competitive.

A simple projection of the decline shows that the United Kingdom-registered fleet, currently some 3·7 million tonnes, will disappear by 1995. It is already one tenth of the size it was 10 years ago, on the eve of the Falklands war. That figure is very little appreciated by the nation at large. A further 11 million tonnes is British-owned but foreign-flagged, yet, on present trends, that could also go within the next 20 years. The experience of the Gulf war, when foreign ships were chartered to transport British forces, makes it crystal clear why shipowners and naval officers at the very highest levels argue that the British fleet is already dangerously small.

In their responses to the repeated reports of the Select Committee on Defence on this matter, the Government have said that they do not share the concern about foreign shipowners and crews being unwilling to sail into a war zone, and that insurance arrangements could encourage neutrals to trade. Is that a sound view, and on what information is it based?

Britain's defence strategy now emphasises the necessity to be able to deploy our land, sea and air forces in distant places. The Falklands and Gulf conflicts demonstrated that need, and the requirements for transportation by sea. The number of British seafarers is already inadequate to fulfil the likely sea transport requirement in the event of a future conflict without mobilisation and direction of labour but—more important, because I am looking forward—unless measures are taken now to stop the decline of the merchant fleet, even that very inadequate pool of personnel could disappear.

[Mr. Mark Wolfson]

There are no longer sufficient numbers of militarily useful merchant ships on British registers to fulfil the national requirement for sealift in an emergency. Again, that already inadequate fleet is coming to the end of its life. They are the major problems—vessels and men—and the solution is to re-establish a healthy national shipping industry.

For years, the industry has suffered from unfair competition. The Government admit that, but argue that the way forward is to persuade our competitors to stop their tax subsidies and other benefits to their shipping industries, which will achieve a level playing field. Worryingly for the British shipping industry—and, I argue, worryingly for all of us and for our defence forces—there is no evidence that progress is being made in achieving a level playing field. I believe that the reverse is the case. Other countries continue to improve their Government's help for their shipping industries. If that is not the case, perhaps the House will hear my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement give examples to prove me wrong.

I now examine in more detail some of the points that I have already highlighted in support of my arguments. A clear trend can now be seen in British strategic orientation since the end of the cold war. The United Kingdom has redefined her defence policy away from a major commitment to land and air forces for the now non-existent central front towards flexible forces available for global contingencies in a range of conflicts, be they lateral or multilateral. Our leading role in the NATO Rapid Reaction Force clearly demonstrates that, as does the new orientation of the Royal Navy away from submarines towards carrier and amphibious task forces, which are capable of projecting our power on a global scale.

Britain has chosen to play its part in the maintenance of stability in Europe and beyond by having a real ability to employ and maintain mobile and flexible ground forces. The arguments for that were used all the time in debates and questions in the Chamber when justifying the changes being made in the armed services. We have an amphibious brigade that is based in the United Kingdom, an airborne brigade and two mechanised brigades. Based in mainland Europe, we have an armoured division and an air mobile brigade. Added to that, the Royal Air Force is in a position to provide a powerful striking force.

What we have not done is define the shipping that is necessary to deploy these forces. I argue that without that shipping being available immediately as required, those forces—they are purchased at great expense—may well not be able to operate where and when we immediately require them.

We must learn from recent experience. The Falklands war demonstrated what was needed to deploy two lightly equipped brigades to the other side of the world, far beyond the reach of an airlift. We still have a continuing commitment to defend the Falklands, and that cannot in the longer term be fulfilled without sea vessels. The fact that we decided to procure a strengthened amphibious squadron for the Royal Navy implies that maritime flexibilty is still a national priority. Unless we have the sealift to back it up, there is little point in building expensive and specialised amphibious shipping.

The Gulf deployment demonstrated another sort of United Kingdom global operation—the distant deployment of a reinforced armoured division and an RAF striking force. That involved 144 voyages—70 roll on/roll off, 67 general cargo and seven container. All but eight of the voyages involved foreign-flagged ships, of which 105 were chartered, along with five British vessels. Although we were able to charter ships, there were particular features of the Gulf war that enabled that to be done. It might not have been possible to do that in other circumstances.

What were the special features? There was a truly remarkable international consensus behind the operation. No Government had to exert pressure on their seamen to co-operate. Some countries saw involvement with merchant ships as one way of making their participation real. There was only a limited threat to the coalition shipping that was involved in the sealift. That might well not be the position next time, especially as submarines are proliferating in other defence forces.

Ships were readily available, because it was the time of a seasonal downturn in the shipping market. Even more important, there was time to look for suitable shipping on the international market. In addition, total shipping demand in 1990 was probably the minimum required for such a deployment. There was the availability of the Suez canal, good fuel supplies locally, an excellent port infrastructure that enabled us rapidly to unload, and over-flying rights and landing facilities for the Air Force. Without those factors, the number of ships needed and the tonnage required could have been very much higher.

Personnel is the other vital consideration. There are not enough ships available flying the red ensign, in its various forms, to be available to service future military deployments. Whether there would be sufficient reliable personnel to man those ships is also dubious. Since 1979—for 12 years—the number of British nationals employed in the United Kingdom shipping industry has dropped by 60 per cent.

Some of the tonnage that was chartered by the Americans for the Gulf war had crew difficulties. That demonstrates that there is no certain substitute for a country's own nationals in a crisis or a war. In the Falkland crisis, British seamen had to replace personnel who were forbidden by their Governments or their unions to take part. Unless the disappearance of the mercantile marine is prevented, the current stock of seafarers will rapidly waste away. The average age of a merchant seaman officer is now more than 40. Indeed, the Department of Transport has said that it expects a serious shortfall of United Kingdom seafarers by the year 2000.

According to some authorities, we have about 166 ships that could be reliably used as a militarily useful fleet. Those figures are frighteningly small for a country that only 20 years ago had well over 2,000 ships on its registers. I contend that the assumptions of 20 years ago still hang around. There have been many warnings in this House and elsewhere about the problems that could be caused by the decline of the British merchant fleet—yet many people, for one reason or another, still assume that the ships are there. They are not.

What about any future crisis? Each war is unique. Modern defence policy, even more so than the defence policy of the cold war, is about preparing for the unexpected. Again, those were the arguments used for "Options for Change". If we assume that a deployment

were needed in future, comparable to that which went to the Gulf but in a less favourable geographical position, the demand for shipping could be very much higher. If an airlift were impossible, up to eight cruise liners or large ferries could be required to move personnel; some 60 ro-ro vessels, mostly cargo ships, would be needed to move the equipment; and about 125 general cargo ships would be needed to provide stores and ammunition. Perhaps 10 small and 30 medium-sized tankers would be required to supply fuel and water to the forces ashore and to the fleet. About three large container ships would be needed to transport aircraft.

Overall, that possible demand is far above the capacity of the current British registers—and it takes no account of attrition or action damage. We have no guarantee that repair facilities could act swiftly enough to make those ships available again during the crisis.

Then there is the age problem. The existing fleet is coming to the end of its active life. The average age of the United Kingdom-owned and registered fleet is now something over 18 years. If we take 20 years as an average for the normal life of a merchant ship, 1994 will see all five United Kingdom-owned and registered large break bulk cargo liners over age, along with 14 of the 24 large container ships and five of the seven passenger liners. Those are disturbing statistics. I come back to my earlier point: the only way to overcome that problem is to rebuild a healthy merchant fleet on the basis of the present British shipping industry.

It is not just members of the Select Committee on Defence or Back Benchers who have been concerned about the issue. The Select Committee on Transport, in its report on the decline of the United Kingdom-registered fleet as long ago as 1987, identified various arguments for maintaining a United Kingdom-registered merchant fleet. Among those arguments was the danger in defence and economic terms of being totally dependent on others to move the United Kingdom's imports and exports and the further loss of international influence.

Surely it is not unrealistic to suggest that the defence dimension needs to be taken into account in Government policy towards our shipping industry. The French used that argument in the report on their contribution to the Gulf war. They said that the rapid and effective deployment of their merchant fleet and its ability to make a significant contribution to their forces in the Gulf war justified in their view the support that it was given on commercial grounds, but that in that case there was a justification for that support on defence grounds as well.

We know very well that the British shipping industry is asking for a beneficial tax regime of capital allowances for its ships and specific personal taxation benefits for British-based seamen. Those arguments have been deployed many times in the House, but they have not been acted upon by the Government. I believe that they should be, not only because of the commercial importance of the British merchant fleet, on which I have not focused tonight, but, most importantly with regard to this debate and my hon. Friend's response tonight, in defence terms.

We want to hear the justification of the Ministry of Defence for its apparent complacency that all is well and that, if a future crisis arose, we would have the capability —not surely with British flagged vessels but by chartering foreign vessels—to meet our needs. I doubt that, and I look for reassurance tonight.

9.14 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): It is a great privilege to follow such a comprehensive account of the problems caused by the decline in Britain's merchant fleet. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) for his introduction to the debate.

Let me declare an interest. For nearly three years, I have had the privilege of advising the Chamber of Shipping—formerly the General Council of British Shipping—on matters relating to the debate. Some hon. Members expressed surprise at my intention to speak, feeling that a landlocked constituency such as Worcester hardly qualified for serious concern in connection with the future of the Merchant Navy. Let me give them a brief history lesson.

Not so long ago, Worcester was one of Britain's biggest ports. In the early days of the industrial revolution, it sent coal to Coalbrookdale and Ironbridge. I am reliably informed that the county of Hereford and Worcester also enjoys the highest per capita recruitment to the Royal Navy. Distinguished retired and serving Merchant Navy and Royal Navy officers and ratings live in my constituency. Moreover, as many people are in danger of forgetting, 95 per cent. of the country's trade goes by sea. The future of the Merchant Navy is therefore crucial to every hon. Member.

As I said, I have advised the Chamber of Shipping for some time, and during that period I have become convinced of the urgency of its case. There is a tragic irony in the decline so eloquently described by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks. Although it is easy to paint the picture of an industry in a terminal condition, many sectors of that industry are still the best in the world. Its ferries, cruise ships and container ships are the envy of the world, as are its officers and ratings and its management skills. If we throw away the shipping industry, we shall bear a heavy burden of guilt.

The debate is primarily about the defence implications of the decline in the merchant fleet. I find it extraordinary that we can be so complacent about the decline. The Merchant Navy provides a fourth arm of defence, at no cost to the country. Indeed, if the Government introduced the modest measures suggested by the shipping industry, they would probably find that a profit would be made as the fleet revived. That cannot be said of many elements of the defence budget.

I do not pretend to be a military analyst; I must look to others for advice on defence matters. In June 1991, Lord Fieldhouse observed:

> "The number of British-manned ships, sailing under the British flag and available for defence purposes, is now at a crucial level and may already be too few. We ignore this situation at our peril."

I believe that we are inoring precisely that. How many of our constituents really understand the impossibility of mounting another Falklands operation in 1992? My brother-in-law served in that operation, in a ship taken up from trade, and I know the crucial role played by such ships in its successful completion.

The Ministry of Defence often argues that the Gulf war proves that we no longer need a British flag fleet. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks explained eloquently how untrue that is. No serious risks were posed to ships that participated in that operation. As Lord Sterling—a

[Mr. Peter Luff]

past president of the General Council of British Shipping —observed, as soon as a shot was fired, those chartered ships would have disappeared

"like snowflakes on a summer day."

I do not want the debate to focus entirely on the defence implications of the decline. I fear that, if we allow it to do so, my hon. Friend the Minister will give an eloquent account of why he does not share our sense of urgency, and the whole case for the shipping industry will go by default. We must remember that the industry brings at least four more clear and distinct benefits to our country. First, it contributes some £4 billion gross—£2·4 billion net—to our balance of payments. The loss of that contribution—a loss that must be very much on the cards if the rate of decline that we have seen during the past three or four years continues—would mean a halving of the country's invisible surplus, and I do not think that that could be tolerated.

Secondly, it is not widely appreciated by those who do not study such matters deeply that the maritime skills and expertise created by those who work in the industry bring enormous benefits to other aspects of the economy. The shipbuilding industry, the marine equipment industry and the ports and harbours cannot function without an adequate supply of retired officers returning to serve on shore and bringing their skills to bear in vital economic activities. The City of London's earnings depend more than is widely recognised on the continuing strength of our merchant fleet. Maritime banking and insurance, shipbroking, ship classification and legal services all depend on the credible position of this country in the world as a significant maritime nation.

As the chairman of one of the country's leading P and I clubs said to me recently, the red ensign fleet provides the ballast to all this country's activities. It is also appropriate, at a time of increasing environmental concern, to recognise the fuel efficiency of the merchant fleet. We hear a great deal from our right hon. and hon. Friends in government about the need to shift goods from road to rail, which I welcome, but we could make an even more significant contribution towards saving our valuable fossil fuels if we shifted more goods to seaborne transport, especially the coastal trade, which is by far the most fuel-efficient system of delivering goods in this country.

Almost exactly a year ago in the Chamber, in an attempt to still the vocal criticisms from hon. Members on both sides of the House—my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) was one of them—the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the then Financial Secretary both promised that a statement would be made to the House on the defence needs of the shipping industry. A year later that statement has still not been forthcoming. I regard that as a significant breach of trust by the Government.

The British industry is lean and fit. It can take on the world, but only if the unfair barriers in other countries are met by similar action in this country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks said, it is simply not credible to expect other countries to dismantle the protection which they give to their domestic industries when they are doing so well from it.

In the last Session of Parliament, before I had the privilege of joining the House, early-day motion 500 attracted what was almost a record number of 353 signatures—the 10th highest ever number of signatures to such a motion, I believe. The motion set out, more briefly than I have done tonight, the basis of what I have been saying, and concluded that the House

"calls on Her Majesty's Government to take immediate and positive action to first ensure that the British fleet is strengthened by appropriate stimulation of investment in modern tonnage and second encourage the recruitment, training and employment of British seafarers."

That motion flowed directly from a report by the Government's joint working party with the industry. It has given added strength and urgency to all that we have heard this evening.

I am concerned that the Government are playing a game of financial pass-the-parcel between the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Transport and the Treasury —and, to a lesser extent, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Not so very long ago, the red duster ruled the world. It could so so again today, because of the inherent strength of the industry. The modest concessions on cabotage recently won by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport are welcome, but they are not an adequate response to the challenge that the industry faces. If the British merchant navy is to make the contribution that it can and should make to the defence of this country, something must be done. The industry has suggested capital allowances and national insurance and taxation reliefs for seafarers. One of those measures was before the House yesterday, but sadly it was not moved.

I understand that the Government do not like those proposals, but if they do not like them, let them suggest some proposals of their own. Something must be done, and soon, if the consequences that have been spelt out tonight are not to take place all too early.

9.23 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) on his passionate plea for the merchant marine, and also my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoakes (Mr. Wolfson). I cannot, I fear, back up their detailed exposition of facts and figures, but I shall consider the subject in a historical perspective. We all know that those who ignore the lessons of history are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Most if not all of us in the House were brought up on tales of brave sailors of the past—Hawkins, Raleigh and Drake. If we look back beyond the Gulf war and the Falklands, right back to the armada, we see that it was our sailors and our ships that protected our shores. In Napoleonic times, the battles of the Nile and of Trafalgar developed our naval strength in the protection of our own shores. Many members of another place if not of this House will remember how crucial was the battle of Jutland in the first world war.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): As was the battle of the Falklands.

Mr. Robathan: That is so. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will remember Dunkirk, when our merchant ships, small ships, and amateur sailors came to this country's defence. They saved the British Expeditionary Force, played a crucial part in raising morale, and ensured a successful outcome to the second world war. So, too, did the Atlantic convoys. I could mention many other examples.

Many people viewed the Suez crisis with some misgivings, but our Royal Navy and merchant ships lent their support in that episode, too. We heard from other hon. Members about the Falklands and the Gulf war. Less than two years ago, we relied on our merchant shipping and merchant sailors to support our operations overseas.

Times change. It may be argued that we no longer need such defence support. Who can predict the future and know what it will hold? Whose crystal ball could have predicted the anarchy in Yugoslavia given that, when Tito died, a marvellous future seemed to await the Balkans?

It will not have escaped the notice of the House—including those right hon. and hon. Members who usually sit on the Benches opposite, which are now empty—that we are an island. However many tunnels are built, we will always rely on shipping. As we withdraw from overseas territories such as Hong Kong, it is more important than ever to have home-based ability and experience in reserve. In future, we will not be able to call on our friends and dependencies overseas.

At army staff college I was taught about something called STUFT. As right hon. and hon. Members can imagine, that prompted many puns. It actually stands for shipping taken up from trade. The importance of STUFT was the great lesson of the Falklands. Shipping taken up from trade is no longer available because the British merchant marine has declined so much.

Positive action is required. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to examine the issue closely. Financial incentives are needed to keep British shipping alive and vibrant. I will not dwell on the consequences for trade—and we will always be a trading nation—gross national product, and the employment of mariners if they cannot be provided.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester said that the House was promised a statement last year on the grave defence implications of the rundown in merchant shipping. That statement must be made. If we have no merchant fleet, we will weaken our defence. We will have no mariners, experience, tradition or shipping to call on. We cannot sit back and let the merchant fleet perish by default. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to produce a happy solution.

9.28 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) did well to continue a Kent tradition, in securing a debate on shipping. Over the past 12 months, I have initiated two debates on the subject—as right hon. and hon. Members might expect from a Member of Parliament with considerable constituency interests in shipping, in terms of both jobs and a thriving ferry industry.

In my Adjournment debate earlier this year, I secured from my hon. Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping a promise to monitor carefully the subsidies and support given by other countries to their shipping. I was therefore disturbed to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks say that other countries are still increasing their support and subsidies, whereas we are not competitive in that regard.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) said, I initiated a debate last year, to which a Treasury Minister replied. I was promised that the defence review would consider whether support should be provided under the Defence budget as approved by the Treasury and how some assistance might be appropriate in that area. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to deal with that specific issue later. The excellent speeches made by my new hon. Friends the Members for Worcester and for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) raised a number of issues which suggest that our shipping industry is not thriving as it should be and that we shall have to monitor it most carefully. The Government must take an active role in that respect.

The merchant fleet is terribly important to this country. Attention has been drawn to its military and civilian importance. The ferry industry in my constituency provides many thousands of jobs and I hope that it will continue to do that for many years to come. Many of the seamen who live in my constituency do not just work in the local ferry industry: they work on our deep sea ships and travel to ports around the country to engage in our shipping industry.

The decline in our merchant fleet has not simply occurred under this Government. It is important for the House to recognise that the decline started when Labour was in power in the mid-1970s. The British shipping industry was not helped by the subsidies made available by the then Labour Government to Polish ships. Nor was it helped by the support given by the Labour Government to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development code which encouraged the developing countries to develop subsidised fleets of their own. That competition in the international shipping markets was severely subsidised and it caused considerable damage to our fleet.

The changes that the Government have made to capital allowances—ironically made by the predecessor of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby—have gone too far. They have encouraged disinvestment in shipping to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks referred earlier. Many ships are now transferring to foreign flags.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks referred to tax havens, I was reminded of my debate on that subject yesterday. I am concerned that there is a considerable transfer of assets away from the United Kingdom to tax havens in other countries which make it more favourable for ships to be held as assets registered in those countries. That is ludicrous. If, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister will claim when he replies, those ships would be available to the Royal Navy if they were required in times of war, they should be available as ships registered in the United Kingdom.

We should ensure that our tax regime is sufficiently favourable so that the tax havens do not receive the business. Why should lawyers and accountants in those countries form companies and earn the fees? The money should be brought back to this country, be that in respect of the advisory services for lawyers and accountants or through ship ownership.

It is in the interests of the Ministry of Defence to persuade the Treasury that the capital allowances regime is enouraging disinvestment, not investment. My hon. Friend the Minister represeents a constituency which has shipping interests and I know that he will endeavour, perhaps with a little difficulty, to reconcile his sympathies with his responsibilities. However, I am sure that we can rely on him for a forthright speech which will endeavour to point out that he will take forward the battle in Whitehall in the interests of shipping and in the interests of his constituents. I hope that, in due course, he will try to

[Mr. David Shaw]

tle within Whitehall the issue of re-flagging to tax havens, as it must be stopped. I hope also that he will take a robust line in negotiations with the Treasury and point out that the money should not come out of the budget of the Ministry of Defence. It is an adjustment to capital allowances that has gone too far.

The capital allowances regime is unfavourable. There have been international reports, and I have previously referred to the report of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York into international allowances on assets. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will go into battle on capital allowances and tax matters. My hon. Friend is an expert on financial matters, having had a financially oriented career, among other skilful careers. I hope also that he will seek changes to the capital allowances regime which will allow our shipping industry to develop further and allow us to be comfortable and to sleep easy in our beds at night knowing that our defence is properly integrated not only in terms of military shipping, nuclear deterrence, or having many skilled people in our Army, as we saw in the Gulf war, but in terms of a properly managed defence capability that is backed up by a competent, able and well-invested merchant marine.

9.35 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): The House has been privileged to hear four excellent speeches amounting to a useful and interesting debate. I particularly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wo[illegible]on the way in which he presented his case. He is a worthy champion of the red ensign, and he asked a number of questions to which I shall return. I was glad that he recognised the changing defence strategy of this country and our emphasis on mobile and flexible ground forces. He is right to ask whether we have the sea-lift required to move those forces in certain situations and whether we have defined the shipping required for such operations. I shall return to those questions, but I can tell him now that the answer is in the affirmative.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) as a new, fluent and articulate voice on the subject of British shipping. I noticed in his presentation a slight difference of emphasis from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks, who, at one point, seemed almost to make our flesh creep by his descriptions of the terminal decline of British shipping, whereas my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester perked us up no end by his strong words about how British shipping is still the best in the world and the ballast to all our activities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), who brings to such debates his own distinguished military experience, was right to go back to the lessons of history. It certainly struck a chord with me when he rolled off his tongue great names such as Hawkins and Drake. Only yesterday, I was in Plymouth standing at the site where Drake had been when, just 304 years and 16 days ago, he launched the armada. It is impossible to be in such surroundings without wondering whether the lessons of history will teach us that we have to learn again from the lessons of the past and that one day again we will be launching major seafaring operations. The probability is not high, but Defence Ministers have to plan for improbabilities. I was glad that my hon. Friend reminded us of the importance of not forgetting the lessons of history.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) has long been a persistent and passionate crusader for Britain's seafarers and British shipping. In the previous election campaign, he was something of a heart of oak, politically. The local paper predicated that he would lose the seat of Dover with a swing of 23 per cent. to Labour, but the good arguments that he has put forward in the House on behalf of his constituents' interests won him the day and he came back. We are very glad to see him.

Dr. Reid: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, as he knows that I am somewhat restricted by protocol because I shall speak in the European fighter aircraft debate. As he has paid such compliments to the erudite and informative speeches that have been made, and as he knows that, even in 1989, the Defence Select Committee was speaking of six successive years of decline in the merchant marine, he will know that the defence statistics that have just been revealed show evidence of the claim of a further 42 per cent. reduction in the number of United Kingdom-registered general cargo vessels between 1984 and now. Even more alarming, there has been a 40 per cent. reduction in the number of officers and ratings since the Falklands conflict in 1982.

Therefore, will the Minister respond to the erudite speeches made tonight by going to the heart of the problem and what Conservative Members called at one stage a breach of trust—strong words indeed from the Minister's own side? The Government said in the White Paper that they were conducting

"a detailed review of the defence requirements for British merchant ships and seamen in times of crisis."

While we welcome that, what does the Minister mean by "in times of crisis"? In what strategic context is he considering the requirements? Is he contemplating changes in the legislation? Which organisations is he consulting as part of the review? In order that we do not have a further breach of trust next year, will he say when the review which has been announced again this year of the merchant marine will be completed?

Mr. Aitken: I am glad to respond to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid). I shall do so quickly and cover the detail later. First, the review is complete and I shall announce it tonight, although it will not necessarily gladden his heart. It was an interdepartmental Government review, but we took into account the representations that have been made by a range of organisations, including at various stages the Chamber of Shipping, the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers and other such organisations. We also studied the Grove report.

I do not accept that there has been any breach of trust in the matter of the regrettable decline in the British merchant fleet. I shall turn to the specific statistics which are at the heart of the hon. Gentleman's case and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks in a moment. As my hon. Friend said, the subject is not new. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover reminded us that I, too, as a maritime Member represent a channel port. We have debated the decline in Britain's merchant fleet for all the time that I have been in Parliament.

Of course, the decline in our merchant fleet is a matter for general regret. To give some hard facts, the number of United Kingdom registered trading vessels of 500 gross registered tonnes—that is, of a size likely to be important in any defence calculation—has fallen from 1,614 in 1975 to 321 at the end of 1991. However, in the past few years the decline has slowed and in the four years since 1988 it has been at the rate of some 12 or 13 ships a year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks somewhat over-emphasised the nature of the decline when he said that the British merchant fleet would soon cease to exist if the rate of decline of the past four years continued. The cessation of existence of the merchant fleet is certainly a long way away.

The reasons for the decline are many and various. They include the changes in the pattern of international trade and the commercial pressures on British shipowners to sell vessels or transfer them to foreign registers. I take the sensible point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover about the need to crack down on tax havens which may encourage such transfers. Then there was the decision of the last Labour Government to begin phasing out capital allowances for ships. That perhaps started the process of decline.

The reasons are many and the solutions are also many. The Chamber of Shipping, in which my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester properly declared an interest, has been vociferous in suggesting solutions, as has the former chairman Lord Sterling, who has made many representations to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and others.

The ingenious fiscal concessions that have been suggested are not within my responsibility. I hope that my hon. Friends will understand if I do not refer to them at any length other than to say that I will bring them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and others.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks concentrated on the defence dimension of the issue, as I wish to do.

Mr. Wolfson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. On tax measures, I compared the position in the United Kingdom with those abroad and mentioned our lack of progress in achieving a level playing field. I hope that my hon. Friend will return to that subject, as he promised.

Mr. Aitken: I heard what my hon. Friend said, and I undertake to bring his remarks to the attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. A Defence Minister cannot respond satisfactorily to such subjects as the level playing field on tax concessions. During the debate on the Finance Bill last night there was an opportunity to raise those matters, although sadly the amendment concerned was not moved. Debates such as those on the Finance Bill, when a Treasury Minister is responding, are the proper occasion for those subjects to be ventilated and questions answered, but I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's argument is considered by the Treasury.

Mr. David Shaw: May I support my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) on that issue, and declare an interest in what I am about to say, as a chartered accountant. The Treasury is well staffed with accountants and other supporting staff who are used to figure work. If the Ministry of Defence is taking that argument and need on board, it might be appropriate for it to sort out the accounting arguments with its accountants, ready for the battle that needs to be fought in Whitehall.

Mr. Aitken: As my hon. Friend is an accountant, he knows more about battles between accountants than I do, but I am sure that they will, as usual, occupy the attention of the Treasury. The defence of the realm transcends accountancy. The question whether we have to spend public money, or in any way change our policy, because of the defence requirement is to be decided not through mere financial calculations, but through the deeper defence calculations.

Dr. Reid: Before the Minister gets into a labyrinth of tortuous arguments about accountancy, and without any sour grapes, as it is not often that a Minister gives me a straight answer to a question, he said that the review has been completed and that he is about to announce it. Does he think it appropriate that a review of the merchant marine, presumably undertaken with a view to reversing some of the disastrous trends of the past few years, should be suddenly announced at this time of night, at the tail end of a Session?

Mr. Aitken: I repeat that I do not think that the review is likely to gladden the hon. Gentleman's heart. Nevertheless, we shall announce our conclusions at the earliest possible opportunity. It has literally just been completed. No one can be accused of trying to smuggle something under the carpet if a Minister responds to a debate and answers the questions that have been asked. There will be plenty of other opportunities to ask questions, including at Question Time, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are not engaged on some nocturnal concealment exercise—far from it—and I shall face up to the announcement of the review, although it may be found disappointing.

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): Is the Minister confirming that the review will be the subject of a statement to the House in the near future, or simply that it will be made public at some stage?

Mr. Aitken: Towards the end of my speech I shall announce the results of the review. As I said earlier, the frissons of excitement that seem to be building up may not be entirely justified when the announcement is made.

I was about to turn to the historical theme, the necessity for preparedness, touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby. In recent history, there has rarely been a time when the strategic uncertainties of a changing world, and the changing threats that come with it, have posed such difficult challenges and questions to defence planners and Ministers.

It remains a near certainty that in times of tension or war the United Kingdom will need a significant number of merchant ships. The hon. Member for Motherwell, North tried to bowl me what he thought was a clever question about the definition of a time of crisis. I can only say that a time of crisis is when the House of Commons has the kind of debates and exchanges that took place at the time of the Falklands or the Gulf war, which suggest that we are in an hour of national crisis. Parliamentary indicators are as good a signpost of crisis as any.

It is a virtual certainty that in such times the United Kingdom will need a significant number of merchant ships

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for European and out-of-area reinforcement. The merchant ships will also be required to support naval operations. It is possible that with lower force numbers, longer warning times, larger aircraft and newer methods of transportation, such as the channel tunnel of which my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks was once such an ardent enthusiast, we may have a more flexible task when providing such reinforcement and support. Nevertheless, the importance of merchant shipping for Britain's defences in an emergency remains pivotal. There is little doubt, therefore, that the theme of this debate is correct: a healthy British merchant shipping industry may have to provide a vital lifeline and supply line to British forces in an hour of peril.

In an ideal world we should like to have a large pool of British-flagged, British-crewed vessels to choose from in time of war or crisis. Unfortunately, we do not live in an ideal world when it comes to the health of the British merchant fleet. We share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks at the decline in the number of British-registered vessels—I have already said that it is down to 321 vessels of 500 tonnes or above. However, we do not believe that the situation is so critical that we could not manage to carry out the type of crisis resupply and reinforcement task that faced us at the time of the recent Gulf war or at the time of the Falklands invasion—tight and more difficult though that task might be.

May I remind the House of what happened at the time of the Falklands crisis and of Operation Granby for the Gulf? In Operation Granby 109 foreign-flagged vessels and five United Kingdom vessels were engaged in the reinforcement and movement of men and equipment to the Gulf. On the return phase, 81 foreign vessels and three United Kingdom-flagged vessels were chartered. The cost of the operation was about £140 million.

We had no difficulty in obtaining all the British forces shipping requirements on the open market. Virtually all the movement of men was done by air, but the equipment was largely moved at sea. Although some might say that it was disappointing that the United Kingdom-registered vessels represented a comparatively small percentage of the operation, that was a voluntary decision on the part of the British shipping industry. Lord Sterling wrote to *The Times* during Operation Granby to say that the British shipping industry was then extremely busy with existing contracts and did not necessarily wish to bid for the contracts that were on offer to the shipping industries of the world. We were able to undertake Operation Granby successfully.

At the time of the Falklands crisis 52 merchant ships were used, the majority of them British. Half of them were requisitioned, half chartered.

Dr. Reid: I am sory to intervene again, but I did not realise that such a substantial response would be made tonight.

Does the Minister realise that what he has said about Operation Granby is at total odds with the Select Committee on Defence analysis, on which it spent a great deal of time? It concluded that there was

"an almost total absence of UK shipping from the lists of ships providing the sealift for Granby . . . The significance of the degree of dependence displayed must be addressed by MOD in its analysis of the lessons of Granby."

Is the Minister saying that the Select Committee was totally wrong and that its analysis has been either ignored or rejected after investigation under the MOD review? Can he confirm that MOD police are now investigating allegations of fraud during the chartering operation for Granby? I am not asking for details, but can he confirm that an investigation of fraud during the chartering contracts process is under way?

Mr. Aitken: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's last point is that I can confirm that the Ministry of Defence police fraud squad is conducting investigations into the chartering of some shipping for the Ministry of Defence during the Gulf crisis. It is not our practice to comment on Ministry of Defence police investigations while they are under way, and the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first point is that the Select Committee was factually correct, and in my factual analysis I confirmed that. There is a difference of opinion between the Government and the Select Committee in that we believe that Granby was a successful operation, that it offered charters to British shipping and that while those offers were perhaps not taken up as widely as we would have hoped, our job was to make sure that Operation Granby was a success. From the point of view of shipping, it was a success. We believe it indicated that a British defence movement on that scale is entitled to go and can successfully go out on to the open market to fulfil Britain's defence needs.

Mr. Luff: I am sure that the Minister is not suggesting that the shipping industry in some sense turned its back on Operation Granby. Will he join me in congratulating the British shipping industry on the efficiency with which it is run, which meant that it did not have ships available at the drop of a hat? Will he learn the lesson from that and accept that if we could encourage the industry to grow, more ships would be available for such an operation?

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend makes a sound point. The British shipping industry was at that time enjoying a high level of success and efficiency and, reasonably enough, did not want to disturb its existing charter arrangements. The wider interests of British shipping to which he referred earlier are well taken.

The Falklands operation is the kernel of the argument because it was a British-only operation and the question is whether we could do it again if we were called on to do so. That is extremely unlikely, particularly as we have built a new runway in the Falklands and installed there a formidable garrison.

Without being complacent, the answer is that we could. Fifty or so similar ships could still be requisitioned or chartered from the United Kingdom shipping register or from the British dependent territories shipping register. Although it would be tight in some categories, the answer, without being complacent, is that we could do it again.

Mr. Robathan: I seem to remember that during the Falklands operation the Indian Government objected to some of its nationals on British ships being sent to the Falklands.

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend is correct, and I shall come to the subject of seafarers, which is different, though important, in relation to the subject of ships, with which I have been dealing so far.

Even though there are fewer British flag vessels from which to choose, it can be claimed, without complacency, that we should be able to mount operations similar to Granby or the Falklands. There are good grounds for believing that by a combination of chartering foreign vessels on the open market and chartering or, in some cases, requisitioning them, British ships could meet the expected requirements of a crisis or wartime situation, even in the worst and surely unlikely scenario that we were acting alone, without allies or friends.

Mr. Wolfson: Is it not a fact that a key difference between the Falklands operation and the Gulf was the need to requisition ships, as opposed to being able to charter on the open market? In addition, there was danger to shipping—as was seen in what happened in terms of sinkings—in relation to civilian ships. The need to requisition must be a high focus for the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend is right. There are circumstances of greater danger than Operation Granby. There were dangers—which have been somewhat minimised in this debate—to shipping at the time of Operation Granby and we must, and do, focus on the possibility of requisitioning British ships, not only from the United Kingdom register, as we are entitled to do, but from the United Kingdom dependent territories register. The figure given earlier of only 166 ships being suitable was not correct when one takes into account, for example, the ships on the Bermuda register. There are many BP tankers and other vessels on that. We have carefully considered the requisitioning possibilities.

I said that I would mention the review that we have been conducting internally—as promised—between Government Departments on the defence requirement for merchant ships in times of crisis. It follows from the argument that I have been advancing that the review concluded that there was no need for special measures for the British shipping industry now. However, there may be a need to do something more about crewing to ensure an adequate supply of British seafarers, and that aspect will be the subject of further study. I shall tell the House something of our thinking and past practices on that feature.

Given the importance of merchant shipping, the Government have introduced a number of measures to help the industry and ensure the availability of vessels and crews for national needs. Those include financial assistance for the training of recruits under the Government's assistance for training scheme—the GAFT scheme—which commenced in 1988. Before the introduction of that scheme, the annual recruitment of cadets had fallen to a low of 162. By the end of the 1988-89 period, the figure had risen to 289, and it reached 521 at the end of 1990. Government assistance has also been made available for the travel expenses of deep-sea crews for the repatriation of seafarers, and there has been a relaxation of foreign earnings deduction rules to allow British seafarers to spend more time in the United Kingdom. In addition, a Merchant Navy Reserve was established in May 1989 to provide a pool of British seafarers who could be called upon in times of national emergency to man merchant vessels. That reserve establishment was a direct consequence of some of the problems that arose in the Falklands war, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby referred.

The purpose of the establishment is to cover two perceived shortfalls in manpower. First, it replaces foreign nationals serving in United Kingdom flagships when, in time of crisis or war, they are deemed to be a security risk, or when they express a desire to leave the ship or are ordered to leave by their Government. I think that that is what happened in the Indian shipping case to which my hon. Friend referred. Its second purpose is to man British-owned but foreign-flagged vessels returning to the United Kingdom flag in time of tension or war as a result of emergency legislation. In that case, it may be necessary to provide full crews.

Recruiting for the Merchant Navy Reserve got off to a slow start, but a campaign in major British ports at the beginning of 1992 increased the numbers in the reserve to more than 650. The Department of Transport, which administers the scheme, hopes to build up the reserve's strength to more than 1,000 by 1993, and is aiming for a final establishment of about 2,000.

The Government also provide war risks insurance to indemnify shipowners against loss; and there are agreements with open registry states. In that connection, we have already signed agreements with Liberia, Bahamas, and Vanuatu, where there are approximately 100 British-controlled ships registered. That would mean that in times of crisis it would be possible to gain access to those vessels with the consent of the countries of registration. Furthermore, in the unlikely event of a full-scale war involving the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, we would have access to the shipping resources of our NATO allies.

The Government also participated in a joint working party with the British shipping industry. The recommendations of the working party included the introduction of more flexibility into the rules governing the nationality of officers on British ships. The main justification for those rules is one of defence, and we have made major concessions at the request of the industry. The Department of Transport has recently issued a consultative document recommending that the existing nationality conditions for United Kingdom-registered merchant vessels, covering the ship's master, first officer and chief engineer, be relaxed to require that only either the master or the first officer be British. In the case of those vessels of strategic importance, the master would still be British.

I hope that the House will accept from the range of measures and practices that I have outlined that some progress has been made on the availability of British seafarers in time of war for ships that have to go to an area of danger.

I realise that the announcement of the review that I have made will not be greeted with cheering and will not gladden the hearts of my hon. Friends who have so properly and ably raised matters of concern tonight. I hope that they will accept that the argument about the defence dimension in Britain's merchant shipping is really about defence priorities and defence spending priorities. There are competing requirements for defence funds, and our review of the defence requirements for merchant shipping in times of crisis shows that at this juncture we cannot allocate defence funds in support of the British shipping industry. I am sorry to be the bearer of those bad

[Mr. Aitken]

tidings, but I hope that it is some reassurance to know that we have taken careful measures to ensure an adequate supply of British seafarers in times of crisis.

There is a vital role for merchant shipping in an emergency and we continue to keep a close watch on the state of the industry and the trends to ensure that our plans are capable of being met. We carefully review shipping requirements and our latest review shows that there is no need at the moment for any special measure. I assure the House that we continue to give the defence needs of merchant shipping a high priority; and I hope that after this useful debate there is still no doubt about our commitment to making sure that this need will continue to be met.

Student Hardship

10.5 pm

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): I am grateful for this opportunity to debate student hardship, which causes a great deal of concern not only to me but to many of my hon. Friends. Representations from students show the difficult circumstances in which they now find themselves, and those difficulties are the direct result of a series of disastrous Government decisions in recent years on student finance.

I am glad to see an Education Minister in his place. It is a long time since we had an opportunity to debate this issue. When it was last debated in November, the Government, by some strange quirk, decided to field a Social Security Minister who spent a great deal of time denying her Department's responsibility for student problems. I am glad that the winding-up speech will be delivered by a Minister who accepts responsibility for the welfare of students. However, some contributions should also be made by the Department of Social Security.

Over the past few years, the Government have followed the principle that gave birth to one of our more famous supermarkets—"stack 'em high and sell 'em cheap". The principle followed by the Government in higher education —if principle is not too dignified a term—is pack 'em in and slash their cost. The deliberate impoverishment of students has been part of Government policy in the welcome move towards increasing the number of people in higher education. However, no policy should make life increasingly difficult for those who participate in higher education, and Government policies have had extremely deleterious consequences.

What other group of people has been told that basic income should be frozen at 1990 levels? The grant component of higher education support for students is frozen at precisely that point. What other group of people would be told, "We know that this may prove to be inadequate, but we have a battle against inflation"? Britain still has higher inflation than many other countries in western Europe, and over the past three years there has certainly been a decline in the purchasing power of the student's pound. What other group of people would be told to take out loans and become dependent on finance that would have to be paid back with interest in the future? Such policies are implemented by a Government who bleat about the dependency culture even though they are deliberately inculcating exactly that dependency among a large section of our young people. It is detrimental for students to be placed in such an invidious position.

The Minister has written on several occasions—certainly once in response to hon. Members who raised the issue with him previously—that he believes that it is important that students are gaining greater independence and economic awareness. He believes that that is happening. Greater independence looks like a sick joke when students are being plunged into debt. I do not doubt that they are gaining greater economic awareness. Many are being taught some fairly harsh economic lessons by the Government: they are being taught about poverty, dependence on loans and how helpful it would be if one had a relatively prosperous father or mother.

I have not the slightest doubt that when Tory Members of Parliament send their offspring into higher education, in many cases after having spent thousands of pounds on

secondary education in public schools, thereby increasing their children's chances of going into higher education, they bail out their offspring when they say that the level of parental contribution, assessed against the grant, is too low to live on. It is clear from all quarters that the support is inadequate.

Whereas it may be possible for members of the Conservative party, Tory Members of Parliament and some sections of the community to bail out their children and ensure that students get through this period without total impoverishment, that option is not open to large numbers of my constituents who have no spare resources to supplement the inadequate student grant.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Which countries in the western world do not have a loan system to help towards the maintenance of students?

Mr. Davies: I think that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that we managed to run a higher education system for a very long time on the basis of respect for students and the provision of the resources necessary to give them adequate grants. I do not remember the Conservative party telling the nation that it would set out gratuitously and deliberately to make life more difficult for students seeking to enter higher education.

Mr. Riddick: Will the hon. Gentleman please answer my question?

Mr. Davies: The question is not apposite. Many features of our higher education system compare very favourably with those of other countries. For example, our success rate at graduate level is the envy of many countries, and there is a correlation between support for students and success rates. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that it would be more appropriate for us to adopt other countries' systems of financial support for students, he may also find that he is embracing the notion that more of our students should fail their courses, in line with other countries. That is not a particularly progressive or constructive way to view young people's education.

The Minister must face the problem that not only is the student grant inadequate, leading to dependence on loans, but all other means of supplementing student finances are effectively blocked. The Government have made it abundantly clear that there is to be no form of benefit support for students. That is a substantial loss. A study carried out by the students union of the university of Manchester has demonstrated that, for the average student in Manchester, housing costs have increased from between 45 and 50 per cent. of his income up to 71 per cent. That is a considerable slice of a student's income. It is a fact that students can no longer apply for housing benefit. The result—I am sure that the Government did not wish this upon the students—is that students are so impoverished that their standard of living is below the level of unemployed young people between the ages of 18 and 24. We are asking the young unemployed, who have an extremely difficult time, to exist on about £60 a week if they have access to housing benefit, but student support is only just over £50 a week.

I wonder whether Conservative Members have considered the privations that students face. I know that some people will say, "Students have always been poor. Our own generation at university was scarcely well-off, but it survived". The majority of students of my generation survived because we were able to obtain vacation jobs. We could not make our grants last throughout a full year unless we were able to have some earning powers during at least the long vacation.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): What was wrong with that?

Mr. Davies: Many of us had substantial earning power over the Christmas period because of the institution of the Christmas post.

The hon. Gentleman asked what was wrong with working during the long vacation. I do not think that anything is wrong with that, provided that students have access to work. The bald fact is, however, that students cannot obtain jobs during vacations. It is not possible in circumstances——

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Gentleman is talking rubbish. He has said that Tory Members bail out their children. Perhaps he will name the Tory Members whom he has in mind. I have four children, all of whom managed to get jobs and work their way through in the way that he said he did. What is wrong with that? I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman thinks that it cannot be done now. The fact is that it can be done.

Mr. Davies: If the hon. Gentleman's children were able to obtain vacation jobs, that may reflect the rather more privileged position that they enjoy compared with that which faces many of the children from my constituency. There are unemployment rates of 16 per cent. in Oldham. In Manchester, a few road-sweeping jobs attracted more than 1,000 applicants. Many were graduates who had recently qualified at university. Students do not have much hope of easily finding casual vacation jobs that will enable them to supplement their income. That is a measure of the impossible situation that students face.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): At one time, as my hon. Friend says, students were able to get jobs in various industries and in many other sectors. During the recession, those jobs are no longer available. As a result of the squeeze, local government—which used to make many jobs available to students during college vacations—is no longer able to offer vacation work. It does not have the necessary finance available to it.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his contribution. It reflects the grim situation that we all face. As unemployment moves inexorably towards 3 million, there are no jobs for students to take up.

Access funds are another aspect of support that the Government suggest for students, but the higher education institutions have always said that they provide inadequate support. It was predicted that the £25·8 million voted last year would be speedily exhausted because of the real hardship claims by students. During the past two weeks, the Labour party has carried out a survey of access funds, and almost 50 per cent. of the institutions surveyed have already exhausted their full entitlement. That means that students who still have almost three months to go before their next grant cheque and have no access to benefits and, in many cases, no possibility of supplementing their grants with jobs will find that when they apply to their institutions for help they will receive only the bleakest of answers.

[Mr. Davies]

Problems also confront students at the end of their courses. Unemployment is reflected in the extent to which this year's recruitment fairs have been operating at only half the level of previous years. Major companies have virtually abandoned graduate recruitment. After just three or four years at college, students are saddled with debts of more than £1,000. They cannot fulfil the Government's rosy view of how they can solve their debt problems, which is to get a job to repay those debts in a short period. For large numbers of students, graduate unemployment means no jobs and substantial debts once they have successfully graduated.

What does all that mean for education? I ask the Minister to reflect on just what perspective he believes the next generation takes of higher education in those circumstances. The moral must be clear, especially for the children of low-income families. Faced with the prospect of debt and of extreme difficulty in sustaining themselves through their higher education courses, children will decide that if there is a job available when they leave school, however poorly paid and low in prospects, it would be better to take that job than to follow the somewhat hazardous prospects of higher education. The Government's oft-declared objective, to increase higher education participation by children from lower-income groups and reduce the extent to which it is enjoyed predominantly by children from middle class homes, will suffer while student support operates at such an inadequate level.

If there is that long-awaited recovery in the economy and the beginnings of some green shoots—although most of us have failed to see them, despite the many Government promises—and if a few jobs are created, young people will seize those jobs rather than put themselves through three or four years of higher education, with all the difficulties that they face and limited prospects when they have graduated.

On the evidence of the past two years of increasing difficulties for students, I appeal to the Government to rethink the basis of student support. If they do not, students and staff of the battered higher education section of our education system, which has been quiescent in recent years—perhaps previously hoping that some of its difficulties would be overcome by a change of Government at the last election but now coming to terms with the fact that this Administration will be in power for at least the next three to four years—will press their grievances, and if they are not met students are bound to advocate their cause. That, as we know from the past, has often led to considerable disruption in higher education, to the cost of students, the education system and, ultimately, the nation.

If students are impoverished, if they receive the harsh lesson from the Government that reason will not prevail, the Government will have only themselves to blame for the reaction that will undoubtedly result.

10.26 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) on applying for a debate on such an important subject. I speak as the parent of a daughter who has just completed her second year at Chester college. Therefore, I have a vested interest—an expensive one—in the cost of keeping my daughter at college.

As my hon. Friend said, the problem is that for the younger generation of people we have made going to college or university dependent on their parents being both willing and able to contribute to their further education. I stress that they must be both willing and able, because the one is not satisfactory without the other. The situation is extremely difficult.

I spoke against student loans on several occasions at the time of their introduction. The concept is totally wrong, and the sooner we revert to the grant system the better. Loans are wrong, because to allow people in education to acquire a debt is nonsense. I know that the loans are effectively zero-rated, and that if earnings are below a particular level in subsequent years, the loan does not have to be repaid; but the simple fact is that the loan is seen as a debt with which students are saddled, and that is nonsense. Moreover, it would be a rare student who did not build up a debt in addition to the student loan resulting in two debts on completion of his or her education.

The statistics clearly show that those who have had the advantage of a university or college education earn more in later life than those who have not had such an advantage. Therefore, they will pay back not only their tuition fees but the whole cost of their education in the higher taxes that they rightly pay in a fair society on their higher income. That is fair, and that is the system that we should have. Student loans should clearly be scrapped, and the sooner we scrap them the better. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will admit that they have got it wrong and will not allow the system to continue for a third year.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), who has now left the Chamber, said that it was easy for students to find jobs in the vacations. If the hon. Gentleman believes that, he does not live in the real world. In 1992, with the country in the longest and deepest recession that it has known since the war, it simply is not possible for students to find vacation jobs in most parts of the country. They cannot find work in factories, with local authorities or even at McDonalds or Wimpy bars because of the recession that the Government have created; moreover, they are not eligible for benefits, which is outrageous.

When I was on Burnley council, we used to employ students in a number of jobs during the vacations. Over the years, however, those jobs had to go as the Government squeezed local authorities' budgets and hammered their spending. Nowadays, authorities are rarely able to take on any temporary labour.

Housing costs and benefits are also an increasing problem. The Government must deal with the accommodation issue in any event. Some of the student accommodation that I have seen—not my daughter's, but that of other students—is of a very low standard. Much more properly run, properly maintained halls of residence are needed. Private sector rented accommodation should be properly supervised as well, as much of it is not only of a poor standard but increasingly expensive. Local environmental officers have not sufficient powers to supervise such properties: they need greater powers, the standards must be raised, and rents must be better controlled to provide value for money.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton mentioned the access funds. In this instance, access is certainly not a flexible friend; for most people, the funds are a joke. Either they are spread too thin, or the money has gone. Most student unions consider them an insult.

If we are to compete in the world, emerge from recession and keep the economy permanently out of deficit and financial difficulties, investment in education and training is crucial. It was one of the key issues at the time of the election; sadly, the people made the mistake of failing to recognise how different Labour's policy was. They did not realise that we considered investment in all levels of education and training to be vital.

Higher education is currently the subject of debate. The problems created by the Government will bar more and more people from continuing their education. The Minister will say that statistics show a higher percentage of people to be doing so, but he should bear in mind the number who are dropping out because financial pressures prevent them from concentrating fully on their studies and taking all their opportunities. The Minister and the Government must understand that, if they do not put that right, think again and change their policy, it will be the Government and the country which loses out. Not only young people in education but the nation as a whole will suffer, and will pay the price for this short-sighted folly and the hardship which will prove detrimental to this country's education and training opportunities.

The need is crucial and the case made so well by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton is overwhelming. The Government must think again, change their policies and give our people a better opportunity to go on to higher education.

10.35 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) on initiating the debate and on the powerful case that he has made for his constituents and for students in general. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) for the strength of his contribution. They both showed how great is the Labour party's concern about this important issue.

As this is my first opportunity to do so, I welcome the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education to his post. Because of his distinguished interest in the social sciences, it will not have escaped his attention that there were above average swings to the Labour party in the seats where higher education is especially important. We can hope only that the lesson that he learns from that fact is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley explained, the need to change Government policy rather than to punish students and academics further for their dissidence, as some of his hon. Friends would like him to.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton said, the debate is timely to the point of urgency. The prospect facing tens of thousands of students this summer is grim. My hon. Friend rightly referred to the series of disastrous decisions on student support made in recent years. First, there are the cuts in the value of grants. Since their cash value was frozen two years ago they have been reduced by the rate of inflation. Then there was the introduction of student loans, the ending of entitlement to income support and housing benefit, and the cynical abolition of the vacation hardship allowance, combined with the difficulties which students have in finding vacation jobs, especially now in the depths of recession. There are also escalating rents, the pressure on institutions' libraries and the superinflationary rise in the cost of books. Those factors have all conspired to condemn students without other means of support to spiralling debt and the prospect of a summer of poverty.

Mr. Pike: Is not another of those problems the lack of access to computers? Many students have to pay for computer facilities because in many places insufficient facilities are available for all the students.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. Of course we welcome the increase in the numbers of students in our educational institutions, but equally we deplore the fact that resources have not kept pace with that increase so that, as my hon. Friend says, facilities of all kinds, including essential equipment such as computers, come under enormous pressure. When students have to buy equipment themselves, that imposes a financial penalty which many of them cannot bear.

Our charge against the Government is that, faced with the prospect of deepening student hardship, they offer students and their parents nothing but complacency, incompetence and indifference. Clearly the Government have learnt nothing from the experience of last summer, when the situation was so serious that the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux dealt with so many cases that it was impelled to draw up a special report, entitled "Diminishing Options". It concludes:

> "On the basis of cases reported by Citizens Advice Bureaux, the basic student grants and loan alone are not providing an adequate income for many students and they are suffering considerable distress as a result. One of the groups hardest hit are students whose parents are on low incomes and also mature students who are fully independent and who have their own financial commitments. Some are considering giving up their courses, and there is a real danger that access to higher education for poorer people will be reduced."

That is backed by the requests for help received by the National Union of Students and the higher education institutions themselves, and the volume of mail on the subject that Members of Parliament receive.

The Government's response is to deny hardship—typified by the former Secretary of State for Education in his letter to Members of Parliament last year, and by his remark in the House that

> "I do not accept that the 'scores' of cases stand up to examination."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 885.]

The Government also point to access funds as a source of help—and I dare say that we will hear more of the same tonight.

If the Government seriously expect students, their parents, and the rest of us to treat their claims with anything but contempt, they would have made an objective study of the extent of student hardship, and monitored the use of access funds. They have done neither.

On 8 June, I asked the Minister when he would undertake a survey of students' income and expenditure. He replied only that the Government would do so "as and when appropriate." On 25 June, I asked the Minister what representations he had received on the prospect of student hardship this summer, to which he gave no answer, and whether he intended to increase the availability of access funds. He replied:

[Mr. Smith]

"We believe that the sums made available to the funds should be sufficient for their purpose, if properly targeted."—*[Official Report, 25 June 1992; Vol. 210, c. 273.]*

On 2 July, I asked the Minister how many institutions had already spent their access funds. He answered:

"The information is not kept centrally."—*[Official Report, 2 July 1992; Vol. 210, c. 663.]*

He should certainly consider having it centrally recorded.

On 3 July, I asked what assessment the Government had made of the need for additional financial support for students this summer. The Minister referred to his previous answer, and added:

"We do not consider that additional provision is required."—*[Official Report, 3 July 1992; Vol. 210, c. 713.]*

The Government have learnt nothing from last year and have failed to assess student need for this year. They will not make additional student support available, and do not know how access funds are being spent. More comprehensive evidence that the Government could not care less about what is happening to students would be difficult to imagine.

The ultimate cynicism is that last summer institutions were allowed to bring forward 10 per cent. of access fund expenditure to the current academic year. What is the difference between last summer and this? None—except that last summer was the last one before a general election, and this summer is the one following it.

The Labour party is so concerned that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton said, we made our own survey of access funds depletion. Of a sample of 27 higher education institutions, just under half have already used all their current allocation. Nearly two thirds of them have less than £1,500 to see them and their students through the summer.

One institution attempted to bring forward funds from next year, and several more hope that they will be able to use some of next year's allocation in advance. It is plain for all to see that there will be a real crisis of student hardship this summer. It will be especially acute for students who are on low incomes, for older students and for those whose institutions have already run out of access funds. A Government who took their responsibilities to students seriously would act now. They would carry out their own immediate check on depletion of access funds, increase the size of those funds and replace the money that was pre-empted last year.

I ask the Minister to recognise at last the seriousness and urgency of the situation and to take those steps now to avert a summer of student hardship. I urge him also to introduce measures to restore vacation hardship allowance and to introduce a targeted system of housing benefit for students. That is what Labour pledged at the general election. Nothing less will do if we are to stop the crisis of student hardship becoming an ever-worsening annual event to the enormous cost of countless individuals and to the detriment of opportunities in higher education.

The Government are doing a grave disservice to the students of this country and to their hard-pressed parents. It is time that they dumped their failed policies on student support, addressed the crisis that is staring us all in the face and took the action that the Labour party has been urging on them for some time.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Nigel Forman): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) on his success in the ballot for the debate. It was welcome to hear the views of the hon. Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). I thank the hon. Member for Oxford, East in particular for his kind tribute to my academic credentials. It remains to be seen whether he will feel as generous after what I have to say.

I am all the more glad to take part in the debate as the Government have reason to be justly proud of their achievements in higher education generally and, in particular, with regard to student support. I must make it clear that I do not dismiss allegations of student hardship and I will endeavour to respond to the points that have been raised.

I must make it clear at the outset that no system of student support can protect every student against hardship. However, we have an impressive array of arrangements for that purpose and we shall certainly continue to monitor the situation carefully. Before I come to the main burden of my remarks, I will try to answer some of the specific points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton began by saying that he thought that it was wrong for students to be deprived of benefits. He felt that students should continue to have support from the benefit system. The Government believe that support for educational purposes should be directed through educational channels. The decision to undertake full-time study is a decision to invest in one's own future rather than to enter employment straight away. Ever-increasing numbers of young and mature students are taking that decision.

As the hon. Members for Oldham, Central and Royton and for Oxford, East recognised, the expansion of student numbers has been considerable and has been achieved in a way that has maintained quality and access for all categories of students. In case the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton leaves the debate with the impression that students are fundamentally worse off, as he suggested, I remind him that the grant and full-year loan together are more than 30 per cent. higher than the grant was on its own in 1989-90. That has more than compensated the majority of students for any loss of benefits. On top of that, the access funds to which Opposition Members have referred, worth more than £25 million this year, allow colleges to support students in financial need and can be carefully targeted.

It is wrong to say that student support is inadequate. The figures on the full package of support available to students, both from grants and from loans, make it clear that the system is generous and is meeting needs.

Mr. Andrew Smith: If the system is as generous and adequate as the Minister claims, what advice would he give a student this summer whose institution has already spent all its access fund, who is not entitled to income support or housing benefit, and who has exhausted the patience of his or her parents, bank and landlord?

Mr. Forman: Hard cases make bad law. There is no doubt that, from time to time, a small minority of students will find themselves in hardship, but the vast majority of students are very adequately helped by the buoyancy of

student loans. It is somewhat surprising—the hon. Gentleman should recognise it—that the take-up of student loans is still less than 40 per cent., according to the latest figures. Given that those loans are available to students, that hardly suggests that hardship can be all that widespread or deep. If there were the problems that the hon. Gentleman suggests and on the scale that he talks about, students would be wise, and indeed they are still able, to apply for a loan before the end of the relevant period.

The hon. Gentleman is basing his argument on a very small part of the sample. He should take account of the fact that the majority of students still are adequately financed from grants, from holiday work or from parental contributions, or a mixture of those things, and that they see fit not to take out the student loan that is available from the student loans scheme.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): If the Minister is not prepared to accept Opposition Members' concerns, does he accept that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals has expressed concern about student hardship and the quality of education that it is able to offer with available resources not matching the increase in student numbers?

Mr. Forman: I am aware that the increase in student numbers has been accompanied by a maintenance of quality in all its forms and that there is no sign from the figures relating to new entrants into higher education that anybody is being deterred from entering higher education by the arrangements that we have in place.

I link that comment with a point that was made by the hon. Member for Burnley. The drop-out rate from higher education is the lowest in the advanced world. It is about 5 per cent.—I speak from memory—which is much lower than in comparable countries. That is because we have an efficient, cost-effective education system which, on all the evidence, is not deterring new students. Indeed, the number of students has increased by 16 per cent. this year over last year, and we expect the number to continue to increase in future. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) probably knows, current projections suggest that, whereas one in four of the relevant cohort is entering higher education today, it is likely to be one in three before the end of the decade. I do not accept the argument that students are deterred by the financial arrangements—quite the contrary.

Several Opposition Members made points about graduate unemployment and the difficulty in obtaining jobs. I accept that graduates may temporarily be finding it somewhat less easy to obtain employment of the type that they would ideally like, but the fact remains that investment in higher education is good for the young people in question. Ever-increasing numbers recognise that fact by entering higher education.

One of the many advantages of the student loans scheme is that if graduates cannot find work or are on low incomes for a while, they may defer their repayments for a year at a time. The possibility of deferral exists.

As for the point about vacation work to supplement the money available to students, I took the trouble just this afternoon to look at today's copy of the *Evening Standard.* In the section on hotel and catering—just one page—several jobs are available to young people. They include jobs as bar persons, catering assistants, sandwich bar assistants and other such part-time jobs which pay reasonable money and would be ideal to provide a supplement for many students. It is common knowledge that successive generations of students both in Britain and elsewhere have found it normal to supplement their income while at university by working part time.

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): I suspect that it is slightly fewer years since I was at university than since the Minister was a student. I certainly had to supplement my income when I was at university. I did several different jobs in the summer holidays. Does the Minister agree that student hardship is not simply a matter of grants versus loans—although I find it despicable that students have to start their working life with a debt hanging around their neck—and that the real issue is benefits? Thousands of students live in sub-standard housing because the Government refuse to allow them housing benefit. The amount of money that it would cost the Government is small. The Government's attitude is petty and mean-minded. Does the Minister agree that it would be better for all involved to reinstate housing benefit as soon as possible for students?

Mr. Forman: That is not the best way forward. The Government took the decision to withdraw housing benefit from students. It is available in only a small minority of cases for particularly vulnerable groups. It is right to concentrate on them. Supplementary allowances protect the most vulnerable groups.

Several hon. Members referred to the access funds. The hon. Member for Oxford, East referred to the survey of access funds carried out by his party. He should be careful not to draw sweeping conclusions from such relatively flimsy evidence. As I understand it—he will correct me if I am wrong—the survey covered a third of higher education institutions. It found that a third had completely exhausted their access funds and a third had no more than £1,500 left. He must realise that arithmetically that is a shaky sample. It implies in any case that for each finding one is talking about one ninth of the institutions. That implies that seven ninths are in a satisfactory position with the access funds and the vast majority target their money in the appropriate way.

Mr. Andrew Smith: I referred earlier to the Minister's distinguished credentials in social science. Does he accept that a random sample of 27 out of 100 or so of higher education institutions is a good and indicative sample? We found that 44 per cent. had totally exhausted their fund and 63 per cent. had less than £1,500 left. The overwhelming probability is that that is typical of the higher education institutions and their students. The survey is a solid basis for supposing that there is, indeed, an imminent crisis of acute student hardship this summer.

Mr. Forman: We take the view that it is for higher education institutions to decide on the allocations. In the previous year they were able to bring forward a portion of that money. We should target on the most needy students, because that is what the funds are designed to do. They are designed not to be a flat-rate, across-the-board supplement for all students, but to be targeted on those in greatest need.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. He referred to the fact that last year institutions were able to pre-empt 10 per cent. of the access funds from

[Mr. Smith]

the current year's expenditure. If it was right to do so last year, why is it not right this year? Will he give a commitment that institutions can draw on next year's access fund?

Mr. Forman: It was right to do so last year because it was at an early stage in the access fund arrangements. We believe that it is now right to continue on a regular basis and not to have that arrangement for the coming year.

I should return to the main thrust of my remarks. There are some widespread misconceptions about financial support for students, some of which have been mentioned in the debate. For the benefit of the House, I shall set out five key facts about the situation of students.

First, we have increased students' resources substantially in the past two years. Grants and loans form the central elements of our support package. The full-year loan, together with the grant, now gives students over 30 per cent. more than the grant two years ago. This autumn, we shall uprate average student support from grant and loan by a further 4·5 per cent., thereby maintaining its value in real terms. As a result, full-year support this autumn will be nearly 40 per cent. higher than the grant alone in 1989-90. That represents a substantial real-terms increase. It has been achieved at a time when some members of society have been much less fortunate financially. Students should recognise that. In other words, a considerable number of the people who contribute to student support, through the tax system, are less well off than the students themselves, and one needs to consider that.

In addition, it is often forgotten that we are continuing to uprate the supplementary allowances that are payable with the grant. This autumn, we shall increase them by 4·5 per cent. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows from his experience of such matters that they go to, among others, mature students, students with dependants, disabled students and those studying at their colleges during the vacation. They provide an important additional resource for many students with additional needs, and that is a good example of the targeting in which the Government believe.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. Much of our discussion has been about students in higher education. Is he satisfied with the current financial provision for students in further education, because many students in local colleges in my constituency have been complaining about the low level of support that they get from their local education authorities?

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman is right to use those words—it is for local education authorities to decide on the support that they can allocate to students. It is not for central Government to step in to suggest increases, or changes in the system. I am satisfied with the present arrangements. It must be for local education authorities to determine to what extent they support students.

The access funds are worth more than £25 million in total this year. They enable institutions to provide discretionary support for students in financial need. We have taken care to ensure that the distribution of the access funds to institutions is weighted to reflect regional variations in the cost of accommodation, for example. For this academic year, institutions can provide help from the funds at any time up to 31 August.

Secondly, we have started to reduce in real terms the average parental contribution to the grant. It is now frozen in cash for those parents whose residual incomes rise in line with national average earnings. Such parents will find that they are paying less and less in real terms over time. Indeed, they are already paying less than last year. Those whose income rises faster than average earnings may pay a little more out of their higher income. Conversely, those whose income does not rise as fast as average earnings will pay less in cash than they did before. Many other parents, of course, are not assessed for any contribution at all. As a result, the loans scheme is now starting to share the cost of student maintenance more fairly between students themselves, their parents and the taxpayer. I regard that as an equitable sharing of the burden of student support.

Mr. Pike: The Minister has said that the parental contribution is fixed by the grant regulations. Does he accept that the majority of parents give more than their set contribution—if they can do so—to avoid their children suffering hardship? In some cases parents will go short to ensure that their student children do not suffer. Those extra parental contributions hide the real problem.

Mr. Forman: I pay tribute to parents who make a substantial contribution towards the costs of their children's education. It is right and proper that they should. Most parents that I know with children in that category strive to do just that.

Those contributions represent part of the burden that is borne by parents and it is quite right that the increments of financial support available to students in the coming years should be taken up principally by the loan, which is not means-tested and which is a buoyant source of finance.

I mentioned vulnerable students earlier and it is important that the funds for such students are now rightly directed through the existing funding channels. We have ensured that those students remain eligible in certain cases for housing benefit and income support. As hon. Members are aware, those students include disabled students, lone parents and those with dependent children. Many other students did not claim those benefits when they were available some time ago. For them, the new grant and loan package has presented them with a big gain in resources.

Many students find income from other sources as a result of part-time work in term time or summer jobs. Opposition Members must acknowledge that from their constituency experience. The facts are clear. A recent survey by the National Union of Students, for what it was worth, suggested that 65 per cent. of students found work in summer 1991. They earned about £800 on average, which is not insignificant. That money represents an increment and is in addition to other streams of income available to students.

I have already spoken about the loan facility, which is generous and buoyant. Let me remind Opposition Members of the generous terms of that scheme. Loans are indexed to the rate of inflation. Last year, that meant an indexation rate of 9·8 per cent. This year, it has been 5·8 per cent.—a full four percentage points lower. That is a consequence of the Government's success in reducing inflation. For next year, the rate will be the increase in the retail prices index in the year to June. We shall announce

that figure tomorrow. I look forward to seeing what it is. I should be surprised if it did not offer good news for students and borrowers under the loans scheme. There is also generous provision for borrowers whose incomes are no more than moderate. Under the present arrangements, they can defer their repayments if their gross income is £1,055 a month or less. From September, that threshold will rise to £1,130 a month, equivalent to more than £13,500 a year. Taken together with the indexation rate, that means that student loans are available on far more favourable terms than any other form of credit. They are the best deal in town. Loans are here to stay. The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton devoted the bulk of his speech to calling on the Government to get rid of the student loan scheme, but I must tell him that we intend it to expand gradually in time so that it takes up proportionately more of the weight of student support.

Last year, only 28 per cent. of eligible students actually took out loans, despite the fact that the scheme was widely publicised. This year, take-up has been considerably higher. Nevertheless, we expect that, by the end of the academic year in a few weeks' time, at most 40 per cent. of eligible students will have taken out loans. It is their right to make that decision, but our policy has always been to make the extra money available and to leave it to the students to decide whether to borrow those resources. However, that does tell us something about alleged student hardship. It suggests that many students are able to manage on the grant alone, supplemented by other income. The fact is that many simply do not seem to need all the resources that the Government have made available.

There is now widespread and increasing agreement that students should make some contribution to the cost of their higher education. Of course, they do not contribute while they are studying. They start to repay after they have completed their course and then only when they have started to earn reasonable incomes. In time, many will enjoy a much higher income than the taxpayers who paid for the costs of their education. I agree with the hon. Gentleman on that. Thus, by spreading the cost of student support, we can pay for the rapid expansion of higher education that we have seen—and welcomed—in recent years. We must not forget the extraordinary surge in participation that higher education has witnessed. It is proof positive that our financial arrangements for student support have not deterred an increasing number of people going into higher education. In 1979, only one young person in eight entered higher education. It is now one in four. And, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear at Portsmouth recently, we now expect participation to reach one in three well before the year 2000. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Is the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) seeking to intervene?

Mr. Forman: I do not claim that the resources available to students during their studies enable them to live in affluence. But I do believe that they can enjoy a reasonable level of support and that there is a satisfactory system in place. Next year, full-year students living away from their parents' home and studying outside London will have £2,980 available to them in grant and loan. Those studying in London can get £3,675. Many students receive supplementary allowances with the grant. Others receive access fund payments. A few in special categories receive benefits. Many can get part-time or vacation jobs if they wish to top up those resources.

By providing these greatly increased resources and funding the huge expansion of higher education, the Government have shown their whole-hearted commitment to students and to higher education. We know that, in time, that commitment will pay dividends for the individual concerned and for the nation as a whole.

[Mr. Forman]

Latin America

11.13 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): I am delighted to have this opportunity to introduce the fifth annual debate on relations between this country and Latin America. I know that all the officers of the Latin American committee are also grateful for this opportunity. These rather arcane procedures that see us having debates going through the night at this stage of the term can at least be used to sensible advantage from time to time. I hope that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench do not take that as meaning that we are satisfied with these arcane procedures, and I hope that the proposals for change that are before the House will have their blessing, and that we shall find new ways to have debates on vital subjects such as this.

Last year, I said that all hon. Members were distracted by many other developments from the sort of attention that we might profitably give to Latin America. What was true last year has now become even more obvious. As Members of Parliament, we are all concerned with a variety of issues that affect our constituents—including the economic problems of not just this country but the world. When we consider matters relating to the European Community and Maastricht, events in what used to be the Soviet Union, in eastern Europe and, above all, in what used to be Yugoslavia, it does not seem surprising that hon. Members' interest in tensions in Latin America has been less than many of us would wish.

I believe that the Latin Americans, although sensitive to our attitude, also understand it, and may even take comfort from the fact that, whereas in the past we were ready to point a finger at tensions and border disputes in Latin America, those problems are as nothing to the horrors that we on the continent of Europe have generated during the past one or two years. I do not know the Spanish translation of the word "schadenfreude", but whatever it is, that is the way that Latin Americans might be considering that development.

All of us who take an interest in Latin America understand the importance of maintaining and developing Britain's interest in that continent. We recognise that there should be a renewal of the well-known—at least among hon. Members present this evening—historical links that Britain has for so long enjoyed with that continent.

We are at an important juncture because, in the past few weeks, there has been a major development: the visit by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Colombia and Brazil. His visit to Colombia was the first ever visit of a British Prime Minister when in office to a Latin American country. That thought is in itself extraordinary, but at least the precedent has now been established, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that. I understand that his awareness of the countries that he visited and the whole of the sub-continent was alerted. In the wake of that visit, it is time to launch a renewed effort to develop this nation's interests in Latin America. I have every reason to hope that that will happen.

Twenty years ago, when I was a diplomat in Buenos Aires, a special conference on Latin America was organised in Lancaster house. It was a way of focusing the interest of Britain—particularly British business, but also our other cultural, social, academic and political links—on Latin America. I believe that everything that has happened in those 20 years—especially the encouraging developments of recent years—mean that it is now time to launch another conference at the highest, prime ministerial, level.

Next year is the 50th anniversary of the creation of Canning house—an institution which is well known to those hon. Members present in the Chamber, and of which we should all be proud. It is a unique focus of the study and development of links with Latin America. It is a small cost burden to the British taxpayer and is greatly supported by private interest. I commend that part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget and hope that that support will continue, even in these straitened times. Next year is the 50th anniversary of Canning house, and that would be an appropriate time to stage a new conference to demonstrate Britain's interest in and commitment to a continent of 450 million people and the commercial, political and economic importance that that implies.

The realisation has dawned that Latin America is no longer a continent of tinpot dictators and banana republics, and it is now understood that democracy has been established. However, it is not quite understood that the democratic Governments in Latin America are still relatively tender and need as much support as possible. That support should be internal, but the more traditional and longer established democracies also have a role to play.

In Latin America, the 1980s were known as the lost decade, when the gross domestic product of almost every Latin American country and its standard of living fell. Those phenomena put great strains on the body politic. Therefore, it is especially remarkable that democracy emerged, but it means that in some Latin American countries the democratic institutions that we all take for granted are thin and embryonic and need much help and understanding from the developed world. I shall devote the rest of my speech to that.

Our media have an unhappy record on extending and improving the understanding of what happens in Latin America. Everyone in political life is familiar with the sad but undoubtedly true platitude that good news is not news and bad news is what is published. That means that only the difficulties and disasters in Latin America form the diet on which we are fed. That is a sad fact, but as politicians we expect to live with it. That does not mean that we should accept or take it for granted. We should complain about it, and I hope that those responsible for reporting on Latin America will take note.

Another even more worrying phenomenon is the extraordinary tendency of those who claim to be the intellectuals or the intelligentsia of western Europe, including the United Kingdom—the chattering classes generally and the media—to light upon every far-out, left-wing organisation that appears on the scene and to invest it with a haloed, sanctified status as the defender of the people of Latin America against a cruel and oppressive dictatorship. That has happened in the past, but much more often than not, and certainly in recent years, that has not been the true picture. *[Interruption.]* I note the scoffing reaction of the hon. Member on the Labour Front Bench, who represents a Scottish constituency but whose name escapes me. He thinks that this is a laughing matter.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whitney: Certainly, when I have finished my sentence. It is not a laughing matter but a matter of great concern to all of us who value democracy and human rights in Latin America.

Mr. Foulkes: One of these days I shall take the hon. Gentleman around Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley so that he not only knows how to pronounce it but knows more about it. I know that he knows a great deal about Latin America. I was not laughing. I was astonished that he was dismissing so lightly dictatorships such as that of Pinochet in Chile, that of Somoza in Nicaragua and the others under which the people of Latin America have suffered. It was that which was causing us concern. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who has a good record of supporting democratic development in Latin America, agrees with us about that.

Mr. Whitney: I am glad that the hon. Member from Scotland was not laughing about the problems of Latin America. Had he been listening carefully, and if he reads the transcript of what I said, he will see that there is no question of my defending the Somoza or Pinochet regimes. Using a little psychiatry or psychology, I would suggest that that was a transference of the hon. Gentleman's own prejudices rather than mine. I think that the hon. Member —or certainly some of his hon. Friends, such as the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) in whose presence we usually rejoice on such occasions but who, sadly, could not be with us tonight—is a splendid manifestation of what I was talking about. Cuba is a long-standing favourite of such hon. Members. While every other communist, Marxist or Stalinist regime has collapsed in disorder and contumely, Cuba clings on. It has an ever decreasing band of supporters and defenders but some of them are to be found—not tonight, but from time to time—on the Labour Benches.

Napoleon Duarte, a very brave man and a dedicated democratic socialist, struggled against the FLMN in El Salvador. The Sandinistas in Nicaragua were the friends of many on the left and many of the more normal members of the Labour party. They were the darlings of the chattering classes and of the media. It required only one democratically run election for the people of Nicaragua to eject the Sandinistas.

This is the opportunity to draw to the House's attention —and I hope that it will go further—a much more worrying phenomenon: the treatment given by some circles in London and other western European capitals to the extraordinary regime of the Sendero Luminoso in Peru. We know that there are serious difficulties in Peru at the moment. We are studying carefully the action of President Fujimori some months ago, and we appreciate the tensions and pressures, but that does not mean that the terrorism of the Sendero Luminoso can be excused. There is no doubt that the struggles and terrorist tactics of the Sendero Luminoso are adding significantly to Peru's problems.

The Sendero Luminoso was formed by Abimael Guzman in 1980. He rejoiced in the successes of Stalin and said that Mao Tse-tung's only mistake was that he did not go far enough. He has led the terrorist regime which has been responsible for about 30,000 deaths in Peru. Yet some in the media naively accept the claims of this terrorist organisation, Sendero Luminoso. There was an especially depressing example in June when a programme entitled "Condemned to Win" was broadcast as part of the series called "Dispatches". It was a flattering and sympathetic portrayal of a barbarous and bloodthirsty organisation.

An exception to the worrying tendency of so much of the media to accept far-left and bloodthirsty movements was an extremely informative and reliable article written by Caroline Moorehead, which appeared in *The Independent* magazine of 20 June. She recited several instances of terrorist activities. For example, there was the murder of the deputy mayor of Villa El Salvador on the outskirts of Lima, one Maria Elena Moyano. She was shot and her body was blown up by dynamite. Her two sons, aged 11 and 12, watched over her. There are many such examples, yet *The Guardian* will carry a letter from a lady who calls herself a representative of the Federation of Democratic Women of Peru, who seemingly rejoices that Maria Elena was executed for a long list of offences.

For a major British television channel to broadcast such a sympathetic portrayal of such a bloodthirsty organisation as Sendero Luminoso is a grave indictment of the British media. Yet again, it increases the problems with which we all wrestle—veracity and responsibility as against the difficulties of censorship. I earnestly hope that we are not moving yet again into a cycle in which certain quarters in London and other west European capitals allow distortions of realities, whether it be Peru now, Nicaragua in the past or whatever Latin American country it will be in future.

We have a duty in the House and outside to ensure that we become increasingly better informed. There are many opportunities to develop our links with the 450 million people of Latin America. We in the United Kingdom must continue to deal with the Falkland Islands, which is a special issue. That means that we must deal with Argentina. We are delighted that relations with Argentina have moved as they have over recent years, but the issue of the Falkland Islands still awaits a solution. The resolution of the problem will be to the interest and benefit of the islanders as well as of the United Kingdom and Argentina.

Beyond that, we in Britain have tremendous economic opportunities. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, will enlarge upon those issues. That being so, I shall not trespass into that territory.

Problems still remain in Latin America, such as debt, population, disparity of wealth and institutional weaknesses, but there have been real achievements. There are challenges for the United Kingdom. I hope that, under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, with his new awareness of the significance of the South American continent, we shall take advantage of the opportunities.

11.34 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I welcome this, the fifth annual summer debate on Britain's relations with Latin America. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) on so ably leading the debate. It is a case perhaps of quality rather than quantity of hon. Members.

When the House is concerned with vital matters such as the trouble in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, it is important that we do not overlook the quietly developing region of Latin America. It has many qualities.

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

First, every republic in the region, with the sole exception of Cuba, is run by duly elected presidents. Every republic is practising liberal market economics. They are dismantling the 1950s and 1960s models of import substitution and massive nationalisation, which caused such stunting of their economies. Their enthusiastic adoption of the free market system and the fact that they are now working through the world open trading system give great inspiration, which this House should duly recognise. In particular, those countries are following the example of Chile, which through the adoption of the free market economy has proved that considerable success can be achieved in Latin America.

Latin America is based on a largely European culture and immigration. It has a cadre of business men, lawyers, diplomats and scientists of a world standard, with whom we could easily work. The past year has been a good one for Britain's relations with Latin America. Only last month there was the first visit of a British Prime Minister in office to that continent. My right hon. Friend visited both Colombia and Brazil during the Earth summit. It is not a breach of confidence to say that he was enthused by what he saw. He told the House in his statement on 15 June:

"The purpose of my visit was to reaffirm our support for Colombian democracy, her market economy and her brave and successful fight against drug trafficking."—[*Official Report*, 15 June 1992; Vol. 209, c. 650.]

My right hon. Friend's visit and the renewed interest in Latin America is not a flash in the pan. Last month, *The Guardian* reported my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary as saying:

"The British Government decided to make a deliberate and vigorous effort to restore the historical relationship with Latin America."

The article states that my right hon. Friend

"added that both Government and business in Britain were looking with fresh eyes at this region."

Much of the credit for the growing interest in Latin America should go to my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who was aptly described in the same article in the following terms:

"A fluent Spanish speaker, he has emanated a clear vision that Britain is missing out on business opportunities."

Latin America is under way. Nevertheless, the two great pillars of its resurgence are akin to two young saplings, both fragile but both offering excellent prospects for the future. The first of those saplings is democracy. As I said, all of Latin America, with the exception of Cuba, is now run by elected presidents. However, there are problems. After decades of military rule, many of the Congresses are populated by a combination of grand extinct volcanoes from ancient political dynasties and—disturbingly for us—very young politicians.

Only yesterday, the Speaker of the Panamanian Congress visited this House. He was only31 years of age, which makes some of us feel desperately old. What we have found in the young parliamentarians from Latin America who have visited this House is that many of them offer great hope for the future. Their problem is that they lack so many of the procedures, practices and experiences that we in this House take for granted. But that is precisely where we can be of use and help them.

In particular, I commend the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. For example, a delegation of Paraguayan parliamentarians came here last year and next week we shall have a delegation from Mexico. The Paraguayans were impressed by much of what they saw here. They took a particular interest in the parliamentary ombudsman and have set up exactly such an institution in their own country, based on the British model.

However, democracy in Latin America is susceptible to corruption and disorder, and that has led to the first blemish on the escutcheon of restored Latin American democracy. When President Fujimori, the duly elected president of Peru, recently closed the Peruvian Congress, he said that the aim of his military-backed self-coup on 5 April was to replace Peru's frivolous, inoperative and corrupt democracy by what he termed an authentic one.

With the coaxing and encouragement of many countries, not least our own, President Fujimori has mapped out what he means by an authentic democracy and has laid down a timetable, through a constituent assembly, for a new Congress early next year. The Government must staunchly uphold democracy, but we should admit a touch of sympathy and understanding for President Fujimori's dilemma.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe touched on the kind of problems with which Peru has to cope. President Fujimori and his country suffer from ruthless and merciless terrorists—the Sendero Luminoso. Inspired by Chairman Mao and financed by drug money, they have extended their pitiless activity into the urban area of Lima, the capital, from the peasant areas in the south of the country which they have terrorised for years. Some years ago I travelled in southern Peru and saw some of their activities for myself. Peru therefore has problems in maintaining democracy, and the kind of thing that we saw on television in Britain not so long ago does nothing to help Peru return to and develop a full democracy.

Peru is not alone in having problems maintaining its democracy. There are other rumblings in Latin America. If we do not help in those areas, we shall see a collapse into dictatorship, from which Latin America has only just emerged.

Only this year, the stresses of economic reform have brought an attempted coup in Venezuela and in Brazil there are moves to impeach President Fernando Collor de Mello on corruption charges. President Rodriguez of Paraguay has reacted angrily to his Congress's action to block his standing for re-election.

Yet democracy is taking root in Latin America. Recently—the first time ever, I believe—one elected president has followed another in both Argentina and Peru. Chile too has carried through local elections which have proved that representative democracy is taking root once again in that country as well.

The other of the two saplings in Latin America is the free enterprise, free trade economy. Those of us who have taken an interest in Latin America over the years have been used to decades of protectionist import substitution economic policies in Latin America, with self-serving nationalised industries which have wasted vast resources. We can only marvel at the new approach that we are seeing today. The trade barriers are coming down and with them have come massive opportunities for Britain which we overlook at our peril.

The Government have started some imaginative initiatives to take advantage of those same opportunities. The imaginative Proyecto Venezuela recently carried out a project identifying opportunities for British goods and

services in Venezuela and potential British suppliers, bringing them together through well-produced directories so as to build up British trade and investment in Venezuela. I understand that that was a prototype and I hope that it will be followed in an increasing number of countries, not least in Latin America.

International trade, however, is a two-way process. It is praiseworthy that Latin American markets are now open to British exports and investments, but European markets must likewise be open to Latin American exports, especially exports of agricultural products. That is why the continuing efforts of our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to obtain a final settlement of the Uruguay round of the GATT is so critically important. If we let Fortress Europe develop to the detriment of the developing world and its exports, we shall destroy the new economic order in Latin America.

We should note what is already happening. We should note the development of the North American free trade area, taking in Mexico. It could play an increasingly protectionist role, opening Mexico to United States exports at the expense of exports from Britain and the rest of Europe.

Furthermore, other Latin American countries are queueing to join because we are not providing the opportunities here. Chile is ready to join;Venezuela considers itself a US strategic partner, because it supplies so much of its oil to the US; Panama also claims to be such a strategic partner, on the ground that it has the Panama canal. And so it goes on. If we do not solve the problem in the near future, we shall see Latin America, in reverse order, carrying out the Monroe doctrine and becoming a supplicant of the United States. That is not in the interests of Europe, or in those of Latin America itself.

Even in the south of the South American continent, countries are turning inwards by linking up through Mercosul, and likewise within the Andean pact. If they turn inwards and exclude their foreign partners, it will be to the detriment of both them and us, as trading partners.

I should like this country to be Latin America's champion in the European Community, which remains one of the principal obstructions to the completion of the GATT round. We in Britain are singularly well equipped for the role. Historically, we were the champions of Latin American independence. In 1826, in this very House, George Canning—then Foreign Secretary—declared that we had

"brought the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1826; Vol. 16, c. 397.]

British soldiers and sailors fought alongside Bolivar's army to bring about independence in the north of the continent. Lord Cochrane's ships fought with the Brazilians and the Chileans for their independence. Since then, we have invested and created the railways, the utilities and the industries. We were the co-operators, not the conquerors, of Latin America. We have a continuing fund of good will in that continent—a fund that we are not tapping, but could well tap.

In the context of today's European Community, the interests of the United Kingdom have converged with those of Latin America. We believe in and practise free trade; we oppose the agricultural subsidies on which the countries of southern Europe depend. Spain and Portugal, the metropolitan countries, both rely on subsidies from the European Community and oppose the import of much of Latin America's agricultural produce. Latin America itself knows that we shall fight its corner, and we must press on. The Government must continue their efforts to strengthen Britain as the first port of call for Latin Americans in Europe.

Three practical measures can be undertaken. First, we must further extend the teaching of Spanish, and even Portuguese, in our schools and colleges. Secondly, we must reinforce the work of the British Council, and its offshoot the Cultura Inglesa in Latin America. Their teaching of English—by which I mean English English, not United States English—is invaluable, and traditionally preferred by Latin Americans. Thirdly, we must strengthen Latin American institutions in London. Principal among those is Canning house, the Latin American centre in London. Canning house will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year, and I hope that the Government will give thought to the ways in which they may support its proposal for a major conference then, in which some of my right hon. Friends could play a major role in drawing in the captains of British industry to consider opportunities for Britain in Latin America.

We can all see that Latin America is on its way again. There is wind in its sails, and I hope that this country will take a leading role in working with it.

11.50 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I shall start by quoting Lady Thatcher, although I do not often do that—"It's a funny old world." Here we all are again. The hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) has again been lucky in the draw, and we must congratulate him on his energy and diligence as well as on his luck. This year our annual Latin America debate is two weeks earlier in the month, and, thankfully, two hours——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): No.

Mr. Foulkes: I should have said that unfortunately, although it is two weeks earlier in the month, the debate is taking place two hours later in the day. I must get that right, as the Minister has corrected me.

We have much the same cast for the debate as we had last year, although the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), is no doubt pursuing the interests of this country in some far-off Eldorado while we welcome in his stead the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. I am pleased, too, that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) has sat through the whole debate, and shows a keen interest in Latin America.

However, this year we do not hear such delight at the outcome of the G7 as we heard last year about the London G7. The hon. Member for Wycombe praised the outcome last year, and talked about the great opportunity for the completion of the Uruguay round of the GATT talks. A year later we are in the same position as we were then, and the hon. Gentleman is not praising the Munich G7. I quite understand why.

Mr. Whitney: I am puzzled; I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not exulting in the fact that our high hopes of last year have not been realised. Generous as he is, I hope that he will use the opportunity, while dwelling on the present situation of the GATT round and the G7, to

[Mr. Whitney]

pay due tribute to the tremendous efforts of the Prime Minister in the past few days to persuade his colleagues in G7 to make progress on the Uruguay round of GATT.

Mr. Foulkes: I am certainly not exulting, and I shall come to a tribute to the Prime Minister soon, which will surprise the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends. I was showing that I had done the hon. Gentleman the courtesy of reading the speech that he made last year, and I noted that his tone and some of his remarks had changed this year. I shall come to a little bit of humility soon, which will also surprise Conservative Members.

There is also, rightly, a little less euphoria this year about the democratic revolution in Latin America. Unfortunately, the causes for euphoria are not as great as they were last year—I shall dwell at some length on that fact. I even detect some slight tempering of last year's claims by some Conservative neo-economists about the miracles that the market economy can deliver everywhere.

Now I come to the humility: one of my predictions last year—that we should be conducting the debate from different Dispatch Boxes this year—has also proved less than inspired. However, I assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that that pleasure has merely been postponed —although I shall not say for how long.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foulkes: I have only just started. Oh, all right.

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman forecast whether, if the occupant of the Chair on that occasion is willing, he will be replying to a debate on Latin America next year?

Mr. Foulkes: I have ambitions, although I shall not reveal them now. We have just started the elections to the shadow Cabinet, so this is not the time to talk about such matters.

In passing I should also welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who has sat through almost all the debate, and who has long shown a special interest in Latin America.

A debate about British relations with Latin America is even more important now that the conditions are right for those relations to be strengthened, with Britain leading the European Community, as the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said a few minutes ago. Prevailing democratic trends and the growing economies of much of Latin America provide an opportunity for closer links. While the Prime Minister's visit to Rio was welcome—even if its purpose was the Earth summit and not establishing closer relations with the region——

Mr. Jacques Arnold: My right hon. Friend visited Colombia as well.

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, and I welcome that. He was the first-ever British Prime Minister of any party to set foot on South American soil, and that indicates how little attention the British Government have paid in the past to Latin America. I am glad that is being corrected.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said in Mexico two months ago:

"The British Government have decided to make a deliberate and vigorous effort to restore the historical relationship with Latin America."

That serves to remind us that our trade with Latin America remains marginal. As other hon. Members said, only £1 billion of our exports go there.

I am sceptical about Government claims of increasing trade and co-operation with Latin America. The Opposition strongly believe that such links should be strengthened. I know that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with his special knowledge, is keen to see that done, and I hope that the Under-Secretary will confirm that he believes that there are tremendous opportunities for investment and trading co-operation with that region. I hope that he will confirm also that the region's stability, prosperity—with some qualifications, which I shall mention later—and developing democracy provide the opportunities described by Conservative Members.

In last year's debate, we all expressed optimism about the continuation of democracy in Latin America. In retrospect, perhaps we were a little complacent. The succeeding 12 months have underlined that the fight for democracy is a long and continuing struggle. The outlook for democracy in Latin America still gives cause for concern.

Just a short time ago, almost the whole continent was under democratic rule for the first time in its history. I do not share the view taken by the hon. Member for Gravesham. I believe that the picture has clouded. The backward steps of the attempted coups in Venezuela, Haiti, and Peru emphasise how fragile democracy remains in some parts of Latin American. I welcome the establishment recently of the British-Venezuelan Cultural Trust, founded by Marcel Curiel, a prominent Venezuelan business man who provided the initial funds. The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) and I have the privilege of being two of its founding trustees. We hope that it will help to establish cultural, educational, and other links between Britain and Venezuela. My earlier remarks emphasised the importance of doing so.

Recent events in Peru also sound ominous warnings for the survival of democracy on that continent. I make it clear to the hon. Member for Wycombe in particular that we hold no brief for Sendero Luminoso—Shining Path. My hon. Friends and I would feel concern at any parallel being drawn between the activities of Sendero Luminoso, which is a terrorist organisation, and the fight by the Sandinistas against a dictatorship in Nicaragua. I regret the unfortunate remark by the hon. Member for Wycombe.

As to Peru, now is the time for the rest of the world to demonstrate that the days of South American dictators are over. There can be no justification for the suspension of democracy in Peru. The whole international community must show that leaders such as Fujimori cannot seek to solve their country's problems—and Peru certainly has vast problems—by carrying out army-backed coups. That —as Fujimori has already found out—is the route to increased problems. There is no doubt that he greatly underestimated the scale of international condemnation of his actions.

A direct consequence of that external criticism was the alteration of the timetable for a return to democracy, as the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) rightly said. Elections for the constituent assembly are now to be held in November. However, the pressure from the international community must be maintained to ensure

that Fujimori, who has displayed a very strong authoritarian tendency, keeps his pledge to ensure real democracy in Peru.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): When terrorism becomes an extreme menace to the state and threatens the lives of democratically-elected representatives and ordinary civilians, the state must take drastic measures to preserve itself as we did within our own polity when, in 1972, we abolished a democratically-elected assembly in Northern Ireland. We would not have done that had the IRA campaign of terror not been in full swing. We still do not have proper representative local government in Northern Ireland after all these years. That is a direct consequence of terrorist action.

Mr. Foulkes: I do not want to consider Northern Ireland in detail. However, the hon. Gentleman knows that Northern Ireland is still subject to democratic Government from this very House. He is part of it. In his army-backed coup, Fujimori undermined democracy and dissolved the elected Parliament.

I hope that Conservative Members will agree that the pressure should be kept on. We believe that Peru's dependence on international financial assistance means that the international community can play a key role in restoring democracy. In particular, Britain, in its presidency of the Community for the next six months, must play a leading part in keeping the pressure on. All co-operation must be conditional on the swift return to democracy. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that the British Government, in their Community presidency role and other roles, will keep that pressure on.

In passing, perhaps we should issue a little warning to our friends in the United States who might be thinking of diverting from their traditional political loyalties. The experience in Latin America of moving away from traditional political parties has not been that wonderful in Peru and Brazil. They might be wrong to believe that their salvation lies in moving away from traditional political loyalties.

No one has considered Haiti in detail during the debate. However, by saying that there is democracy in the whole of Latin America, the implication was that Haiti has some kind of democratic system. The situation in Haiti is even less encouraging. Marc Bazin was named Prime Minister in June, supported by the military and, of course, by business. Since he became Prime Minister repression has greatly increased. He achieved only 14 per cent. of the votes in the last presidential election when Father Aristide received 67 per cent.

The prospect of democracy in Haiti is, once again, very distant. The Tontons Macoutes have returned and political assassinations are commonplace with at least 2,000 people having been killed since the coup took place. The British Government, acting with others, must do all that they can to maintain and increase the isolation of Haiti. Brian Mulroney, the Canadian Prime Minister, said recently that he, with President Bush and President Mitterrand, were discussing plans to speed the return of Father Aristide to his role as the duly democratically elected president.

What will the British Government do? Are they involved and, if not, why not?

Mr. Jacques Arnold: The hon. Gentleman has highlighted a problem: where does Latin America start and finish? Haiti is a francophone country and there is therefore some doubt as to whether it should be included with the other francophone countries of the Caribbean where it is located. If we are to include the islands of the Caribbean, and as Latin America is hispanic, as is Cuba, will the hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that communist Cuba is the only country in Latin America that does not have an elected president?

Mr. Foulkes: I do not want to cross swords with the hon. Gentleman about the definition. We would spend hours doing that, and we do not have hours. I want to give the Minister some time to reply. However, that is an interesting argument.

In relation to Cuba, I repeat what I said last year. It applies equally today. I said:

> "Let me express the hope . . . that the conditions in Cuba will soon allow a move towards pluralism. I strongly deplore the continuing confrontational attitude of the United States, which is hindering such a development."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1991; Vol. 195, c. 856.]

That remains equally true today and it certainly is our position in relation to Cuba.

Overall democracy will be put to a severe test in Latin America over the next year or so. In several countries, including Venezuela, Guatemala, Nicaragua and even Brazil, there has been talk of coups. We must do all that we can—Conservative Members agree with me—in aid and in trade co-operation to ensure that the age of democracy in Latin America does not become a short-lived, transient fluke but is a lasting tradition as it moves from one democratic Government to the other, whether of the right or the left.

I now refer briefly to some social problems. Although the economic revival of Latin America is certainly welcome, the view has been expressed—perhaps not tonight, but elsewhere and on previous occasions—that all the problems are being solved by the economic revival. Latin America is a continent with a vastly unequal distribution of income and wealth. The neo-liberal policies advocated by Conservative Members, including again by the hon. Member for Gravesham, of low expenditure, privatisation and free markets have resulted certainly in lower inflation, in higher exports and in money pouring into the region, but at what social cost? Some of the incoming investment is just speculative. The deep, grinding poverty remains. National economies are still imbalanced because state action is minimal in many parts, and gross national product has not gone past the levels that it reached in the 1970s.

Not only is it clear that market forces are not enough, but there is a real danger that the neo-liberal economic strategy that is now dominant will increase inequalities and widen social cleavages. That will create a much greater potential for disruption and division within the region and put fledgling, fragile democracies at risk.

In Brazil, the drastic austerity programme, for example, has resulted in 12 million unemployed, wages that have fallen by 20 per cent. over the past year, and a minimum wage that has been reduced by successive freezes to a pitifully small amount. Brazil, the largest and richest country in the continent, now has the world's worst income distribution—a huge gap between the very rich and grinding poverty of many people. It has homelessness on the increase, rapidly growing shanty towns, and a rapidly

[Mr. Foulkes]

rising infant mortality rate. That picture will not help to stabilise, protect and preserve the fragile democracies that we have been talking about.

The truth about Latin America is that the hidden price of neo-liberal macro-economic success has been the living standards which are no higher than those of more than a decade ago—high unemployment, widespread lack of education and appalling housing and urban slums. In 1960, of the 400-odd million people about whom the hon. Member for Gravesham spoke, 100 million were below the poverty line. Thirty years later, after 30 years of so-called progress, more than 200 million are below the poverty line.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Much of those 30 years was under military dictatorship, nationalised industry and state control. It is only in the past very few years that we have had free trade and liberal economics. At least we now have a chance of a breakthrough. The hon. Gentleman cannot say that 30 years of military dictatorship and nationalised industry are the fault of the current economic policy.

Mr. Foulkes: Unemployment, social divisions and divisions of wealth have increased in the past few years under the new liberal economic policies. As the hon. Gentleman knows, some of the dictators followed those policies, too.

While it is welcome that El Salvador's 12-year war is this year officially over, problems remain with the peace process. The fact that the fragile peace has held is as much a testament to war-weariness, after all the years of struggle and conflict, as anything else. However, I hope that the Minister will agree that it is to be deplored that while the Government of El Salvador have complied with the letter of the peace agreements, for example by disbanding the police units, they have not complied with the spirit. They have merely transferred the men and equipment to other units.

Despite the inevitable mutual distrust, the United Nations representatives in El Salvador have expressed some optimism that progress will continue to be made. But it is essential that the social and economic issues that caused the conflict in the first place are tackled, if the peace is to last. In that respect, reconstruction aid will be crucial. It is important that the American Government be encouraged to change military aid into aid for reconstruction. It is also important that Britain plays a role in providing much needed assistance. Even if the Minister cannot tell us anything tonight, I hope that he will undertake——

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I can.

Mr. Foulkes: Then I look forward to his saying it tonight.

Chile was mentioned by several Conservative Members. In some ways it is paradoxical that Chile provides one of the most encouraging models of the new Latin American democracy. Its Government take the most positive attitude of all Latin American countries to human rights. They are facing up to the unhappy legacies, instead of sweeping them under the carpet, as some other countries have tended to do. Chile has a compensation scheme for families of Pinochet's victims and is setting up a national organisation for reparation and reconciliation to seek a long-term answer to the problem of human rights. That is a follow-up to last year's Rettig report, which detailed more than 1,000 cases of army responsibility for killings and disappearances.

There is to be a case against 17 of the carabineros, including the commanding officer General Mendoza, for three murders, despite the amnesty granted by Pinochet for human rights abuses. That determination to face up to the past and seek justice is a notable example, which we hope that the rest of the region will follow.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Including Cuba.

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, the whole of the region. I hope that the Minister will support that.

It is also worth noting that President Aylwin's Government, who preside over a booming economy, remain popular and secure. The right was humiliated in the recent historical municipal elections—in Chile, if not in the United Kingdom. I am honest, as ever.

We see great opportunities for developing trade in the economies of Latin America. I see that the time is moving on. I do not want to cut the Minister short so I shall cut my remarks short. I see great opportunities, but it is important that Britain sees and seizes the opportunities. In spite of all the United States rhetoric of enterprise for the Americas, when it has come to matching that rhetoric with real dollars, it has often failed. I hope that we shall see our opportunity and seize it.

As in many other areas, the British Government seem to have run out of steam in their relations with Latin America. Great opportunities exist in Latin America for Britain and the European Community. Britain has an opportunity as President of the Community to lead the way. We should break away from our preoccupation with Maastricht rebellions, looking over the Government's shoulder, additionality and subsidiarity. As 1994 approaches, it will be 500 years since the landfall of Cristobal Colon—to bring a little culture into the occasion I have got the pronunciation correct. As we do not have the Minister of State but only the Under-Secretary of State, perhaps I had better say Christopher Columbus. We should also look beyond Europe, and our day-to-day preoccupations with the European Community, to the new world and Latin America to provide at least a significant part of our future trade and political co-operation.

12.14 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) on initiating the debate. He is the acknowledged leader of the Latin American group in the House of Commons. He mentioned that this is the fifth annual debate of this kind, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold). I have no doubt that, as long as my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe is a Member of the House, he will take every opportunity to ensure that Latin American affairs are properly debated at this time of the year.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), should have been replying to the debate, and I apologise on his behalf for his not being here. Among Foreign Office Ministers, he is the acknowledged expert on Latin America, as every hon. Member knows, but he is engaged on important European Community business

connected with the presidency. He would have had to cancel that appointment to be here tonight, and I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that that would have been the wrong decision.

As all hon. Members have recognised, Latin America has experienced dramatic political and economic change in recent years. Despite setbacks in one or two countries, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) among others, and despite the unreformed communist regime in Cuba, democratic government is now the norm in most of the region. Of course, there is a little less euphoria now than there was 12 months ago. Earlier, I read the debate of 12 months ago, and I can judge that as well. However, there is a little less euphoria elsewhere in the world—for example, about eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): And Britain.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman makes his comment from a sedentary position.

In Latin America, we are observing free market economic policies, aimed at steady growth. The control of inflation and the encouragement of investment and competition have also been adopted by most of the countries in the region. Regional integration is being pursued, for example, through the establishment last year by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay of Mercosur —a new southern-cone free trade area. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham mentioned, Mexico is negotiating a north American free trade area with the United States and Canada.

All those developments point to a transformation of the prospects for Latin America, by comparison with the gloomier prognosis of the 1980s. Together they have rightly been dubbed "the quiet revolution" by British press commentators. British business, investors and financial markets are all taking notice. We are already one of the largest foreign investors in the region, and are keen to promote more exports.

The British Government are responding energetically to the changes, to strengthen already good relations with Latin America. We have resident United Kingdom-based diplomatic representatives in every continental Latin American country. We are doubling our bilateral development aid during the next few years, albeit from a modest base, and, of the European Community aid programmes to the region of about 200 million ecu per year, we contribute about 20 per cent.

We are strengthening political links. In June, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister became the first holder of his office in history to visit South America, when he made his successful visits to Colombia for talks with President Gaviria and his Ministers, and to Rio, in Brazil, to represent the United Kingdom at the Earth summit. Of course, my right hon. Friend also had talks with President Collor.

In May, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Mexico, and we look forward to welcoming President Salinas as a guest of the British Government on his visit to London later this month. Last year, the then Secretary of State for Education also visited Mexico, and the then Secretary of State visited Venezuela to launch the Projecto Venezuela to encourage British exports to that valuable market.

We have just started our presidency of the European Community, and during that time we shall do what we can to strengthen the EC's already good relations with Latin America. Those relations are based mainly on the EC dialogues with the Rio group and Central American countries. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State represented the United Kingdom at the annual meetings between the EC and the Central American Ministers in Lisbon in February and Rio group Ministers in Santiago in May. During our presidency, we shall build on those contacts so that the EC can best make its contribution to encouraging development and regional integration in Latin America, the consolidation of democracy and the observance of human rights.

I should like to make some lengthy remarks on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe, who launched this interesting debate. He mentioned Colombia, with which we enjoy excellent bilateral relations. Inevitably, the successful visit by the Prime Minister in June has enhanced our relationship. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley also said that that historic visit was a gesture to remedy the less than dynamic interest in South America that our country had shown for many years, especially in view of our historic relations with that part of the world.

In his talks with President Gavira and senior Colombian Ministers, the Prime Minister agreed that we will continue our co-operation in the important matter of drugs, and that both countries would work towards greater bilateral trade and investment. It was agreed that that would include the proposed signing of an investment promotion and protection agreement. My right hon. Friend also invited the Colombian Minister for Foreign Trade to visit the United Kingdom in the autumn.

Hon. Members will know that, in 1991, BP made a great oil discovery at Cusiana, which was the culmination of nearly five years of exploration work. It represents BP's largest find in the world for more than 20 years. A number of United Kingdom companies have expressed interest in the opportunities presented by that significant discovery.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the ancien regime of Latin America in Cuba and Nicaragua, as it once was. Castro's regime is the best example of the terrible impoverishment that results from bad economic policy. That country is impoverished notwithstanding the enormous subsidy that it received from the Soviet Union for many years. Now that that subsidy has come to an end, its poverty has got even worse. There is no willingness to undertake political reforms, despite recent attempts to attract investment. It is increasingly an anachronism in a region where democracy, with all its difficulties about which we have heard, is none the less almost universal. The persecution of dissidents in Cuba is unacceptable.

My hon. Friend condemned the terrorist campaign of the Sendero Luminoso in Peru, as did the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley.

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister has painted a very one-sided picture of Cuba, which has made substantial advances in health and education and has one of the best literacy rates and health services in Latin America. It is also under great pressure from the economic embargo from the United States. I am not saying that everything in Cuba is wonderful, but there must be a balance in the way that one looks at it, and that balance is not coming from the Foreign Office or from the Minister.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: If a country receives billions of dollars-worth of subsidies from the Soviet Union over many years, it must have something to show for it, and Cuba set up schemes for education and health care. However, it destroyed human rights and failed to develop a market economy or any way to sustain prosperity for its people. It is a country with enormous potential, but it has been ruined since the Castro revolution.

All hon. Members who have spoken mentioned Peru. I recognise that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley unreservedly condemned the dreadful campaign of Sendero Luminoso. We also condemn the indiscriminate violence in that brutal campaign and the dreadful violence of the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amarú terrorists in their efforts to destabilise Peru. The terrorists clearly intend to exploit the situation for their own ends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham emphasised the enormous importance of the trade opportunities available to Britain in Latin America. He drew attention to the great importance of the Uruguay round and the GATT negotiations. In that, I heartily concur with him. It was right to point out to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley the tremendous efforts of the Prime Minister last week in Munich to press this point on our European and other G7 colleagues.

Mr. Foulkes: It was a total failure.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It may have been a failure, but he made a valiant attempt, and the failure was not his fault.

It is all too easy for forget, and many people do not know, that Latin America accounts for 9 per cent. of the world gross domestic product. Its total GDP is over $1,000 billion, more than the combined GDP of Africa, excluding South Africa, the Indian subcontinent and south-east Asia. Brazil is the eighth largest, and Mexico the 16th largest, economy in the world. The continent is rich in natural resources, with one third of the world's copper and bauxite, 20 per cent. of iron ore, plus vast energy reserves of coal, oil gas and hydro-electric potential. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe was right to underline this.

Perhaps I may correct the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley. I think that he said that our trade with Latin America amounted to only 1 per cent. of our——

Mr. Foulkes: No, £1 billion.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: That is right. It was £1·2 billion in 1991, accounting for 2 per cent. of our exports. It is still a small market for us, and it must be improved, but in several markets the United Kingdom is the second largest foreign investor and has been so for a long time. British companies are expanding and making new investments.

I shall now deal with the constitutional position in Peru. On 8 April, together with our European Community partners, we expressed deep concern at President Fujimori's suspension of the constitution rule and reports of human rights violations. Meanwhile, we have suspended the balance of payments assistance promised to President Fujimori during his visit to the United Kingdom.

We can all agree with the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley that the day of the dictators must be over—that is absolutely right. Naturally, international reactions to events on 5 April were universally critical. Peru's friends in the wider world should work for the earliest possible restoration of Peruvian democracy, as we are doing. It is also important to encourage the efforts of the Organisation of American States in that sphere.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham said that Peru has many problems. The election of the constituent assembly is fundamental to the settlement of Peru's constitutional crisis. It is unfortunate that the elections planned for 18 October have been postponed until 22 November. We believe that there are valid reasons for that. The delay was for practical reasons. It is essential that the elections should be properly organised. However, we will continue to monitor progress, as it is most important that the elections should now proceed without further delay if the Peruvian Government's good faith is not to be challenged.

In developing his thesis about the fragility of democracy in Latin America, the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley referred to Haiti, which was correctly described as French America. With our European Community partners, we support the efforts of the Organisation of American States to work for the return of President Aristide on the basis of the Washington accords.

The hon. Gentleman said that Mr. Mark Bazin was chosen as Prime Minister of the consensus Government, provided for in the tripartite agreement between the illegal regime, the Parliament and the army. He was right to say that the Bazin Cabinet does not represent a true consensus in Haiti. It excludes the pro-Aristide FNCD and the MRN party of Mr. Theodore. It is not clear that Mr. Bazin has the will or the capacity to negotiate a settlement, even were President Aristide to agree to negotiations. We shall press that during our presidency of the European Community.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley also mentioned El Salvador. We are extremely pleased at the progress on the peace process in El Salvador. Credit must be given to the leaders of both Government and FMLN for the fact that they have overcome the obstacles in the implementation of the 16 January agreement. The United Nations, particularly ONUSAL, played a critical role in keeping the two sides talking. There is now a good chance of implementation being completed by the 31 October deadline.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned aid, and asked me to comment on aid for El Salvador. The European Community has pledged 50 million ecu to the reconstruction plan, of which the United Kingdom contributes 20 per cent. I am glad to report that the first group of projects has been approved, including the establishment of a land bank to help the ex-combatants to purchase land. I am also glad that the reconstruction plan recognises the importance of the non-governmental organisations' efforts, which the British Government have long supported.

The hon. Gentleman also cited Chile as a paradoxical example—because of its past, sad history—of a country that has emerged as a modern democracy. Our bilateral relations with Chile have grown in warmth and substance since its smooth and peaceful return to democratic rule in 1989. President Aylwin made a successful visit to Britain in April last year as the guest of the Government. Our contacts with his Government are good and frequent at senior and working level. Chile is a valuable trading

partner. Its liberal market economy is an example to its neighbours and it provides excellent opportunities for British investment. I am glad that more companies are discovering what the Chilean market has to offer.

My hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe and for Gravesham spoke about their proposal for a Latin America conference next year and paid tribute to Canning house, which next year celebrates its 50th anniversary. I am happy to agree with my hon. Friends that Canning house plays a most valuable role in United Kingdom-Latin American relations. I am glad to confirm to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will continue its financial contribution of £30,000 in 1992-93. My hon. Friends are discussing with the Secretary of State the imaginative proposal for a Latin American conference in this country next year. Those discussions will continue, and my right hon. Friend will carefully consider the proposal.

I am grateful for this opportunity to review Britain's relations with Latin America. The changes in the region represent an irreversible commitment to progress and reform. Undoubtedly, there will be setbacks, but the general trend is set, and the Government will do what they can to reinforce it. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley said that the conditions were ripe for an improvement in relations. They are, and there will be an improvement. He also said that some of our relationships had run out of steam. That is a little inconsistent with his averment of an improvement in relations, which will certainly come about.

The future will provide many more opportunities to strengthen our relations in economics, culture, science and education. We shall certainly work to that end.

European Fighter Aircraft

12.37 am

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): This is another opportunity to discuss a matter that is vital to our industry, to thousands of our workers, and to the future strategic requirements of the British armed forces. We are discussing the provision of the best possible equipment at the best possible cost to the world's best airmen. Therefore, it is fitting to place on record my condolences and those of the whole House to the family of Flight Lieutenant James Henderson who was tragically killed yesterday evening on a training flight in a Buccaneer jet. When I last checked the news agency tapes, his navigator was still missing. I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I say that our thoughts are with the families of both airmen.

In terms of the armed forces in general, the past two years have not been good for the Government. They managed to lose the confidence of many of their Back Benchers over "Options for Change", especially over regimental changes. They found themselves in conflict with the Select Committee on Defence, dominated by Conservative Back Benchers, over the way that the changes were carried out. As I checked the tapes tonight, I saw that in another place Lord Chalfont has criticised the Government's defence policy as being

"trapped in a time warp and increasingly out of touch with international realities."

The Minister will be pleased to know we support him this evening, or at least his position on the European fighter aircraft. I say his position because, clearly, it is not necessarily that of the Government as a whole if we are to believe the press reports to which I shall refer later. In all humility, I hope that the support that he has received and will continue to receive from my party for the Ministry of Defence's declared position will be of not insignificant, although not earth-shattering, use to him as he continues the labyrinthine discussions with his ministerial colleagues.

Tonight's debate provides us with a welcome opportunity to discuss more fully the implications of the decision, taken by the German Government some days ago, not to proceed with the production phase of the European fighter aircraft programme. It is especially important that we have this opportunity as, in the past few weeks, there has been a disturbingly large amount of ill-informed comment on the subject not only in some sections of the press but in some sections of the Government.

I hope that it will be useful if I make it plain for those who have commented in the press on the Opposition's position that it does not stem from a knee-jerk reaction which is somehow required of us because of past defence mistakes. While I have the highest regard for the psycho-analytical powers of some commentators in the press, they would be better served studying the objective analysis of future military needs than delving into the supposed psycho-analytical processes of the collective Labour party and its need to prove itself more macho than the Conservatives. I assure the House that that is not the reason we support the continuation of EFA.

Nor do we believe that the continuation of the EFA is only a matter of jobs or of industry. Again, that is a supposition made by people who are usually more sympathetic to my party but who, for some reason, believe

[Dr. John Reid]

that we could not possibly defend the aircraft because in their analysis—which I believe to be mistaken—of the current military situation, it is no longer required. We do not believe that.

There are two essential points that must be grasped before the relative merits of the project are discussed. First, if the Gulf war taught us nothing else, it taught us that the provision of modern, state-of-the-art air power is an essential ingredient in any successful military operation. It may not be a sufficient condition, but it is increasingly becoming a necessary condition. Therefore, allied air supremacy of itself could not have ended the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, but it ensured the rapid success of the ground operation with the minimum number of casualties in the shortest possible period.

Secondly, if the United Kingdom is to retain an effective air power capability into the next century, we shall need to undertake a replacement programme for many of our existing aircraft. Anyone who examines the issues objectively must come to that conclusion unless one believes that we no longer need an air force. The RAF's Phantoms and Jaguars, in their respective air defence and offensive support roles, are becoming technically obsolete and will in any case be uneconomic or unsafe to operate by the turn of the century. According to the Select Committee on Defence, our other air defence fighter, the Tornado F3, will also have reached the end of its useful service life by about the year 2005.

As our equipment is approaching obsolescence, we see the development and proliferation—the latter perhaps being the most important—of a new generation of Soviet-made, latterly Russian-made, aircraft with superior avionics, and greater combat effectiveness. The MiG29 is the most frequently mentioned of those aircraft and, although it entered service with the Soviet air force in 1983, it remains a highly potent threat. This should be of interest to those who think that the dissolution of the Soviet Union necessarily means the wholesale dissolution of the hardware which it produced. The countries currently in possession of MiG29s include several with a proven track record of authoritarianism at best and external aggression at worst—I refer to Iraq, Iran, North Korea and Syria.

Although Iraq, for reasons best known to itself and perhaps to some of our airmen, chose not to deploy MiG29s during the Gulf war, it would be naive to assume that they do not pose a considerable threat, or could not be deployed and employed by Iraq, Iran, North Korea or Syria, among others, in future. With the extremely harsh economic conditions being experienced in the former Soviet republics, we must expect—despite our hopes—that these aircraft will become available to other unsavoury clients along with even more sophisticated designs, such as the Su27 and the MiG33.

Those who have argued that the EFA was designed to meet a threat that no longer exists have missed a vital point. The Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact no longer exist but their hardware has not evaporated into thin air. It is being acquired increasingly by regimes whose intentions remain suspect to say the least. We would be failing in our duty if we did not take account of that in future provision for our airmen and airwomen.

The case for a new aircraft that is capable of carrying out both air defence and offensive support missions is undeniable. It is incumbent on those who argue against the EFA, including those in the Government—there are those in the Treasury who have been muttering behind their collective hands—to say which other options would fulfil the requirement at a lower cost to the public purse or with a better cost-capability. I issue the challenge because it is perhaps easier for me to do so than the Minister, although I know that the Treasury will have noted his long-term commitment to open government. Against that background I have no doubt that the Treasury will be prepared to come out into the open to tell us which option it would prefer if the EFA were not to proceed.

Every authoritative survey has arrived at the same conclusion: each of the available options to the EFA is either less capable or more expensive. Some of the options are both less capable and more expensive. Of the American options, the F15s and F16s are both designs of the 1970s and significantly less capable than the aircraft that the EFA is intended to counter. Similarly, the F18 is regarded as a less capable aircraft. It may even have a higher unit cost than the EFA. The remaining American option, the F22, will not be ready for three or four years after the EFA. It is not designed as a multi-role aircraft and it is expected to cost about 60 per cent. more than the EFA. The F22 is certainly the most capable fighter currently under development—we could have disputes about whether the marginal increase in capability is compatible with the supposed 60 per cent. extra cost—and it is unlikely that the United States Government would allow it to be sold abroad for many years. If they did, it is at least questionable, and perhaps highly suspect, whether they would allow the full array of avionics that accompanies the aircraft to be part of the agreement.

Of the European options, the French Rafale is the most often cited. The French pulled out of the EFA project in 1985 because their requirements for a future fighter differed from ours. The Rafale has therefore been developed primarily as a replacement for the Jaguar in an offensive support role, whereas our priority—mainly but not exclusively—is for an agile air-defence fighter. The Rafale is judged to be a less effective fighter and it is expected to be more expensive than the EFA.

As I watched some of the interviews that took place last week, especially of Conservative Back-Bench Members, I could not help being suspicious that at least some of their opposition to the EFA was because it was a European collaborative project. It seemed that it was becoming deeply embroiled in the Eurosceptic or anti-European section of Tory Back-Bench Members. I hope that I was wrong. I hope that a judgment was being made purely on the basis of future military need, cost and capability. It seemed, however, that some of the comments were inspired by a deep suspicion of anything that smacked of co-operation between European nations.

As I said, of the European options the French Rafale has been most often cited, and I have tried to explain why that would not fit the bill for us. Another favourite solution of the EFA sceptics is that we should buy MiG29s and Su27s from Russia because they are the aircraft that we expect to counter. The flaws in that argument are manifold, but there is one that I put above the rest. It is the duty of the Government and of the House to give our airmen equipment that is better than that of our potential enemies and will offer them more than a 50-50 chance of survival in combat. If, within cost-capability limits, we can produce a fighter that will, by objective standards and

judgments, give an 80-20 chance against MiGs, we would be lacking in our duty to our airmen if we produced one with only a 50-50 chance.

Secondly, while theoretically the purchase of Russian aircraft would undoubtedly be cheaper initially, it may turn out to be a false economy in the longer run. It is now widely recognised that the airframe life of a MiG29 is estimated to be as little as one third of the airframe life of an EFA. It is also said that the MiG29 is much more expensive to maintain and purchasing countries have already experienced significant problems obtaining spare parts. There appears to be no doubt that long-term servicing support for MiG29s—or, indeed, any other MiG—would be highly suspect.

Surely the most absurd idea that we have heard over the past two or three weeks is that we should begin to develop from scratch what has become known as a lighter, cheaper aircraft. Given that the whole point of the exercise would be to save money, and given that the £5 billion spent so far on developing EFA would be wasted, the argument cannot stand up under the weight of its own contradictions. Not only would we end up with a less capable aircraft, which would probably cost us more, but it would not be ready for service until many years after the withdrawal of those that it is supposed to replace. Whichever way we look at it, we are driven to the same conclusion—the EFA is the best option available. Surveys show that it is second only to the F22 in fleet and combat effectiveness, and in cost-effectiveness it has a clear lead over the F22.

Those who have argued for abandonment of the EFA have palpably failed to make a credible case for any alternative programme. As I said earlier, the only sustainable argument that they could make is that we do not really need an air force. If they maintain that we do, the obligation is upon them—commentators, the Treasury, Back Benchers, political analysts and military strategists—to tell us how we could possibly achieve an equally effective fighter at a lesser cost with guaranteed servicing, and which would meet the requirement of the Royal Air Force. They have failed to make any credible case on any of those points for any alternative programme.

Even if we could achieve the savings sometimes imagined—and they are imagined—they would be dwarfed in public expenditure terms by the devastating effect that they would have on the British economy. I have tried to make plain our view that we base that not purely on either jobs or industry, but also on military and defence requirements. It would be wrong to make the case for the EFA purely or even primarily on the basis of its effect on employment. We should not fall into a trap of seeing defence procurement as some sort of grand job creation scheme. I hope that I have made clear the overwhelming strategic case for the continuation of the EFA programme.

However, it would be equally wrong of us wholly to exclude economic considerations from the equation, especially as the case against the EFA is supposed to be financial—at least in the arguments of many of those who oppose it. There is not a British-made alternative to the EFA. Any foreign import, even one that involves some workshare arrangement, would lead to the loss of tens of thousands of mainly skilled jobs. In what possible sense would that lead to budgetary savings for the Treasury or the Government?

We welcome recent orders won for the airbus by British industry but, notwithstanding that, the loss of the EFA would be a major disaster for our aerospace industry. We are talking not only about the loss of thousands of jobs, but about the loss of an entire industry; an industry of vital strategic importance to Britain. If the EFA programme is abandoned and we are forced to import the next generation of fighters from abroad, we risk destroying our aerospace industry altogether, civil as well as military, because the two are inextricably interlinked. To put ourselves at the mercy of foreign suppliers for all time and pay for the privilege would serve neither our security nor our economic interests.

There may be a case for adjustment of the original numbers of EFAs ordered, and there may even be a dispute between the Government and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen when we come to discuss those numbers—it is widely recognised that there may well be some adjustment to those numbers because the original calculations were made in about 1986 and the world has moved on—and while I would urge the Minister to continue in his efforts to keep the costs of the EFA down, because, obviously, every time we can reduce the cost, the cost capability factor is far more beneficial from everyone's point of view, it remains the Opposition's view that the continuation of the programme is vital for our defence needs and represents the most economical option available.

If any other option met our defence needs and requirements, saved those numbers of jobs and advanced an industry which is not only strategic but at the forefront of technology, the Opposition, like anyone else, would be prepared to accept it. Thus far, that alternative has not been put forward by anyone inside or outside the House, and until we see it we shall continue to support the Ministry of Defence and trust that we shall be able to ensure that the EFA will be produced and eventually supplied to the Royal Air Force.

12.56 am

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): We all owe a debt of gratitude to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) for introducing this important debate. He has, as is his wont, done much research and produced thoughtful and cogent arguments in favour of pursuing the European fighter aircraft programme to a successful conclusion whereby it is purchased by Her Majesty's Government to enter service with the Royal Air Force, where I am sure that it will fulfil an invaluable and essential function.

It is a comment on our somewhat arcane parliamentary practices that a debate on the single most important military procurement issue of our time should take place in the middle of the night by virtue of an initiative of this kind under the Consolidated Fund Bill. It would have been better if we had been able to have the two-day defence debate before the summer recess. Over the years, I have always argued that the White Paper should be published as near to the spring as possible. In that way we could have a debate before we all disappeared for the recess and if there were a major issue hanging over us, as is the case now with the future of EFA, we could dispose of it in a proper manner and in the right time scale.

I do not wish to be over-critical because, by our presence in the long watches of the night, we have shown that we seek not so much to be in our beds but to be vigilant and evidently concerned for the future defence of our country and our country's defence industrial base.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

That said, I must wholeheartedly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State's robust reply to the private notice question on Tuesday, following the visit to the United Kingdom of the Defence Minister of the Federal German Republic, Herr Volker Rühe. I thought that my right hon. and learned Friend's replies were admirable. They showed an unequivocal personal commitment—as well as an unequivocal commitment on the part of the Ministry—to this important programme. They also showed a clear determination to take on all comers, from the Treasury or from other quarters, who might make his life difficult over the future of the European fighter aircraft, the Panther, or Panthera, as I prefer to call it.

The German Government's decision to withdraw from the production of the project once the development phase has been completed poses a challenge to us, but we may well obtain commensurate benefits. I hope that the production process will be rationalised. The proliferation of assembly lines and flight test centres never made much sense; nor did the strong desire—which was put into effect—to re-invent the management wheel by having a Eurofighter organisation in addition to the Panavia one. Eurofighter could have grown organically from Panavia, as the Airbus consortium was able to produce a whole family of Airbus aeroplanes. The creation of a NATO European Fighter Management Agency, NEFMA, when there was already a NATO Aircraft Management Agency, NAMA, to manage Tornado also struck me as unnecessary.

Those are little quibbles relating to the past, however. We must now show that there is a requirement which really needs to be met. There is a strong temptation to be project-led—to be so keen to replace particular aeroplanes, in this case the Phantom, the Jaguar and the Tornado F3, that we lose strategic perspective and may forget what we are actually seeking to do. We are seeking to procure for the United Kingdom—and, we hope, for our Italian and Spanish friends, and the Germans if they come to their senses—the most flexible instrument to project military power, not only within the NATO theatre but, if need be, outside it, to deter aggression and to secure our commercial and strategic interests and our security.

In recent years, we have seen—from Korea through the Arab-Israeli wars, through the Falklands conflict to the Gulf campaign—that air power is critical to the security of the west and for the preservation of our values and our way of life. Consciously to forgo the most effective instrument available to us for the pursuit of such a strategy would indeed be perverse.

I go so far as to say that if the worst comes to the worst we ought to be prepared as a nation to build EFA alone. I hope that our Ministers will, by means of good diplomacy and by maintaining effective collaboration, make certain that the Italians and the Spanish stay in the programme. If not, however, I believe that the industrial and military stakes are so high that we ought ultimately to be prepared to go it alone. In the last analysis, there is no task more crucial than preserving the peace and defending the integrity of these islands. We discovered that just over 50 years ago, at the time of the battle of Britain, and the lessons learnt then are just as real today.

In the 1920s and 1930s, there were those who thought that we could afford to disarm. They were disabused of the idea in a most painful way—it was a close-run thing.

As the gestation time of modern combat aircraft is so long, it behoves us to make the appropriate dispositions now, and not to throw away the advantage that we have gained from all the time, effort and investment already put into the development phase. Nor do I believe that we should allow the Swedes and the French a virtual monopoly in western Europe of the construction capability for high performance military aircraft. We should stay in the business ourselves.

There may have to be commensurate savings in the defence budget, because at a time of negative growth it will not be easy for the Treasury to provide additional funds. If so, we ought to look to where the problem lies—to Germany itself. If the German Defence Minister is correct, then the threat to his country in central Europe is greatly diminished by the end of the cold war, the break-up and dissolution of the Warsaw pact, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union into its constituent republics, many of which now have values similar to our own. If that changes the security situation in central Europe so dramatically, especially if the Russians withdraw from eastern Germany and Poland on schedule—and ultimately, one earnestly hopes, from the Baltic states, too—any savings necessary should be made in the forces we intend to maintain in Germany. Those forces are relatively inflexible and costly in foreign exchange, whereas a combat aircraft is infinitely flexible. It is essential for the defence of these islands and it can be projected rapidly around the globe to wherever it is required. The same cannot be said of tanks by the banks of the Rhine.

I repeat that we owe the hon. Member for Motherwell, North a debt of gratitude, and that we appreciate the firm and rational stance of the Government to date. I shall not repeat the arguments so well expressed by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North, but I will express my personal commitment to the success of the programme. I want to see the Panther flying in Royal Air Force colours and, it is to be hoped, in Italian and Spanish colours—perhaps even in German colours, too. I believe that it will sell in substantial numbers around the globe, because there is no other aeroplane in its class.

1.7 am

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words in the debate, and I reiterate the congratulations offered by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) on securing the debate and allowing us to discuss this important topic, even at this late hour. I am grateful that the project has cross-party support. Its chances of going ahead are greater as a result of that support.

Over the decades aircraft projects have always had a drama and excitement about them, and not a little political controversy, too. I remember most poignantly from the past the TSR2 project. I joined the Air Force four months before the aircraft was cancelled—I, together with a number of others, had been recruited specifically to fly it. I saw it fly once, then it was cancelled by the incoming Labour Government.

I recently read Lord Jenkins's autobiography, and until then I had not appreciated how close the decision was on

whether to cancel TSR2 or Concorde. One reason that the former course was chosen was that the TSR2 was a national project and Concorde a collaborative project. The latter may, by their very nature, be difficult to devise initially, but once the partners have been assembled, the contract makes it difficult for them to pull out. That is how it should be. Aircraft contracts span decades, whereas Governments and individual politicians have much shorter lives.

As to the EFA, we are currently tightly tied—as are the three other nations—to its development phase. Its cost is about £7 billion, split between the four partners dependent upon the number of aircraft that they said at the beginning that they wanted to purchase. Thirty three per cent. of that cost will be borne by ourselves, the same percentage by the Germans, 21 per cent. by the Italians and the remainder by the Spanish.

Many billions of pounds have already been spent by the German Government on developing the EFA. They and the new German Defence Minister, Herr Volker Rühe, make it clear that Germany intends to remain in the programme. Herr Rühe pointed that out to me on Monday, when he confirmed that the first prototype will take off from a German airfield at the beginning of next year.

Given that the Germans will remain in the programme —which lasts until 1998—they will spend more than £2 billion developing an aircraft that they accept they will not put into production. It is worth bearing in mind that they do not have to decide until midway through next year—when all four partners will determine whether to go ahead with the EFA's production, dependent on the progress of the development programme and, more specifically, how the aircraft flies.

I believe that most right hon. Members agree that that picture is very different from the one painted by the newspapers over the past two weeks. If one believed the leader writers, even in the better newspapers, one would think that Germany had totally withdrawn from the project. Nothing could be further from the truth. At the very time that those words were being printed, the Bundestag had voted £300 million in this coming year's federal budget for the EFA's further development.

In analysing why Herr Rühe said that Germany would not produce the aircraft, it is worth considering the original requirement. I will not reiterate the points made by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North but I will add to them. Despite the German Defence Minister's comments, I believe that the requirement itself is more relevant today than in 1985, and not, as the Germans would have us believe, the other way round.

Built into the EFA requirement was not only the need to move out of area but sufficient range to deal with threats —particularly in Africa and the middle east. That was prompted not only by us but by the Italians and Spaniards, who said that their countries were threatened just as much from the south as from the east. If nothing else, that demonstrates the problem of analysing the German's present position.

The Germans maintain that, because the threat has changed, there is no longer a need for such a large, long-range aircraft. However, one could argue that, as a result of the changing threat, there is a greater need for such an aircraft.

If the threat is less than before, we must bear in mind that the capacity—the aircraft opposing NATO which EFA was designed to deter—has not changed. As the hon. Member for Motherwell, North said, the MiG27s, MiG29s, Su27s and MiG33s are increasingly being dispersed around the rim of the Mediterranean. That is a potent potential threat.

If the German Government honestly believe that they can meet that threat, which they will have to in the NATO context, with a smaller, lighter and inferior aircraft, they have got their calculations totally wrong. When the German Defence Minister made that point, he also said that the rest of the German armed forces—apart from the Luftwaffe—would have to become more mobile and more able to move to the peripheries of NATO and, provided that they changed their constitution, even beyond the edge of NATO.

I believe that there is a big conflict between what the German Defence Minister said and the reality of the next five or 10 years. A much more rational reason for the German decision is that it is based on short-term politics and, more specifically, the popularity of the Christian Democratic Union and, in financial terms, the problems that it will have with the budget over the next two or three years in respect of reunification. I believe that the smaller, lighter aircraft is simply a paper exercise to keep the German aerospace industry quiet.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North made a very good point about the alternatives. Looking at the other options and off-the-shelf purchases—the only option for the Germans if they do not want the EFA—I agree with the hon. Member. If we analyse the alternatives aircraft by aircraft, none of them comes up to the EFA's specifications. The exception is the F22, but that is very expensive. The newspapers failed to point out that the F22 is not actually for sale. It contains much technology that the Americans would not like any nation—and certainly not the Germans and the others—to take on board just yet. The F22 is not an alternative to the EFA.

I want now to consider some of the consequences of the German withdrawal from the production phase of the project. The programme is going to be disrupted. A four-nation programme, with all the involved management referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood, is bound to be disrupted if 33 per cent. of the project is removed. That will cause problems, particularly in respect of the teams that have been brought together for specific purposes, for example, in respect of the fly-by-wire system and the compressor for the engine, both of which are the responsibility of the German contingent.

However, savings can be made by reducing the tooling up of a reduced number of production lines. A larger number of contracts can be awarded based on cost rather than work-share arrangements. There should be considerable savings in respect of the project's cost that fully outweigh the smaller production which will increase costs. The two should balance out: the smaller production line against the cost reductions, because fewer units will be needed.

There is another point: if we decided that one of the member states had to leave the project in order to keep the costs down, we would choose the Germans because their production costs are between 20 and 25 per cent. higher than ours and those of the Italians.

We can produce the aircraft as cheaply or nearly as cheaply without the Germans as we can with them. Equally, the reasons for the Germans withdrawing do not

[Mr. Keith Mans]

relate to the other two countries that remain with us in the project. They do not have the same problems with budgets and reunifications. They also stated in their original specifications that they need an aircraft with a longer range that can operate over the Mediterranean. There is no reason at the moment to suggest that either of the other two countries would, in any foreseeable circumstances, want to withdraw from the project.

What should we do now? We should do very little. We are in the development programme. No decisions have to be made about the production programme until midway through next year. All that we have to do is sit tight. By all means, we should listen to any suggestions from Germany about the new lighter, inferior fighter, but I strongly recommend my hon. Friend the Minister to ask for further and better particulars of that aircraft, just to see what it actually amounts to. Bearing in mind the stringent economic requirements put on it by the German Defence Minister, that it will cost the same as the EFA and, taking into account the remaining development funds available in the programme, we will end up with a brand new Hawk 200 as a result of that exercise. We are still developing the EFA, the Germans are still paying for it, and, half way through next year it will become only too clear that the production of the EFA is the most cost-effective solution for the Royal Air Force and the other two air forces remaining in the project.

Like the hon. Member for Motherwell, North, I have not based my argument on employment or technology reasons. Those matters are important in my area of Lancashire, where jobs and technology are at stake. British Aerospace is the high-tech part of Lancashire. Without it, we would be in a sorry state. The project represents the right aircraft for the three air forces. I end on a personal note. I have mentioned factories around Preston. I have flown every aircraft that those factories have produced and that the Air Force has bought since the war—the Canberra, the Lightning, the Jaguar and the Tornado. I have no doubt that, when British Aerospace gets around to producing a two-seater, I shall be able to have a trip in that as well.

1.22 am

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Like my hon. Friends, I congratulate the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) on initiating the debate and on his well-informed and well-researched speech. We have heard three excellent speeches, and I do not want to duplicate the points that have already been made. I should like, first, to dig a little deeper into the German question—what exactly is the German stance on the EFA and what implications does it have? Secondly, I shall refer briefly to the case for the EFA and, thirdly, discuss where we go from here in a slightly wider context.

In several speeches on defence procurement, I have tried to stress that the spirit of a defence contract is as important as the letter. For example, even with an ordinary national contract, it is important in respect of intellectual property rights that, if a certain company has developed a good idea, even if the idea is the property of the Ministry of Defence, it is almost always right to let the company that has come up with it go as far as the production phase, because it will do it best. That means that there is an added incentive for excellence in the industry. We saw the best form of spirit coming out of our defence contractors in the Falklands war and the Gulf conflict, with the extra mile and the extra mile beyond the extra mile to which they were willing to go in supporting British armed forces.

The central problem with the EFA project is the fact that the Germans have so manifestly breached the spirit that lies behind the contract, and breached it in a fashion that we should find profoundly worrying in ways that go well beyond the contract.

In order to see the size of the breach, we have to look, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) has just done, at the words of Chancellor Kohl and Herr Volker Rühe and their approach to the project. They have continuously reminded us of the disjunction and the great change in Europe as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. They and, indeed, the press have made many references to the terrifically changed climate in Germany. There is overwhelming opposition among the German people and in their Parliament to the project.

However, no serious effort has been made to address the military position. If the EFA is not appropriate, what is appropriate? I have heard nothing from any German source about what possible threat any aircraft that could be purchased for the Luftwaffe, even only the Hawk 200, would be supposed to face. We certainly have not heard any discussion of what aeroplanes such an aircraft could expect to face. We now hear that the Germans are seeking a new format for which there is no intellectual basis whatever.

The problem for Britain is that our most important European ally appears to have closed its eyes completely. The Germans are fulfilling the letter of the contract. They are paying a lot of money to complete the development. But we have to realise that by withdrawing from the production phase because of sheer emotion—to put it bluntly, sheer political pressure—without making any effort to examine the military rationale for any subsequent course of action, the Germans have changed. That is important.

Germany has been overwhelmingly the most important continental European prop for NATO in the past. It is also the paymaster of the EC. In the past generation, while the French have been in "internal exile" within NATO—nominally a member but outside the command—Britain and America have looked to Germany as the main continental prop for NATO. The fact that the Germans have treated the most important collaborative venture within European NATO in this fashion has profound consequences for foreign as well as defence policy. We must address those consequences.

My second question goes back to back with the German issue. Why do we need the European fighter aircraft? We have heard cogent expositions already in the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre and for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and the hon. Member for Motherwell, North. We must remember how dangerous the world is. Two conflicts are going on side by side in Yugoslavia. In Moldova a bloody little war is going on which is not being reported on television screens. Fighting in Azerbaijan continues sporadically. Nuclear technology is spreading into Algeria, Libya, Syria and Iraq.

We do not know how long Boris Yeltsin will last. Mr Gorbachev disappeared in a hurry. We can only admire

Boris Yeltsin for the way in which he overcame the coup, but he may not last long and, if he does not, we do not know who his successors will be. Of course, the military capability remains in Russia. A formidable array of aircraft remains in Russia, as well as all the countries to which the Russians have sold them.

In Britain we are trying to make a desperately difficult decision. A substantial peace dividend has been extracted from our defence budget in the past five years. The percentage of gross domestic product that we spend on defence has fallen by a quarter in the past five years.

What should be our approach to the EFA? I share the view of my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre and for Ruislip-Northwood and the hon. Member for Motherwell, North that we must have the EFA. We must have it ultimately for the reason expressed by Enoch Powell in an article in *The Field,* which has been largely overlooked. He said that if one has only a limited amount of money which cannot possibly cover all the commitments and all the things that we should like to buy, one must give priority to projects with the longest lead time for rebuilding. In reality, that means that the Air Force comes first, the Navy second and the Army last—I come from a long line of soldiers—and land forces have to put a greater reliance on reserves.

In a modern world, in which aerospace technology has travelled so far, armed forces without a modern fighter are not worth having. That is the central case for having a modern aeroplane, and the only one on offer that can fit the bill, I am afraid, is the EFA. That is why I share the view that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre has just articulated so clearly, that even if we have to go it alone on the EFA, it is worth doing.

I also endorse the remarks of my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre and for Ruislip-Northwood when they said that many of the extra costs associated with a shorter production run can be balanced by eliminating the vast amount of extra work involved in trying to produce the parts in four different places, and with the vast costs in paperwork and inefficiencies in project management that stem from being based in four different languages and places. The biggest loss through costs of scale is in the development phase, which we do not have to worry about. The case for going ahead with the EFA is overwhelming.

On the industrial and defence side, we must go ahead with the EFA. It can be done within a reasonable price. We must be clear that if we go ahead with the project, within a shrunken defence budget, the Royal Air Force must look to other areas to save money, because it has not suffered the same cuts in manpower as the other two services. The manpower of the Army and Navy is so overstretched that it is beginning seriously to affect the morale of soldiers and sailors, who see their families more and more rarely. The Air Force must take its share of manpower cuts to help to pay for this machine.

I hope and believe that we shall build the aircraft, but we must not lose sight of the frightening wider implications of the German withdrawal from the EFA. The fact that the country has so strongly, emotionally and irrationally turned against the project, and that the German leadership has buckled in the face of political pressure, should worry us severely.

There is no Consolidated Fund debate on Yugoslavia, although a British warship has been sent, and British troops are on the ground there in various non-combatant roles; and at a time when emotions, largely stemming from Germany, persuaded the countries of the west—wrongly, in my view—to recognise Croatia, it should worry us that our most important European ally is apparently being driven by emotion. I welcome the Government's stance. I shall not stray too far from the strict confines of the debate, but I welcome the sensible and cautious view that the British Government are taking on developments in Yugoslavia.

During the next few weeks and months it will be important for us to remember that we are dealing with an ally whose attitude towards defence has changed profoundly, and their attitude to foreign policy too, I fear. A great deal may be required of our political leadership during the next few months to keep rational thinking alive in Europe, and to remain strong in our capabilities and cautious in our willingness to use them. It looks as though Britain may have to adopt that role, as the only country in western Europe which still espouses what used to be the view of NATO as a whole—that we do not want to deploy force unless we have to, but we have the force there if we need it. That has been the traditional NATO stance, and I am glad that it remains British policy. I am also glad that we are firmly committed to developing the EFA.

1.34 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) for instigating the debate. In common with those who have already spoken, I shall not put the case for the EFA simply on the grounds of jobs. We would be insane, however, if we did not recognise the jobs and skills implications behind any decision. Should the Germans decide not to continue with production, which looks increasingly likely, they will make a false economy if they look for a cheaper aircraft.

This week Volker Rühe addressed Members of the House and I was singularly unimpressed with his arguments for not continuing with the production of the EFA. I am proud that we have participated in a project that will produce an aircraft with the technology suited to the next century.

I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Motherwell, North included me when he spoke of some hon. Members who have doubts about European union and who see the EFA problem as a reason for not going ahead with that. I should much prefer to see four countries acting in unison to produce the aircraft so that we retain a defence capability which can compete with the Americans and the Russians. It would be a mistake and short-sighted to argue that we should buy our equipment off the shelf from the Americans and the Russians. Such a decision would have dangerous implications for defence and our defence equipment manufacturing capability.

Hon. Members will know that British Aerospace has a factory in my constituency. Many of its workers would feel that their jobs were under threat should the Germans pull out. Given the all-party support for the project, I cannot imagine that the Government would decide to pull out of it. But were that to happen, imagine how difficult it would be to build up our skills base again once it had been lost. If the Germans decide to buy their aircraft off the shelf from another country, they will be exporting German jobs and future skills to other countries.

I strongly believe that one gets what one pays for, no matter what it is. Volker Rühe said that one must decide

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what one can afford to pay and then discover what one can get. That is an extremely naive approach. When it comes to the defence of the European alliance, the last thing one wants to do is to end up with an aircraft that is less capable than that of one's aggressor. That is what would happen were we to choose a less capable aircraft.

I was proud to visit Germany recently with colleagues from all parties to try to persuade our German parliamentarians of the need to continue the EFA project. Many of them appreciated the need for the EFA and were searching for ways in which to continue in that project. They know that, like Britain, Germany will need a replacement aircraft sooner rather than later. If we can act in unison on that project that would benefit all of us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) mentioned that much has changed in the past three years and said how easily things could change again. Who could have predicted the break-up of the Soviet Union in such a short time? Who can say what will happen over the eight years that it will take us to reach the year 2000? We need to be prepared for all eventualities. There have been options to save and I am sure that all parties have looked at them. However, there is no option to axe. We should all work as hard as we can to persuade those who need to be persuaded—whether it is the Germans or people on our own side—of the need for the EFA project to continue, and of the fact that this is the best course for Britain and the best course for Europe.

1.40 am

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I, too, am grateful to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) for drawing this issue to the attention of the House, because it is one which concerns the large number of my constituents who work at British Aerospace plants in Lancashire. I want to pick up on one or two of the comments made by my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). In doing so, I pay tribute to the remarkable all-party campaign mounted in defence of the European fighter aircraft project, largely through the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre.

My hon. Friend mentioned what he perceived as being the main underlying political reason for the German withdrawal—that the German Government think that the threat in Europe and the world has changed. That is right, but it has not diminished, and the German Government seem not to be sufficiently aware of that point. The House has a great understanding of the tremendous insecurity that has arisen in Europe as a result of the break-up of the former Soviet Union. We can all cite areas—Moldova, the Baltic states, the Ukraine, Azerbaijan, the various Muslim states—in which conflict could arise at any moment for a number of reasons which we cannot, perhaps, immediately call to mind but which make the whole region unstable.

What is even more worrying than the growing political instability in the region is the other issue which has resulted from the break-up of the Soviet Union—the proliferation of the sale of former Soviet Union military technology, advice, hardware and expertise to out-of-area countries, particularly third world countries. I am aware, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister is aware, of a number of recent instances of former Soviet military and security service personnel being involved in the sale of nuclear materials and military technology, advice and hardware to third world states which we would regard as unsavoury.

What worries me about the German Government's attitude is that they seem not to be taking any notice of the dangers inherent in the situation. They seem not to understand the responsibility that we in Europe have for the defence of freedom out of area. That is something which is always at the forefront of our thinking, and this attitude leads one to question the German Government's motives, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury said.

What underlies the fears of my hon. Friends about the German Government's withdrawal from the EFA project is the suspicion that it is part of a somewhat wider shift in German foreign policy which may lead them not to amend their constitution to allow German armed forces to take part in out-of-area activities with NATO. That must be of great concern to the House because if that is right, we should know about it. We should question the German Government in detail about that. Will my hon. Friend the Minister give that matter careful consideration and make our concerns known to the German Government?

1.45 am

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I shall be brief as I have come from Committee. I share the views of my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) who, like me, wore the light blue uniform of the Royal Air Force earlier in their lives. There is no question but that RAF crews, particularly pilots, would expect the RAF to have an aircraft that could compete on at least favourable, if not better, terms with an opposition aircraft that they were likely to meet in the skies.

No one denies the fact that the RAF requires an air superiority, agile aircraft. Some people suggest that we should buy the F22, which is a fine aircraft. Whether the Americans will ever sell it to anyone must be questionable, but even if they were to, it is an expensive aeroplane and is probably much more sophisticated than we require. I doubt whether we shall ever fight the Americans, so that aircraft will not be an enemy aircraft. The likely enemy aircraft are those that have their origins in the former Soviet Union, and they will become more available in those parts of the world where we would rather they were not.

Experience in the Gulf demonstrated clearly that if one has command of the skies, the ground casualties can be relatively light. The RAF must have the European fighter aircraft for that reason, if no other. But there is also the issue of Britain's base in the aerospace industry, and the high technology involved in manufacturing the EFA, particularly technology in the use of composite materials, is something that we abandon at our peril. In addition, the aircraft will carry modern avionics and a range of weapon systems. Therefore, there is no question but that the RAF needs the EFA. The doubters should remember that, in 1940 the Luftwaffe would have been delighted to have bought the Spitfire, and I judge that, in future, it would be happy to buy the EFA.

1.47 am

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): This has been a debate remarkable for its quality, expertise and thoughtfulness, and I shall do my best to respond to the——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The Minister requires the leave of the House to speak again. I am sure that it will be granted, but we must go through the motions.

Mr. Aitken: With the leave of the House, I should like to begin by associating the Government and the House with the kind and thoughtful words of condolence that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) expressed to the families of the late Flight Lieutenant Henderson and his missing navigator. They were the crew members of the Buccaneer that so sadly crashed on training earlier today. I know that the House will wish to join in those expressions of sympathy for the families of those who lost their lives in that tragic accident.

The hon. Gentleman began by drawing attention to the unity of view of the two Front Bench teams on the EFA. That unity is valuable, much appreciated and remarkable for the Labour party. The EFA was planned as a peacekeeper, but I am sure that, even in their wildest dreams, its designers did not think that, long before it flew, it would become a peacekeeper for the Labour party, whose defence policies have hitherto been more notable for discord than for harmony. However, I do not wish to look a gift horse in the mouth and I thank the hon. Gentleman for initiating the debate. He showed sound military and strategic sense. I agreed with almost every word that he said.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), for Wyre (Mr. Mans), for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) for their contributions. It has been a debate of experts. We have heard a wealth of aviation, military, Anglo-German and Lancastrian expertise.

The calm and thoughtful nature of the debate is in sharp contrast to much of the debate outside, because many commentators seem to be flying by the seat of their pants, often through a fog of ignorance about an aircraft that has not yet flown.

My hon. Friends spoke about the threat to which the EFA is being built to respond. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood put it well when he said that air power is critical for the security of the west. The international security environment has changed radically since the EFA was originally conceived. The direct threat posed by the Warsaw pact and the Soviet Union has disappeared. However, the EFA will be in service throughout the first quarter of the next century and the world could be a very different place by 2020. That is why it is important to look at capabilities rather than intentions and at a realistic assessment of the scenarios that might unfold on the international scene over the next quarter of a century.

We all recognise that there is considerable and growing instability in areas adjacent to NATO within and outside Europe. There is ethnic and territorial conflict in eastern Europe and within the former Soviet Union, where the race between the new democracy and a return to the old despotism with new faces could yet be close run.

The middle east remains unpredictable and, despite the collapse of the former monolithic threat posed by the Soviet Union, there still exists a number of risks to security and the United Kingdom could be involved in joint military action with our allies designed to promote stability or halt aggression. It is essential for our armed forces to be fully equipped to cope with any emergency requiring military intervention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North spoke about large numbers of sophisticated aircraft being sold around the world. There has been a widespread export drive. The MiG29 Fulcrum has been delivered to all former Warsaw pact countries except Hungary and to some other countries including Cuba, Iraq, Iran, Syria, North Korea and former Yugoslavia. The Su27 Flanker has been sold to China. The Russians are also developing new fighters, including improved variants of the Su27 and the MiG29 which could be exported. Observant hon. Members may have read in the technical press of a recent briefing by the Mikoyan design bureau about the remarkable capabilities of the MiG33. Many sophisticated American aircraft have also been sold in the middle east and elsewhere.

Against that background, an aircraft of EFA's capability is essential to match potential threat aircraft. We need to provide an effective defence of the UK and of British forces wherever they may be deployed. Our current air defence aircraft, the Tornado F3, was designed to intercept bombers at long range. It does not have the agility to defeat hostile agile fighters in the former Soviet arsenal. It is not a suitable match for aircraft such as the MiG29 and Su27, let alone future upgrades of these types or even more modern Russian aircraft.

Thus there is a need for an agile aircraft with a modern radar, other sensors to enable it to exploit modern weapons, and a sophisticated electronic warfare suite to enable it to survive. Today's greater emphasis on NATO rapid reaction forces reinforces the case for a multi-role capability. Multi-role aircraft should offer economies in support and operational flexibility. It is not surprising, therefore, that the chiefs of air staff of the four EFA partner nations, including Germany, reaffirmed as recently as 10 March that they considered that the requirement for an aircraft of the EFA's capabilities was still valid.

The recent visit of Herr Rühe has attracted much comment in the debate. As the House is aware, Herr Rühe, the German Defence Minister, visited London on 6 July. He told my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and myself that Germany did not intend to proceed with the production of the EFA and would like to redirect the unspent EFA development money to the construction of a completely new smaller aircraft with much lower production costs for delivery about the end of the century, just two years after the date planned for the EFA. The Germans wish that activity to be undertaken collaboratively by the present EFA partners and perhaps also France. He confirmed, however, that Germany would nevertheless honour its obligations under the memorandum of understanding to complete the remainder of the present development phase which will continue until 1999.

Herr Rühe cited two reasons for his interest in a new but less capable aircraft. First, he said that Germany would have difficulty accommodating the cost of producing the EFA in its budget, alongside the heavy expenditure it faces for reconstruction of the former GDR. Secondly, he considers that since the threat of a massive

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Warsaw pact attack, against which the EFA was originally designed, has completely disappeared, an aircraft of the EFA's capability is now an anachronism.

I found Herr Rühe a captivating and charismatic political personality, but I thought that his EFA Lite thinking—as it is known—was seriously flawed on economic and military grounds. As I listened to him, his performance reminded me of what is perhaps one of the most dramatic moments in Wagner's great opera "Das Rheingold" when Dönner, the god of lightning and thunder strides on to the stage with a hammer which he whirls above his head. He brings it down on the anvil with an ear-splitting crash and, at that moment, the clouds roll away, there is clarity in the sky and the shining Valhalla appears. One realises that a great moment of truth has arrived. The difference with Herr Rühe's performance is that his hammer blow had the opposite effect to Dönner's: instead of the clouds rolling away, there was a thickening of the clouds; instead of clarity, there was obscurity; and instead of the shining Valhalla or EFA, one could see only an absurd spatchcock political contraption known as EFA Lite.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre was right to pour a little political scorn on the nature of a fairly transparent device. The smaller aircraft that Herr Rühe is proposing could not, using present technology, possibly provide the performance needed in the air defence role to match potential threat aircraft. There is no point in building an aircraft which cannot do the job that we require of it. If we introduced EFA Lite, the old SAS motto "Who dares wins" would create a new motto for the RAF, "Who flies loses". We would be sending our pilots up, destined to lose in combat.

Moreover, it is unrealistic on financial grounds to think that, given the seven years and £5 billion which we have jointly already effectively spent on the development of the EFA, developing a completely new aircraft could be any cheaper than continuing with the present EFA airframe and engine combination or that it could be done in half the time of the EFA programme. We would have to go back to the drawing board. It would mean throwing away the EFA prototypes and engines and repeating much of the development work which, together with the preliminary studies, has taken us seven years to reach the present point.

What Herr Rühe is suggesting is likely to result in an inferior product, some five to eight years later than the EFA and costing more rather than less. It would be like building an expensive loser, and I think that that description would stand even if we followed the good advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and sought further and better particulars. I think the more we got of those further and better particulars, the more we would find that my description and that of many hon. Members was correct.

I shall say a word about the costs, which are central to the project. The EFA is admittedly an expensive programme. The United Kingdom's share of development amounts to about £2·7 billion and if we were to buy 250 aircraft, which is the number we forecast at the start of the programme, it would cost us another £9 billion for production. Therefore, there is a common interest on the part of all four partners in getting the costs down. We are determined to do just that, but, before Germany's decision not to proceed to the production of the EFA, we had agreed to seek ways to reduce the costs of the programme to make it affordable to all the partners.

The German Ministry of Defence is not unique in having pressures on its budget. We have already made encouraging progress in identifying savings, and industry had unilaterally offered a 5 per cent. cut in its production prices before the present German demarché occurred. We believe that there are further savings to be made, and we shall continue to examine them in co-operation with our partners.

The best way forward must be to build on our investment in the EFA, not to throw it away. If Germany perceives a reduced threat, it can by all means opt to fit less capable equipment in the aircraft, but a new airframe and new engines at this stage is merely a recipe for delay and extra expense. The delay involved would not only add to the cost but would cause massive disruption to the aerospace industry in the four EFA nations. Indeed, it is questionable whether, when the time came, the capability would still exist to build the new aircraft that Germany has proposed. Technological development is an ongoing capacity. We cannot put it down and expect to start again with it intact several years later. My hon. Friends who represent Lancashire constituencies are well aware of that. Nor can we keep aircraft factories idle for up to five years and then expect to find a skilled labour force that is ready and waiting to start work again. I am sure that my hon. Friends the Members for Ribble Valley, for Blackpool, North and for Wyre all know that if we take the present German route there would almost certainly be serious disruption and reduced employment prospects and technical skills in factories in their constituencies.

Dr. Reid: I know that the Minister is pushed for time and I do not want to delay him for long. All of the discussion tonight has focused on the British and German angles on the EFA. Will he take the opportunity to tell us whether he is aware of the latest developments in the thinking of the Italians, especially in view of their budget deficit and the cuts that they have made in the past few days?

Mr. Aitken: I shall be glad to deal with those matters in a moment.

The House will want to know what we propose to do in the light of the meeting of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State with Herr Rühe earlier this week. We are talking, of course, about a collaborative programme that involves four partners. Perhaps there are only three partners now, but we are not sure of even that yet. First, we need to discuss Germany's stated position with our partners. We need also to discuss any detailed proposals that Germany may make about the smaller aircraft that Herr Rühe has been suggesting. We think that the first priority is for my right hon. and learned Friend to meet his Italian and Spanish colleagues at the earliest opportunity to discuss the implications of the EFA programme in the light of the German decision. The signs that have come from the Italian and Spanish Governments have been distinctly encouraging. Robust views have been expressed in support of the aircraft. However, all Governments are committed to attempting to reduce costs. All the three remaining partners are determined to meet at the earliest opportunity, and I think that an announcement

about such a meeting will be made shortly. As partners, we wish coolly and calmly to find the right way ahead for the project.

We shall take a measured approach. The signs are that our partners wish also to take that approach. They do not wish to waste, as the German Government appear to be willing to do, the £5 billion that has already been spent on development. We all feel that it would be wrong to rush into decisions about the EFA before we are sure that what is proposed represents the most cost-effective way forward, that it represents value for money and that it is affordable for all the Governments concerned. We shall not know this until we have examined and debated all the options with our EFA partners.

It was always the plan and the timetable that these matters would be discussed when the development phase reached its end, or moved towards it, early next year. We are now having discussions a little earlier than expected. Germany has said that it will continue to meet its obligations in the development of the EFA, and final discussions about production are still some way off. It remains the Government's hope that we shall be able to continue with the programme with or without Germany. As one of my hon. Friends said, we are optimistic that, even if we were to go ahead with a three-nation programme only, the costs would be no more than they were planned to be had Germany not withdrawn from the project.

As the debate has shown, the EFA project has profound industrial, political, strategic and economic implications, as well as fundamental military ones, which I have been outlining and concentrating upon tonight. Decisions on its future will therefore rightly be subjected to intense scrutiny and debate within the Government, in the House, in the country generally and by all our EFA partners. We should welcome that debate, which can be a well-informed one only if the facts are coolly and quietly analysed. The aircraft has not yet flown, but some of those who are talking and writing about it seem to have become airborne far too excitably and far too soon. I believe that tonight's debate has been a welcome contrast to some of the ill-informed debate that has taken place outside the House. As I have said, the debate has shown real expertise and knowledge among Members. We are grateful to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North for initiating it and for his lucid presentation. I hope that I have answered all my hon. Friends' questions. I trust that I have indicated that we think that a calm, thoughtful and positive way forward can be found in conjunction with our remaining EFA partners.

Population Policy

2.4 am

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am glad of the opportunity to raise a matter which should concern not only this House, but all the Parliaments of the European Community. It is slightly strange that this matter should be discussed immediately after a debate about the European fighter aircraft. It is as though nobody has noticed that the cold war with Russia has ended and that the biggest threat to world survival is not bombs or fighter aircraft, but people. The problem is that there are too many people. It is not an external problem—it is within man himself. It is the very way man has been designed that puts the globe at risk and the future of human life in jeopardy.

I will explain the scale of the problem. First, three babies are born every second. While I have been speaking for the past two or three minutes, many hundreds of babies have been born. Some 300,000 babies are born every day, and there are 90 million new mouths to feed every year. In a little more than 50 years, it is estimated that the world population will have doubled from the present 5·4 billion to 10 billion in the year 2050.

Sir Crispin Tickell put it very well when he said:

"the logic is relentless. This animal—you and I—cannot continue to multiply, consume more natural resources, and do more environmental damage indefinitely. Our long suffering earth simply cannot take it."

We have a global problem, which can be tackled only by international action. It is only a total world effort that can stop the world community committing hara kiri.

Just as we are mutually assured of destruction if we do not control weapons, so we are mutually assured of destruction if we do not take action on the population problem. When Nietzsche said that the world is a great death cell he must have foreseen man's potential for massive self-destruction—not creating anything outside that will destroy him, but destroying himself inside. Suicide is no longer about bombs or fighter aircraft, but about the manufacture of too many babies for the world's natural resources to sustain.

The world can sustain 5 billion people, which is the present population, but the train is moving inevitably forward and we cannot stop the world population doubling to 10 million by the year 2050. The question is whether we can stop the world population tripling. If we cannot, the world cannot sustain itself with its current natural resources because they will have been exhausted.

This is a world problem which requires a supranational response. The European Community is one of the world's greatest trading and economic blocks. It must take the lead, force the pace, and drive forward the programme to curtail the onward movement of the train and the seemingly unstoppable growth in the world's population. The EC should not just be imposing the optimum length of the cucumber, considering whether federalism is desirable, or determining fish quotas.

The debate on fish quotas is nevertheless illuminating. We are running out of fish. Too many people want fish and there has been overfishing. Already, the EC is having to curtail the amount of fish caught because the demand for fish by the ever-increasing population cannot be sustained. Fish quotas are an early warning of the problem. We need to realise that our fishing problems are the result of an

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ever-growing and demanding population. During our presidency of the EC, we should be moving towards a new priority on the world agenda in terms of how to deal with the world population.

I am delighted to see one of my favourite Ministers on the Front Bench tonight. He has already replied to one debate. In case my hon. Friend has any doubt about the scale of the problem, I will give him some figures which may help him to see just what I am getting at and why this is probably one of the most important debates that we have had in the House for some time.

The world population stands at 5.5 billion. The population of the more developed countries, including the EC, stands at 1.25 billion, leaving about 4 billion from the under-developed or less developed countries. At the present rate of population growth, it will take 148 years for the population of the more developed countries to double. In the developed world, the 1.25 billion will double to 2.5 billion in 148 years. But the population of the less developed countries—about 4 billion—will double in 34 years. By 2025 the population of the under-developed countries will have doubled.

Let us look at where the problem is. North Africa has a population of 147 million. That will double in 27 years. West Africa has a population of 182 million. That will double in 23 years. Nigeria has a population of 90 million. That will double in 23 years. East Africa has a population of 206 million. That will double to 412 million in 22 years. By 2020 the population of eastern Africa will go from 206 million to 412 million. Ethiopia has a population of 54 million. That will double in 25 years. Kenya has a population of 26 million. That will double in 19 years. Zambia has a population of 8 million. That will double in 18 years. Tanzania has a population of 27 million. That will double in 20 years.

The problem occurs not just in north Africa, west Africa or east Africa, but also middle Africa, where a population of 72 million will double in 23 years. In south Africa, 47 million will double in 26 years. So Africa has a problem, but it is not the only country with that problem.

Western Asia has a population of 139 million; in 24 years that will have doubled. Iraq has a population of 18 million; in 19 years that will have doubled. Turkey's present population of 59 million will double in 32 years; southern Asia's population of 1,231 million will double in 31 years. If the present birth rate continues, India's population of 882 million will double in 34 years, and Pakistan's population of 121 million will double in 23 years, though it will take 270 years for Japan's population of 124 million to double.

We see a dramatic and appalling picture in Africa and western Asia, but it is not confined to those countries. There are 453 million people in Latin America; if the present birth rate continues, that population will double in 34 years. North America's population of 283 million, though, will take 89 years to double. In other words, Latin America's population will double three times as fast as north America's.

From those figures, it seems that populations are doubling every 20 to 25 years in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Now let us consider the figures for Europe. The European Community—if we include Scandinavia—contains 511 million people. If the present birth rate continues, it will take 338 years for that population to double. It will take 753 years for Denmark's population to doube, and 257 for the United Kingdom's to do the same. Germany already has a minus population trend and Austria's population will take 495 years to double.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Are not all those figures based on the assumption that no major advances will be made in birth control technology? The hon. Gentleman has referred to population's doubling in 20, 30, 50 or 300 years. Surely it is inconceivable that major advances will not be made in that time. Although the hon. Gentleman's statistics may appear very dramatic today, I do not think that they will materialise.

Mr. Steen: That is, of course, an important point. We are always hearing scare stories about terrible things which are going to happen. The technology. however, is not the problem. The technology is there; the problem is access to it. It is not available to some of the world's poorest countries. Populations in western Europe, America and Russia are now under control, but unless we can persuade the developing countries to practise controls which will reduce the current alarming birth rates, the population increases that I have described will come about just 20 or 23 years from now.

There is now way in which we can stop the world population from doubling: it is inevitable. By the year 2050, the world population will be 10 billion. The machinery has already moved into position. What we must do, now that Britain is president of the Community, is to find a way in which to stop it from tripling.

Why, then, are we experiencing this appalling problem of population growth? The reason is the reduction in infant mortality rates, about which we should of course be delighted. People also live longer because of the progress of modern medical technology. But there has been no corresponding reduction in the number of children born. That is why populations have continued to rise so dramatically all over the world.

People's habits are lagging behind technology. The fact that millions of the poorest people have not had access to the technology has resulted in the problem. I draw the attention of the House to an important article on that subject in *The Economist* on 30 May, which said that 300 million of the poorest couples in the world want to restrict the size of their families but cannot get access to family planning services.

It is not a matter of shoving family planning down people's throats, if that is the right metaphor. The problem is that people cannot get access to the facilities which would allow them to control their own destiny. That is the root of the problem now.

Power stations in the third world are pumping out noxious gases which require flue gas desulphurisation and other expensive systems to prevent the pollution of the atmosphere. They may have to be rebuilt at enormous cost. There is a thrust to cut down carbon dioxide emissions, which is difficult, expensive and unpopular. In contrast, family planning is cheap and effective, and people are crying out for it. Furthermore, it has a lasting impact on the environment. The technology is readily available. The problem is that the world's poor cannot get hold of it.

The European parliamentary conference, promoted by the British all-party parliamentary group on population

and development, of which I am proud to be a member, was held in London on 31 January. At that meeting, Sir Crispin Tickell considered the impact on the environment and said that the civilisations of Crete, Petra, central America, the Mexican plateau and Easter island had all collapsed because of an imbalance between population and the environment. He explained that population increase was a major contributor to environmental change and that it put severe stress on the life-supporting capacity of the planet.

We should consider the use of land, water, energy and air. In Ethiopia the fertile upland areas where 88 per cent. of the population live have been losing between 1.5 and 3.5 billion tonnes of fertile topsoil per year. The population was 20 million in 1950; it is 50 million today. During the famines of 1984-85, when an estimated half a million people died of hunger, that number was replaced by new births in little more than six months. When there was such interest in Ethiopia with the national media and enormous sums raised, when we had airlifts and fund raising by pop stars, all the people who died were replaced by new births within six months.

Access to uncontaminated water has barely kept pace with population growth. According to the World Health Organisation, 1·6 billion additional people were given access to water of a reasonable quality. In rural areas more than 855 million people have no access to safe water. Most of the countries with limited renewable water resources are in the middle east, north Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa —the regions whose populations are growing fastest.

In developing countries, resource consumption per capita is lower, but rapidly growing populations and the pressure to develop their economies are leading to substantial and increasing damage to the local environment. That is caused by direct pollution through energy use and other industrial activities, clearing forests and unsympathetic agricultural practices.

One fifth of humanity—more than 1 billion urban dwellers—breathe unhealthy air. In the 1980s, Bangkok, Beijing, Calcutta, New Delhi, and Teheran exceeded the World Health Organisation's guideline of 200 days per year of maximum urban air pollution levels. We have seen examples of such damage in Madagascar, with deforestation and all the other environmental issues.

Someone must take the lead. Britain's presidency of the European Community provides us with a great opportunity to change the order of priorities. There are many short-term and medium-term competing demands, but the United Kingdom could rejig the priorities—realising that the population issue is more important than any of the short-term environmental problems that it may be politically expedient to defeat, but that that will not deal with the long-term issues.

A policy paper published by the Commission's Directorate General VIII, with much input from our own Overseas Development Agency, was discussed by development Ministry officials in Brussels on 4 June. A redraft is being circulated in the corridors of the Commission, but I am not sure what will happen next. It might go before the Council of Minister in November, and be debated in the European Parliament. The most important issue facing the world just might be debated in the European Parliament in November.

The EC development budget, known as "B/75050 Budget Line"—that is how they talk over there—provides for 2 million ecu for demographic programmes. I believe that that is code for family planning, and two million ecu is about £1·25 million. When the EC is spending so little money on the problem, it is hardly surprising that it does not give the problem a high priority.

Can my hon. Friend the Minister reveal the timetable for discussion on the issues paper? When will the European Parliament debate the subject? What funding is currently devoted to population-related activities within the EC development budget? Which director-general is responsible for that funding, and for policy? Has the possibility of establishing a health and population unit, on the lines of our own Overseas Development Agency, been examined? How many health and population experts are there working in the Commission, and for which director-generals do they work? We ought to know what is going on in the EC, and what hope there is of the Community taking a lead, with us pushing from behind.

EC representatives should have attended the Rio summit, but Ripa di Meana did not feel like going, for understandable reasons. I believe that the Pope and other religious leaders should also have been there, because the population problem has religious overtones. Not only was the Pope not at Rio, but population was barely on the agenda. The debates were on the more fashionable environmental issues like global warming, biodiversity, chlorofluorocarbons, and carbon dioxide emissions from car exhausts, but ignored the major, all-embracing world population problem which should have been on the front page and at the top of the queue. It has been waiting long enough for international recognition and for the international community to take action. The subject has been shouting to be taken seriously, but it was hardly noticed in Rio.

The £500,000 that it cost the British delegation to travel to Rio, with Ministers and their private secretaries flying first class and the rest of the officials flying club class, might have been better spent on a grant to increase the work of organisations such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation and other non-governmental organisations which are trying to reduce the population problem that threatens the stability of countries all over the world.

The problem is not just about the priorities at Rio or in the EC. Opposition Members will share my concern about the equally important problem of how we can educate and train women to develop their interest and concern about the population problem. There cannot be many other issues where investment could do more for the development of the environment.

Studies by the World bank have shown that when women have no secondary education, they have an average of seven children. If even 40 per cent. of the women have been to secondary schools, family size drops to three children. Better educated women also have healthier babies. If they are farmers, they are better at managing the environment on which their livelihoods depend. They are more likely to find employment, financial independence and thus the sexual independence that they need to decide how many babies to bear.

Educating women may be less intellectually challenging than keeping the planet cool, but few investments would do more for development and the environment. The EC could play a part by providing greater funds to educate and train women. That is the key to starting the process of reducing the world's population. Before the world's powers look around for enemies to fight with increasingly

[Mr. Steen]

sophisticated weapons, they should first identify the enemy. The enemy is not outside. The enemy is actually staring us in the face. The enemy is ourselves. The enemy is not a soldier with a gun, but the life force within the human race.

The task, therefore, is gargantuan. My hon. Friend the Minister has no time to sleep tonight. He should go back to his office immediately after the debate, call out his civil servants, send a fax to all his ministerial opposite numbers in the EC, jump on the first plane to Brussels in the morning and say that population must move up the list of priorities on the agenda. He should also adopt a target of 4 per cent. of this country's overseas development finance for population activities.

We give about 1·5 per cent. of our overseas aid—a substantial sum for which I give credit to my hon. Friend the Minister—to family planning and population activities, but that is wholly inadequate. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to urge the Commission that population priorities should be translated into action as a matter of urgency. Stronger initiatives should be taken in the Community to assist in making family planning universally available before the end of the decade for more than 100 million couples who want it, but have no access to it. Or do my hon. Friend and the world want to wait until it is standing room only and too late to do anything?

2.34 am

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): About 18 months ago, the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and I were privileged to go on a trip, which was organised by the International Planned Parenthood Federation, to Malaysia and Thailand to study population techniques in those countries.

I could not possibly disagree with many of the interesting comments made by the hon. Member for South Hams. I agree wholeheartedly with his point about the importance of investing in women. We cannot say often enough that it is the best investment that Governments can make. That is why I have frequently questioned our Overseas Development Administration on its policies on population assistance.

It is regrettable that, until very recently, we spent only about 1 per cent. of the budget on population assistance. From 1979 to 1990, we cut by about 63 per cent. our contribution to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. It is regrettable that that should have happened, particularly as the Minister for Overseas Development made many speeches in Rio and elsewhere about the importance of population assistance. Of course, she omitted to mention that the Government have been lax in pursuing that important policy.

In the past, when I have questioned the Minister for Overseas Development about what percentage of the ODA budget was focused on women, the answer has been that, as 50 per cent. of the world's population are women, it was assumed that 50 per cent. of the budget was spent on women. By no stretch of the imagination could that be considered fine tuning. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will tell us that the ODA can be more accurate in its answers on that matter. There is no point in the Government's paying lip service to the importance of investing in women if they cannot guarantee that some of their main policies and expenditure are directed at investment in women.

As the hon. Member for South Hams said, rapid population growth imposes an enormous burden on mothers, communities and the earth's resources. Mothers who have many children are more likely to suffer ill health or to die in childbirth than those who can space their children. Their children, too, are more likely to be ill. As population growth outpaces economic growth, more people sink into poverty and are forced to scratch a living from the diminishing natural resources around them.

There is no easy way to stabilise population growth. Widespread access to family planning, education of women and of men, and measures to raise family income and reduce health risks must all go together. One of the clearest lessons of the past two decades is that investment in women—that is, raising their status, providing access to education, to health care and to family planning—not only improves the quality of life but is the best and quickest way to reduce population growth rates.

A recent report published by the World bank makes the same point. Educating women is the biggest single solution to poverty and environmental destruction. Women hold the key to prosperity because they control their fertility and the fertility of the soil. A secondary education reduces family size from seven to three children. Nothing could be clearer than that. I still find it incredible that the rich countries of the world do not respond to the challenges that such reports place before us.

In many developing countries—I have had the opportunity to visit several of them to see United Nations programmes in action—the lack of knowledge of contraception or access to family planning denies women the chance to space their children. A study in Nepal showed that almost 40 per cent. of women with children did not want another child. But 90 per cent. of married women in that country did not know where to obtain contraception advice or supplies. Every year the complications of unplanned pregnancies and abortions kill 200,000 mothers in that country.

I went to Ethiopia about two years ago and saw the United Nations programme on population in action. I saw the long queues of women outside the rural clinics. Many of them would be turned away that day because the staff simply could not cope with the demand. I realised that Britain had cut our contribution to that important United Nations fund. I hope that we shall revoke that particularly bad decision and increase our contributions to those United Nations funds which everyone knows make a worthwhile contribution throughout the world.

Mr. Steen: Perhaps the hon. Lady is coming to what Britain could do as president of the European Community. If she is, I shall not say any more. If she is not, I hope that she will.

Mrs. Clwyd: The hon. Gentleman is impatient. He gave us a tour around the world. I suspect that if he had had the opportunity to display his visual aids and maps more prominently, many hon. Members might have benefited. So he must forgive me if I take not quite such an extensive tour as he did but nevertheless mention parts of the world where I have seen important programmes in action.

Women need to be confident that, if they limit the number of children, the children will survive into

adulthood. With up to one in three children dying before their fifth birthday in some of the poorest countries, it is not surprising that some parents feel that as an insurance policy they need to have several children. Therefore, investment in primary health care is essential. It is estimated that simple measures could save about 11,000 children who die from diarrhoea every day in the developing world and 8,000 who die from six major preventable diseases every day. Obviously, that must be tied up with the level of overseas aid that developing countries are prepared to devote to reducing such problems.

In the west and some middle-income developing countries, growing economic security has, for example, brought slower population growth. In most developing countries, the downward spiral of poverty, large families, ill health, lack of resources and increasing poverty still predominates.

In the long term the key to stabilising the world population is to support broad-based development and to promote economic security throughout the third world. That will require increased aid, debt relief, trade reforms and an international commitment to invest in the poor. That is the only way in which to give women, their children and the planet a fair chance.

Those of us who were able to attend the Rio conference deeply regretted that the rich countries were not prepared to address themselves to the agenda of the poorer countries. That agenda calls for increased aid flows, reductions in debt, increased trade possibilities and the transfer of technology. Whatever rhetoric the richer countries care to use to describe their so-called achievements in Rio, they cannot get away from the fact that they were not prepared to offer to meet any of those requests. Rio gave us the opportunity to redress the inequalities in the world and it was deplorable that the richer countries were not prepared to promote third-world issues.

If the Government had maintained their contributions to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities at the 1979 level up to 1990, the UNFPA would have received an additional £42·3 million. That substantial sum of money has been denied to the developing world because of the priorities that our Government have chosen to adopt. In 1979, UNFPA received £9·2 million at 1991-92 prices; in 1991-92 the sum stood at £7·5 million and in 1992-93 the planned figure is £9 million. I hope that the Minister can give us better news on that UN fund.

Last month's report from the UNFPA, "State of World Population 1992", the first for 10 years, shows how serious the situation has become. In the 1980s, food production fell behind population growth in 69 out of 102 developing countries. As the hon. Member for South Hams said, in the next decade world population will accelerate by the fastest rate in history. Almost all the population growth will take place in Africa, Asia and south America—more than half of that in Africa and south Asia, which are already suffering the greatest difficulty in meeting food, health and hygiene needs. As the hon. Gentleman said, further delay could be fatal.

Some third-world countries have already shown that family planning can succeed. The key to success is, once again, secondary education for women, plus access to land, jobs and family planning methods. One need only consider what has happened in certain states in India to see what a difference in attitude can achieve. Kerala and states in the north of India have been extremely successful in their control of population. The "State of World Population 1992" report is worth reading because it makes that achievement clear.

The report states:

"Kerala's female literacy rate of 66 per cent. is almost double that of its nearest rival. In the five northern states, only 11-21 per cent. of women can read.

Kerala has the lowest infant mortality rate in India . . . In the northern states infant mortality is between four and five times higher.

Kerala's fertility rate has fallen to the astonishingly low level of 2·3 children per woman—lower than Thailand or China, the former USSR or Ireland. Contraceptive prevalence is three times the national rate."

The report suggests that two factors explain Kerala's success in human development:

"One is the priority given by the state government to spending on education and health, continuing a tradition that reaches far back into colonial times . . . Kerala is the only state in India . . . where the rural death rate is lower than the urban. A far-reaching land reform from the 1960s, has benefited three million tenants and landless.

The second factor, whose roots reach even further into history, is the status of women."

I recently heard a group of women from Kerala take part in an Institute of Development Studies seminar at the university of Sussex. It was fascinating to listen to some of them argue for improving the status of women in many other parts of the world.

In Kerala, as in the north and many other parts of India and Africa, women inherit land. In Kerala, the husband's family pays the bride price to the wife's family on marriage and women—unlike some other parts of India—are considered an asset. In the north they are considered a burden. In reality, they are a wasted asset.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and I saw and heard of some of the attitudes towards women in India, especially in northern India, recently and saw the different approaches to their importance in that country. The waste of that asset has immense human costs and has led to economic stagnation and rapid population growth in the north of India.

Thailand has reduced its fertility rate, from an average of almost seven children per woman to just over two, and I must pay tribute to what we saw in that country during our visit. Kenya, which used to have the world's fastest rising population, has apparently turned the corner. It is interesting that for every priest in Africa preaching against modern contraception, there are five Catholic nurses urging women to go to family planning clinics. That is also a welcome development.

Whatever the Minister says about population policy, I am sure that he will use many encouraging words. However, in the context of an expanding aid budget—although I suspect that it is likely to continue to shrink as regards some of the poorer developing countries as resources are channelled towards central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union—the problem is that the Government analysis treats effects—population growth—not causes. The Government do not often talk about poverty. If Government policy is based on diverting funds away from poverty alleviation, it will be self-defeating. Family planning must be seen as part of a wider health care provision.

The hon. Member for South Hams mentioned the United Kingdom presidency and the Development Council of the EC. He scoffed at some of the budget lines in the European Community, but, as a former Member of

[Mrs. Clwyd]

the European Parliament, I found the budget lines of considerable advantage because, in contrast with what happens in the Westminster system, Members of the European Parliament can amend the budget line by line. If some of his colleagues in the European Parliament wished to put in additional lines on population assistance in the Community budget, they would be able to promote such a policy. Unfortunately, we do not have such an opportunity in Westminster. An Opposition Member has considerably more powers in the European Parliament to promote policies and obtain funds for subjects that he considers important.

As we all know, there is a logjam in the Community, and it is important that, as the United Kingdom holds the presidency, the Commissioners, and particularly some of the Development Commissioners, are encouraged to move rather faster on certain policies than they have done. I hope that, during the United Kingdom presidency, and while we have the chair of the EC Development Council, the Government will be extending their policies on the debts of developing countries to take into account debts to multilateral institutions and to commercial banks. After all, in 1990, for the first time, Britain received more in debt repayment from the third world than it gave in aid and new loans.

I hope that the Government take the lead in the Community in dealing with the enormity of the famine in Africa. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Hams would not like to see population decline as a result of famine. Africa needs something on the scale of a Marshall plan. What is offered is a desperate, last-minute reliance on emergency aid with no timetable for delivery. It is to the shame of the House that we have not had an opportunity to debate the crisis in Africa before the recess, because, before we meet again, it will have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, unless the EC and the Government move swiftly to do something about getting food aid faster to those African countries suffering from drought and famine. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some assurances on that.

Will the Minister assure us—again as the United Kingdom holds the presidency—that we shall address the trade issue, and stop treating the floundering GATT negotiations as a panacea for the ills of the developing world? GATT is a United States-EC dialogue and any advantage to the third world will be only a spin-off from that. I hope that the Government will back up their rehetoric on GATT with action and announce a strategy for improving the trading position of developing nations.

I think that I have made it clear, as the hon. Member for South Hams did, that population assistance cannot be treated in isolation. It must be treated in the context of all the subjects that I have mentioned. The figures tell a story of considerable cuts and disregard for the needs of women in the third world.

Despite what the Government said about population, at the Rio conference they gave no strong commitment to increase population assistance within the present meagre aid budget. I hope that the Minister will be able to address that on behalf of a Government who have done little about population over the past 13 years.

3.2 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) and the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on their constructive and well-informed speeches. They have obviously travelled widely and have had a great chance to study the problem in detail. I shall be brief in addressing one or two important aspects.

The matter was last debated in the House on 25 June during the debate on the Rio conference. It was heartening to hear many hon. Members speak about the vital and immediate problem of the huge growth in world population. I put the topic into context when I spoke in that debate and I gave the figures—an increase from half a billion people at the time of Christ to today's world population of 5 billion, a number which will roughly double in the next 30 to 40 years.

After Rio, an article in *The Economist* stated that the growth in world population was a severe hindrance to economic and environmental improvement.

I hope that the amnesia of Rio can be more than rectified at the EC Development Council meeting on 18 November. As a result of the debate, I hope that the Minister will pass on to my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister our pleas to move this vital issue up the agenda during our presidency of the EC so that it is discussed not only in the Development Council but at the summit in Edinburgh in December. If the problem is placed nearer the top of the agenda, we might start to get some action.

I listened carefully to the debate and noted the comment by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams that the resources devoted to the UNFPA are insufficient. It is sad that such cost-effective aid was not increased. I join in urging the Minister to see whether some of the new resources promised by the Prime Minister at Rio can be used to help solve the world's population problem.

One cannot totally separate the problem of population increase from economic growth and the exploitation of environmental resources; the three are inextricably linked. It is a sad fact that in poorer countries as economic activity falls, poverty and the population increase. As the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said, the extra children born often do not live beyond the age of 30.

As I said in my speech on 25 June, there is a clear case for increasing resources to educate women. That will enable us somehow to break out of the vicious cycle in which women emerge from the family unit when very young and immediately start to bear children. If we could improve education in some of the poor countries so that people delayed having children, and brought them up and fed them better, and had improved health resources, housing and schooling, we could start to break the cycle.

That process is not without success. The link between population and economic growth has been proved in the four "dragon countries"—Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea—which have dramatically stabilised their populations as a result of improved economic activity. One of our major contributions is to try to reduce third-world debt. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimated that, in 1989, the level of third-world debt had reached record proportions.

I welcome the initiatives of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to ensure that the Trinidad terms are not only adhered to, but advanced. That is a significant contribution to reducing world poverty, particularly in the third world, and is a subject of which we do not hear enough.

It is vital to increase trade in third world countries. We have heard much this evening about the growth in the world population. At the height of the growth of the western world during the industrial revolution, the population was growing at about 1·5 per cent. per annum. My hon. Friend the Minister said earlier that that means that the population would double in 30 years. At its height, when there was a great economic push for people to emigrate to north America, the world population was increasing at about 2 per cent. per annum. It is a sad fact that, of the 42 countries where population is increasing at more than 3 per cent. per annum, 24 are in the African continent. It is a great pity that we do not hear enough about a strategic plan for helping the African continent.

The EC Development Council has produced a paper called "Horizon 2000"—to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams alluded. He rightly asked which directorate of the commission was responsible for that paper and which was responsible for financing it. I suspect that it is a little like the "Agenda 21" document at Rio —it lacks teeth. The issue must be moved up the political agenda. It is a sad reflection of the importance of this subject that, despite the lateness of the hour, there are not more hon. Members present to debate it.

I do not know whether there will be sufficient action at the European development summit. I hope that one day, within my lifetime—certainly in this Parliament—the issue will take on greater urgency. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider whether we can meet the United Nation's target of doubling our aid from 1 to 2 per cent. of the United Nations population fund by 1995, as that would be an extremely cost-effective way of alleviating some of the worst poverty in the world.

One of the major problems relating to third world poverty, debt and population explosion is the sort of Government with whom we have to deal. In aiding countries in one way or another, we are trying to help them to help themselves. I think that Christopher Patten was the first person I heard talk about the problem when he was Minister for Overseas Development. It is no good flooding countries with emergency aid. The aid must be properly structured and planned.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams said, there was a great deal of razzmatazz in 1985 when 500,000 people died in Ethiopia and Bob Geldof proposed Live Aid to raise about £20 million. Sadly, within a year, that population had been replaced. Such aid is typical of what I call "fire brigade aid" going to a despotic, tyrannical Government. We need to continue what Christopher Patten began and link our aid to democratic government.

Progress is being made in some parts of the world, as we heard in our earlier debate on south America. Some countries there have a growing population problem and are progressing to good democratic government. We heard in an earlier debate how Venezuela and Colombia in particular have now had two terms of democratic government.

I see that the lateness of the hour is getting to us all. It is time for me to finish and let the Minister wind up. I hope that he will bear my comments in mind. I also hope that he will bring the debate to the attention of my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister and move it up the political agenda so that we get some action.

3.11 am

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I had not intended to speak in the debate, so I rise without notes, but I should like to say a few words in response to some of the issues that have been raised.

I wish to place on record the appreciation of many of my hon. Friends for the important work done by the all-party group on population and development and, in particular, to express our appreciation to Miss Dilys Cossey for the way in which she advises Members of Parliament. I know that many of my hon. Friends are deeply indebted to her for her work.

I mention the personal position of women in third world countries who are faced with the problem of fertility and their considerations when deciding—if it can be said that they have a choice—the size of their families. Millions of women have no choice.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and I were in India, we were fortunate to be able to interview a young woman outside the Rihand power station in central India. We asked her about problems of contraception and how to decide the size of her family. It was a very personal conversation and, within a few minutes, she was reduced to tears, but we learned the truth. She lived on very little money in an area with very little primary health care cover.

She faced a dilemma. She had a very low income but recognised that, if she were to live to 50, which might be deemed an old age in India, she would need some form of financial security in her old age, which she believed meant having children. Therefore, there were economic considerations to be taken into account when discussing children. However, she could not afford to raise children as her husband was unemployed so, in effect, she had no choice. It was only when we provoked the discussion with her that she broke down and explained her dilemma in detail.

If we are to resolve these matters in the longer term we shall not do so simply by education, although that is extremely important. We must secure economic development so that people are enabled to take real decisions on whether it is necessary to expand their families. That brings us back to the allocation of resources. I think that the European Community has a special role to play in developing programmes for sustainable development so that women know that they can look forward to longer-term economic security.

We were able to visit a clinic in India. It was not particularly hygienic. As we walked into it, we saw several women lying on the floor who had just had sterilisation operations. When we went into the so-called theatre at the back of the clinic, we saw that the conditions were pretty poor. The authorities in the area were clearly quite proud of the provision that was being made, but I left with a great sense of unease about whether population controls could be dealt with in that way.

It cannot be beyond the wit of man in coming decades to find ways further to improve the advanced technology that now exists. Some of us object to the proposition that we can leave these matters to market forces and that private companies will develop the technology. A huge

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

international effort is required. States, Governments and research institutions must be involved if we are to make further major advances so that women are not required to go through the indignity of the operations that my hon. Friend and I saw being carried out in India. Even today, crude technology is applied to women who face the difficulties that have been described. Equally, a huge effort must be made to ensure that that does not continue.

We must avoid reliance on private sector industry initatives operating in commercial market conditions. Governments are invariably the purchasers and states must be involved. They must promote research so that people throughout the third world can benefit.

3.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): With the leave of the House, perhaps I might speak for a second time in this debate on the Consolidated Fund.

First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) on drawing an important subject to the attention of the House. I extend my congratulations to the all-party group on population and development for the constructive role that it plays in the continuing debate. We shall certainly continue to listen to what it has to say on this important subject. It is a critically important topic, which is central to the goal of overcoming poverty and achieving sustainable progress within developing countries. I am glad to say that it is of particular and growing interest to many hon. Members.

I believe that the Government can claim some credit for the role that we have been playing internationally in ensuring that population is given the attention that it deserves. Over the past year or so, our voice was significant in helping to ensure that population was placed firmly on the agenda of the Earth summit in Rio. It was an initial disappointment when it seemed as though the summit would not address the issue, but latterly it did. The subject was recognised by the participants for its importance.

During the summit, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development made a notable speech —it has drawn praise from many quarters—pressing the case for population to be tackled seriously by the international community. We have also been pleased by the support that we have been getting from many quarters for the principles and goals that we have adopted under the Overseas Development Administration population initiatives, "Children by Choice not Chance", which was announced last year, accompanied by an admirable pamphlet which I know that my hon. Friend will have seen.

The subject of the debate relates particularly to the Government's population policy with regard to the European Community and to the period of the United Kingdom's presidency. This debate provides a welcome opportunity to explain our intentions during the presidency. We believe that the European Community's aid programme should pay more attention to supporting programmes which extend women's and men's right to choose whether, and when, to have children. Its present involvement in this area is not substantial. Fortunately, there are a good number of people in Brussels who share our view that that needs to change.

We are not actively involved with the European Commission in an initiative, to which my hon. Friend referred, which we hope will significantly enhance the support that the Community provides to population programmes in developing countries, especially in the strengthening of family planning services. We are very pleased that the Commission—the DG8—has already acted by organising a recent meeting of population experts from EC member countries. I could say more about that, but I want to make progress. I will write to my hon. Friend and deal with any points that I cannot answer in detail tonight. Unfortunately, I have only 14 minutes left.

That meeting was especially useful in helping to move towards a more coherent European position on the essential components of family planning programmes and how donor countries should be helping.

The next important step, in which the United Kingdom presidency will again be collaborating closely with the European Commission, will be to ensure that population features as a key item of attention at the next Development Council in November. I am pleased to confirm that my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will be in chair at that important meeting. I shall be representing the United Kingdom.

The Government's aim is that the Development Council will agree a new, stronger resolution on population which will build on the existing rather imprecise declarations of principle in favour of population support contained in the Lomé convention. We hope that that will provide the Commission with a clear political push for greater involvement in support of population programmes and also specific operational guidelines for the Community's aid programme in that area. It is our hope that such an outcome will also encourage member states to pay greater attention to population programmes within their own national aid programmes, as we have already been doing in the United Kingdom under our own population initiative.

I wish to rebut some of the points made by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). She failed—characteristically, I regret to say—to give any credit to the Government on the Toronto and Trinidad terms, which have been a major initiative over the years and a major engine to help reduce the burden of debt in the third world. I fear that she was not sufficiently generous to the Government in relation to their enormous promotion of the Uruguay round on the GATT negotiations, which is absolutely essential to the Government's policy on aid. We never stop emphasising that it is an essential feature of our policy to help the third world to trade with the rich world and to raise its standard of living in that way.

I wish to correct two errors in the hon. Lady's speech. She repeated the canard that, in 1990, third-world countries paid more back to the rich west than they received in aid and loans. That is not true—it is merely an accounting factor, because when debt has been written off it is considered as a debt repayment. That is the reason for that statistical misinterpretation. If the hon. Lady does not accept what I say, I will ask my right hon. Friend to write to her in graphic detail so that the point is put clearly and she can be relieved of any misapprehension.

The hon. Lady was under another misapprehension in suggesting that in some way our aid programme for the third world will be reduced because of commitments to the former Soviet Union. She knows that that is a different budget. It is perfectly true that raising Government

expenditure generally in one area affects the potential for Government expenditure in another. If that is what the hon. Lady is saying, fine, but that is not an argument of any substance. We are helping the former Soviet Union from a different aid resource, as she well knows. She should not use that argument to suggest that in some way aid to the third world is threatened.

The amount that we devote to population within the aid programme has risen from 1·1 per cent. to 1·5 per cent. of our aid budget during the last two years, and it is likely to continue to rise during the next two years in the same sort of way.

My hon. Friend the member for South Hams brought to the House some alarming statistics on world population and how the less developed countries are growing in such a frighteningly fast way. He gave graphic examples from Africa and Asia.

My way of understanding that terrific explosion is to say to myself that anyone who is a shade older than 40, or about 40—we are all a shade older than 40—will have seen the world population double in his or her lifetime. In the next 30 years it will double again. That means that in 30 years' time the world's population will have quadrupled in the lifetime of a 70-year-old person.

That is why, with the best will in the world—I know that it was not mentioned in a tendentious way—the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) was being a little complacent when he intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams. Of course science may solve the problem, but it is precisely to ensure that people who are in a position to influence world events do so that we are having this debate. It is crucial that the issue should not just be left for wise men to come to the right conclusions about. It must be constantly repeated for people to realise the enormous importance and priority that must be attached to it. We do that within the aid programme.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman accuses me of being complacent. All that I was pointing out was that the assumptions are predicated on the bases of existing technology. Inevitably, there will be technological advance which may to some extent mitigate matters.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I accept that, but the important point of my hon. Friend's contribution is to ensure that people address the issue.

Our aid programme spending on direct population activities has grown fourfold since 1981 and it was £26 million in 1991. That is a 55 per cent. increase during the past two years. I gave the percentage figures earlier.

We plan to do more. By next year we intend to have established at least 15 new projects aimed specifically at strengthening the coverage and quality of family planning and maternal health services, improving the reliability of contraceptive supplies and enabling women to take greater control over their lives. We are on course to achieve that target.

It is inevitable that population policy should play a large and growing part in our aid programme. It is precisely because the rich world has been successful in humanitarian relief from famine of the kind experienced in Africa and described by by hon. Friend that we must pay particular attention to population principles.

We attach particular importance to some guiding principles in our population aid. First, individuals, and women in particular, should be entirely free and able to choose for themselves when to have children. Secondly, those choices should be fully informed and not subject to pressure or coercion of any kind. Thirdly, the quality of family planning services, as well as their availability, must be improved if they are to win people's confidence.

Let me say a little about the ODA's support for multilateral population agencies such as the UNFPA, which was mentioned by both the hon. Member for Cynon Valley and my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown). A major part of our assistance is channelled through the multilateral population programmes. Our support for the United Nations Population Fund has increased by more than 50 per cent. over the past two years, to £9 million in 1992. That is a substantial increase. Dr. Nafis Sadik, the UNFPA's executive director, has publicly expressed her appreciation of the United Kingdom's example to other donors.

Our support for the International Planned Parenthood Federation has also grown, to £8 million this year. In 1990, our contribution to UNFPA amounted £6 million. It was paid over two periods, in 1990 and at the beginning of the calendar year 1991. The hon. Lady seemed to want to establish that a cut had been made in 1990; in fact, the money was paid over two calendar years but in the same financial year.

Mrs. Clwyd: I have before me a table showing the United Kingdom's contributions to multilateral agencies between 1979 and 1990, in real terms. It shows that in 1979 our contribution was more than £8 million, and that it declined each year between 1979 and 1990. The Minister said that the contribution spilled over into 1991, but the 1990 figure shown here is £3 million, compared with £8 million in 1979. Until very recently, each year showed a steady decline. I do not think that anyone would congratulate the Government on that.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The important point is that our contribution has grown significantly in the years to which I have referred.

The hon. Lady spoke of the need to educate women. Women's literacy is a vital element of any influence on population growth. There is clear evidence that better-educated women, able to receive the written message on family planning and child spacing, have smaller families, and that the children of those smaller families are healthier and better educated as a result.

Progress is being made globally in terms of population dynamics. Fertility levels are declining, as were mentioned by the hon. Lady and others. The average family size in developing countries has fallen from six to four in the past 30 years, and more than half the couples in the world are now using some form of family planning. Of course much more needs to be done to extend reproductive choice; otherwise the health and welfare of countless millions of women and children will continue to suffer and we shall be unable to prevent the world population from trebling, or even worse.

I end by quoting what was said by my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker in her important speech at Rio last month. I think that it summarises the Government's position on population very succinctly and very well:

"My Government's position, is that women and men should be able to choose when to have children, and should

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

have the means to put their choices into effect. We know that even the poorest people in the world want to make these choices and will make them readily when given the opportunity to do so. Hundreds of millions of couples throughout the world need family planning services to exercise their right to choose. We must not fail them."

I assure the House that the Government will keep that goal —indeed, necessity—clearly in view during the period of the United Kingdom presidency and beyond.

Occupational Pension Schemes

3.34 am

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): I realise that the night is very late—or rather, the morning is very early. Nevertheless, this debate is important for many people, especially old people—*pensioners. It concerns the failures* not only of the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation but of the Securities and Investments Board, in what the Opposition believe is a most shameful affair.

We see many scandals nowadays. It has become almost routine that every few months there is a scandal in banking or insurance, as a result of which there is a serious loss of confidence in the country, and a feeling that the honest brokering that we always saw as part of the British tradition can no longer be expected. We seem to be becoming a set of financial spivs. Britain seems to be a spivs' paradise for people who can work the system and avoid being caught out.

The Maxwell pension fraud has often been compared with the Bank of Credit and Commerce International affair and the Barlow Clowes scandal. However, we do not believe that it is the same. The fundamental difference is that in those two other cases clients made conscious decisions to opt for the chance to gain extra interest, and therefore it could be said that, partly knowingly, they chose to take a risk. In spite of that, the Government were most considerate over the Barlow Clowes affair, even though some of the money was being invested abroad.

In contrast, the Maxwell pensioners were not even informed, let alone consulted. That adds to the insult involved in other people simply taking over. As a result of that rough treatment, all those pensioners will pay a terrible price, which will cause sheer misery for many old people. It has ruined their lives and is undoubtedly ruining their health, too.

Ultimately, many hundreds of Maxwell pensioners will have to plead with the Department of Social Security, unless the Government face their responsibilities, step in and do the right thing by them. Those pensioners do not deserve such treatment. No one can stand idly by and say that they have brought the situation upon themselves. They have not.

What has happened in recent times should give us food for thought, and should give rise to a determination on both sides of the House to take a fresh look at the pensions question. Not only with the Maxwell swindle but time after time in the past few years, we have seen company takeovers conducted with an eye on the pension funds. When the asset stripping takes place, there are great advantages to be derived if there is a handsome pension fund thrown in. Contribution holidays and other features have also been introduced without those who contribute to the schemes being consulted or allowed to express an opinion.

Ministers cannot say that they knew nothing about the Maxwell risk, because it is now public knowledge that the Department of Trade and Industry expressed serious reservations about Maxwell years ago. The Bank of England had also sounded warnings, and it was said that Maxwell was not a trustworthy enough person to run a company.

I wonder whether there are any more skeletons in the cupboard. Will other scandals emerge in a few months' time, with more workers discovering that their pension

funds have been plundered by their employers? Only time will tell. That prospect is certainly sending a shiver down the spines of many people, who wonder where it will all end.

I do some unpaid work in the House as honorary secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union parliamentary group. A few weeks ago, I was approached by one of the union's district secretaries. He had written to the managements of three Watford companies requesting the appointment of an engineers' trustee to their respective pension funds. He was turned down. I then wrote a courteous letter to each of the companies, expressing concern at their attitude—especially in the light of recent events.

To date, I have received only two replies, and they were both disappointing. One stated:

"Given the AEU position on occupational pension schemes, the disappointment of the Parliamentary Group is not surprising. I would stress however that our intention is to abide by any present and future legislation relating to the operation of these schemes."

It went on to say that the company was

"actively seeking to improve the level of understanding and confidence of pension scheme members."

However, that reply clearly implied that in the absence of any statutory changes, the company did not intend to make any of its own.

The Secretary of State for Social Security, in his statement to the House on 8 June, said that the Government were establishing an emergency £2·5 million fund for Maxwell pensioners. When we consider that several thousand pensioners are affected, one becomes extremely anxious about a sudden draw on those funds. As someone said to me, that fund of £2·5 million is, in football terms, about half Gazza's transfer fee and it has to provide for some 30,000 pensioners.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has taken a close interest in the matter. He told me that he had referred to the ombudsman in respect of maladministration, but that he was still waiting for a reply. I do not know whether the Government have any influence to allow them to delay the appearance of observations by the ombudsman. I hope that that is not the case. I hope that the ombudsman will clearly condemn what has happened as a result of the huge scandal.

I met some of the pensioners three or four weeks ago and I was saddened to learn that, in trying desperately to take legal steps to protect themselves, they face bills of £1 million a month in respect of court judgments. That is beyond the pale when we consider that those people paid out their money and are being further insulted because, if they have the temerity to try to use the legal options through the courts, they will possibly face massive costs.

I speak with feeling about some of the Maxwell pensioners because many Maxwell pensioners worked for the Mirror Group at Withy grove in Blackley in Manchester. They have formed a committee and earlier today I spoke to their chairman, Mr. Ken Martin. He told me that at the moment they are partly relieved because their pensions are being made up by the Mirror Group. However, the proviso is that they will be made up only so long as the group is in profit. If the group has a sudden nose dive and falls into recession, will that hit the pensions? If the company decides to spend money on new plant and equipment, which can be vey expensive, will the pensioners fail to receive their returns?

There is obviously no guarantee for the pensioners and it is certainly a most hit-and-miss affair. I hope that the Minister will be able to speak with confidence and reassure me about some of my constituents who are on the edge and do not know whether they will still be receiving a pension, to which they are entitled and for which they have paid, in three months' time. If the Mirror Group encounters difficulties, how will they make up for that loss of pension?

I was tipped off earlier this evening that a reply had finally appeared in the Library to a parliamentary question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). He asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer certain questions about the Securities and Investments Board and IMRO. I took it upon myself to take some photocopies of the reply, which was published today. It is a long reply, which makes us realise that that we are on to something very big. Normally, replies from Secretaries of State are about two sentences long, but the Chancellor's reply is about three pages long.

A couple of extracts are worth spotlighting. The right hon. Gentleman states:

"SIB's assessment concludes that there were serious deficiencies in the supervision of IMRO".

On the following page, he states:

"IMRO was not, and is not, responsible for ensuring that pension fund trustees respect their wider obligations under trust law. Moreover, effective regulation must in the final analysis involve the active co-operation of the private sector".

It appears that, if there is no co-operation by the private sector, there is nothing that we can do. That is outrageous.

The other document that was made available tonight is the Securities and Investments Board press release, which I have not read in great detail as it is several pages long. However, one or two points bounce out. In part, the first page states:

"IMRO accepts that its supervision of these Maxwell companies fell short of the standards that should be achieved by a financial services regulator."

The second page contains the comment—this one really stunned me—that

"it was unduly ready to rely on the good faith and professionalism of those with whom it dealt".

It is like the old boy network. People were expected to do certain things and act like little gentlemen, but they did not. When people dip their fingers in the till, they do not always act like gentlemen and they are not always concerned.

The press release mentions good faith and professionalism. We are entitled to something better than that comment. The press release refers to

"an alertness to information in the public domain (including in the media), and an application of a spirit of critical enquiry in relation to assurances or information given."

Everyone seemed to know what was going on—nudge, nudge. Nobody dared do anything because big money people threaten to take people to court if they dare to question what is going on.

One or two pages later—I wish to highlight one or two observations that I made as a layman—the press release states:

"as a matter of urgency, to produce proposals for strengthening:

the experience, skills mix and organisation of its monitoring staff."

That indicates that there was little skills mix and experience in the past. I wonder what the SIB has been doing to give IMRO such responsibilities.

My last quote from the document seems to let the cat out of the bag. The document says:

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"Andrew Large, the SIB chairman, said:

'The fact that such a massive fraud could be carried out reflects badly on the United Kingdom corporate financial system as a whole, as well as on a number of institutions and individuals within that system.'"

In other words, it reflected on a set of what I would call financial spivs. We have to make sure that such cases are not repeated. The only place that it can be done is Parliament. I do not believe that self-regulation can work when people are dealing with hundreds of millions of pounds of other people's money.

To conclude my remarks on this terrible scandal, we must call for a realistic grant from the Government. They are not faultless in the matter. They made arrangements for the Barlow Clowes victims. If anything, the Maxwell pensioners have a better case than the Barlow Clowes people had. It is not unreasonable to expect some compensation from IMRO. When I say compensation, I am not thinking about petty cash. It cannot give pensioners £2 million of £3 million and say, "That's your lot." We are talking about a massive fraud. We are talking about hundreds of millions of pounds. We should consider some form of penalty for IMRO for its incompetence and certainly its slackness in protecting the interests of the pensioners.

It will be years before ordinary working people regain confidence in pensions schemes—that is, if ever they do. What is more, I sincerely believe that the Government have some moral responsibilities in the matter. We hope that the Minister will make a statement tonight which is worthy of being passed on to the unfortunate pensioners.

3.56 am

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) for initiating the debate. He has done his constituents—several of whom, as he said, are affected by the Maxwell scandal—and the House a considerable service in enabling us to respond to his debate. It comes on the day after the formal response by the Securities and Investments Board to the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation report; so my hon. Friend's debate is in every way timely as well as welcome.

I shall respond to several matters which arise from my hon. Friend's speech and relate that to the SIB response. It was clear from a reading of the SIB response to the IMRO report that at one stage the SIB considered withdrawing recognition of IMRO. It decided instead that IMRO

"should be retained based on appropriate strengthening".

That strengthening is nowhere defined in the SIB's response. It would be helpful to know how it is proposed that IMRO should be strengthened, what role the Government intend to play in that and what action they propose to take.

My hon. Friend referred, and went straight to the point in so doing, to the position in which IMRO found itself. That position is criticised by the SIB. IMRO failed to have its ear to the ground to take note of what is described as "market talk" and should have been more sceptical about the information that was given to it.

Had IMRO paid more attention to market talk, and been more sceptical, it might have been able to see what other people suspected about Robert Maxwell's operations—and what IMRO clearly neither saw nor suspected —and the extent of that massive fraud. The SIB said that it

"views this with particular concern as the availability of such practical knowledge and alertness inside the regulators is a key feature of our"—

the United Kingdom's—

"regulatory system."

When that is not found to be available, it undermines that system.

If the present system is to be retained, we must hear from the Government—and those who maintain that the system should be retained in more or less its present form —how we can ensure that its basis is not undermined as a result of IMRO's failures in the Maxwell case.

The purpose of the present mix of statutory and self-regulation is contained and underpinned by the belief that IMRO, and the self-regulatory mechanism, is more desirable because it is closer to the market and is therefore more able to respond to what goes on in it. If, as would appear to be the case, that closeness is no guarantee of scepticism, or of being aware of the whisperings in the market and taking action accordingly, that calls into question the basis of the present regulatory system.

SIB goes on to say that IMRO's arrangements for granting admission to new members need "further scrutiny". Again, that begs the question: what form will that scrutiny take? What will happen when it is concluded, how long will it take, has it already started and when can Parliament expect to be advised of its outcome? So long as a question mark remains over the admission of new members, the very people to whom my hon. Friend referred—those whom the regulatory system is primarily designed to protect, people who are not necessarily sophisticated and aware of the ins and outs of the market, but who are drawn into and affected by it—cannot be sure that the regulatory bodies admit new members on a basis that is satisfactory in terms of their bona fides and their providence, and their confidence in the system is undermined.

Another key matter, as the SIB points out, is that IMRO needs to strengthen its rules on the handling of private interests of board members. That is certainly so and was evident in aspects of the Maxwell scandal which, with good cause, gave rise to public concern.

We believe that the SIB is in its own way as much to blame in this matter as IMRO. It was responsible for devising the principles of self-regulation, including the system whereby the self-regulatory organisations assess their own performance rather than subjecting themselves to outside examination. That is why my hon. Friend was absolutely right to link the SIB with the debate on the role of IMRO. They cannot be separated in this matter and both must bear a degree of culpability.

We have heard and read what the SIB says about the future of IMRO—we do not believe that it can survive. By postponing the inevitable, as the SIB does by its response, it does the system of regulation no service. We need to simplify the regulatory structure. We believe that we should have just one SRO for retail investment business and one to deal with the rest of the industry. In our view, that is the only way forward and the only way in which to ensure that confidence in the system is restored.

The Government must also address a number of other important issues. We would set them a number of tasks in

relation to the regulation of businesses managing pension fund investments. There is no room for tardiness, no room for a wait-and-see approach. The public demand expedition in this matter and I am afraid that that has not always been apparent in the Government's approach. There has been complacency. We can only hope that the transfer of aspects of responsibility from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Treasury shows the Government's determination to get to grips with the issues.

It is good to see the Economic Secretary to the Treasury in his place at seven minutes past 4 o'clock. I am used to seeing him at this time because of our time together in the Committee considering the Finance Bill. In fact, during that Committee stage, I saw more of the hon. Gentleman than I did my spouse—much to her chagrin. I look forward to hearing what he has to say.

We need to ensure that the responsibilities of all the regulatory authorities are clear, consistent and comprehensive. We need to provide for all investment business to be scrutinised adequately and continually, not only when such businesses are initially granted a licence. We need to lay down clear requirements for the other professionals involved, especially the auditors and the custodians of pension fund assets. There should be clear and regular reports to pension fund members.

My hon. Friend referred to some of his constituents who are Maxwell pensioners and who have suffered as a result of recent events. Those pension fund members are most immediately in our minds. The Government need to introduce a package that will be of immediate assistance to them. Compassion and the desire to preserve confidence in the regulatory system, the probity of our markets and the provision of financial services demand that. All those things demand action in support of the Maxwell pensioners. We look for some answers from the Government this morning and in the days to come.

4.9 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): I have listened with great care to the comments of the hon. Members for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) and for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). I appreciate that both of them have raised the general but important issue of public confidence in occupational pensions, and they are right to request reassurance on this matter. I trust that what I shall say will reassure the constituents of the hon. Member for Blackley and the public generally about the probity of pension funds and the investment management thereof, and the supervisory arrangements for the management and administration of pension funds.

Earlier today, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the Securities and Investments Board had published the summary of conclusions and findings of IMRO's review of its regulation of Maxwell companies—including Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd, and London and Bishopsgate International Investment Management plc. The SIB has also published its assessment of its own and IMRO's performance in this affair and the action that both the SIB and IMRO are taking to rectify the shortcomings identified. The SIB's assessment concludes that there were serious deficiencies in the supervision by IMRO of BIM and LBI. My right hon. Friend has placed a copy of the SIB's statement in the Library of the House.

The Government have made it clear throughout that it might not be possible for the SIB to publish the review in full. We have been advised that publication of the full review by the SIB or the Government at the present time could be severely prejudicial to criminal proceedings. The summary of findings and conclusions which the SIB has published is the most that the SIB believes it safe to publish consistent with this advice.

It may be helpful to hon. Members if I explain some of the background to this review and why it was necessary to examine thoroughly the regulatory and supervisory aspects of the investment management of Maxwell pension funds. As soon as the extent of the problems became clear last December, the SIB began conducting with IMRO a detailed review of IMRO's exercise of its regulatory responsibilities for BIM and LBI. It was essential to ensure that the review was comprehensive and thorough. The review deals with serious issues and the SIB needed to consider the findings carefully in order to assess the discharge of its responsibilities under the Financial Services Act 1986. My right hon. Friend received the SIB's assessment of its own and IMRO's performance only a few days ago, and asked the SIB to clarify a number of further issues raised by the IMRO review. The conclusions have been announced just as soon as this work was completed.

The central conclusion of the review is that IMRO fell short of the high standards which it properly expected of itself. In its own words:

"IMRO's verdict on itself is 'not good enough'."

The review concludes that BIM and LBI were properly admitted to membership, and that IMRO's admission procedures were adequately thorough. At the same time, the review concluded that monitoring was applied over-literally and without adequate senior control and review, and that when "high risk" members were identified, this was not always followed through by adequate monitoring thereafter. IMRO also accepts there were lapses of judgment, inadequate alertness in picking up signs of possible trouble and failure to relate diverse pieces of information.

On the positive side, the review notes that IMRO's monitoring procedures have been reviewed over the past six months; that IMRO has already put in hand some organisational changes and a modified system is being introduced to identify and focus resources on areas of higher risk. The review also notes that further re-examination is being undertaken and that IMRO will increase and strengthen the resources that it devotes to monitoring. In addition, the SIB has requested the IMRO board, as a matter of urgency, to produce proposals for strengthening its monitoring and other aspects, with which I will detail later.

The Government view the shortcomings identified in the SIB's assessment with serious concern and attach importance to the need for early action to ensure that the regulatory system is implemented more effectively.

However, neither regulator nor the system of regulation can guarantee that all fraud will be prevented or identified. The Maxwell affair was, as my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement, wholly exceptional—the vast majority of pension funds have served their members well. Furthermore, the IMRO review covers a relatively limited part of the Maxwell story. Under the Financial Services

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

Act, IMRO's role in supervising pension funds was to regulate and authorise pension fund managers. IMRO was not, and is not, responsible for ensuring that pension fund trustees respect their wider obligations under trust law. Moreover, effective regulation must in the final analysis involve the active co-operation of the private sector, including the professional advisers, financial institutions and others, all of which have their own responsibilities.

IMRO's performance also raises questions about the SIB's monitoring of IMRO and its general oversight of the self-regulatory organisations under the Financial Services Act. Both those issues were raised by the hon. Member for Blackley. My right hon. Friend has therefore asked Mr. Andrew Large, the SIB's new chairman, to conduct his own review of how the SIB carries out its regulatory responsibilities.

My right hon. Friend has also discussed with the chairman of the SIB the need to strengthen the implementation in practice of regulatory standards. Mr. Large fully understands the urgency and importance of that task. My right hon. Friend has asked to be kept closely in touch with progress on the further work, reviews and improvements that are now in hand.

The SIB and IMRO are effecting a number of measures immediately. A number of changes in the senior personnel of IMRO are taking place. First, Mr. Charles Nunnely, the deputy chairman of Robert Fleming, will chair the board of IMRO until a permanent success to Mr. Nissen has been appointed, and IMRO will also be appointing a new chief executive. Secondly, IMRO has put in hand organisational changes and will strengthen its monitoring resources. Thirdly, IMRO has issued a consultation document on changes to its regime for occupational pension scheme managers. Fourthly, at SIB's behest, the IMRO board is producing, as a matter of urgency, proposals for strengthening the experience, skill and organisation of its monitoring staff, its arrangements for dealing promptly and effectively with potential and actual investor risk and its rules on board members' interests.

For its part, the SIB wil review urgently IMRO's admission procedures and practices to ensure that its arrangements are satisfactory. It will also review IMRO's approach to monitoring its members, to ensure that the lessons of this particular case are applied generally.

Under its new chairman, Mr. Andrew Large, the SIB will re-examine the conduct of its own regulatory responsibilities and how to ensure that the lessons of Maxwell are taken into account in ensuring that all the regulators supervised by the SIB meet their responsibilities. In addition, the SIB intends to explore wider issues which fall within the responsibility of other regulators. Those issues include: a review of the supervision of the custody of investors assets; a review with the SROs and the accountancy organisations of the relations between auditors and regulators, particularly the mechanisms by which auditors pass relevant information to the Financial Services Act regulators; and arrangements to ensure effective communication between supervisory authorities.

It is to the credit of the SIB and IMRO that they have carried out this self-critical examination of their performance, published the findings for all to examine and presented positive proposals to improve regulation in future. *[Interruption.]*

It is easy for the hon. Member for Brent, South to be somewhat derisive about that, but we would be the first to criticise bodies that presented a whitewash report of their part in any scandal or collapse. The fact that IMRO and the SIB have been self-critical and have pointed to the need for changes and improvements in some areas is to their credit. The House should be grateful for that. It is to be hoped that others in the private sector, including the professional advisers and financial institutions, will examine their own roles as thoroughly and openly.

In this and earlier debates, hon. Members have asked whether the Government have responsibilities in this matter. First, it has been suggested that the DTI should not have granted LBI a principal's license under the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958. The hon. Member for Blackley spoke about that. I shall give him the facts. The licence came into effect on 26 April 1988 and lapsed on 29 April 1988 when the Financial Services Act came into force. The directors were notified as Andrew Smith, Kevin Maxwell and Larry Trachtenberg. Robert Maxwell did not become a director of LBI until June 1988. The DTI did not license Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd. The grounds for refusing a licence under the legislation then in force were, in fact, very limited. Unless there were previous convictions for fraud or dishonesty, or any other circumstances likely to lead to improper conduct of business, there was not sufficient reason for refusing a licence.

Under the Financial Services Act, however, IMRO was required to satisfy itself that the applicants were "fit and proper" to carry out an investment business and that they continued to be so. The fact that LBI was licensed briefly by the DTI did not in any way reduce the obligation of IMRO to conduct rigorous checks before admitting LBI to membership or to monitor LBI's performance.

In publishing the findings and conclusions of the IMRO review, the SIB has made it clear that IMRO complied with all its normal procedures in admitting LBI to membership and did not rest on the DTI licence.

The Leader of the Opposition has made several allegations that IMRO warned the Government that it could not do its job properly because of problems over the relationship between the Financial Services Act regime and trust law. This is quite wrong. In his statement, my right hon. Friend made it clear that he has looked into these allegations. Neither he nor the SIB has found any evidence to substantiate them. IMRO and the SIB made representations to the DTI over a number of years about the legal uncertainty which they believed was created by the interaction of the Financial Services Act and trust law. However, there was no suggestion that that uncertainty posed a threat to investor protection, and the SIB's conclusion is that neither the legal uncertainties created by the relationship between the Financial Services Act and trust law nor the existence of IMRO's special occupational pensions scheme regime made any material difference to IMRO's regulation of the Maxwell pension fund companies.

Much has been said about Professor Hayton's review. What it actually says is that pension fund regulation should be left to trust law. Following Professor Hayton's report, the DTI told IMRO and the SIB not to rely solely on trust law for regulating the management of occupational pensions schemes, and that it was for them to operate the system of regulation under the Financial Services Act to deliver adequate investor protection.

Neither IMRO nor the SIB at any time advised the DTI that it disagreed with this advice or was unable to deliver the degree of investor protection required.

Mr. Boateng: Is the Minister satisfied with the current state of trust law, on which the self-regulators are obliged to rely? If he is not, when and how does he propose to reform it?

Mr. Nelson: The Goode committee will consider such issues in its wider review. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced the establishment of the review, which will be thorough and wide-ranging. I am sure that it will examine carefully the question of trust law and the proper ambit of statutory law. I acknowledge the importance of these issues, and it is vital that they are considered carefully and that the House subsequently has an opportunity to examine any recommendations because they will have major implications for the structure and liabilities of pension funds and their trustees. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman that the matter is continuing to be considered. It will, I am sure, be a central part of the Goode review.

It has been suggested that, in view of the shortcomings identified by the IMRO review, the Government should now pay compensation. The Government have made their position on compensation quite clear. Everyone sympathises with the hardship and uncertainty suffered by victims of fraud, but no Government can accept a duty to make good losses resulting from fraud or theft of savings. The taxpayer cannot guarantee to make good losses in such cases. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has announced, however, a series of measures to help current and future pensioners, including emergency funding to underpin those Maxwell pensions at immediate risk.

Five positive measures are being taken to help current and future pensioners: first, emergency funding to underpin the Maxwell pensions at immediate risk is being made available by the Government; secondly, since 8 June, a special unit working with trustees and others to secure the speedy return of assets and the rebuilding of funds has been set up; thirdly, a trust is being established into which the private sector can pay voluntary contributions; fourthly, as I said, a comprehensive review of the framework of pension law is under way; and, finally, proposals have been announced on the introduction of employer debt provisions.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has made it clear that the priority must be to identify, locate and establish ownership of the stolen assets and to secure their return. The Government want to encourage and enable the financial institutions which have profited from Maxwell to assist the pensioners who have lost in this affair. Only those on the Opposition Front Bench seem to feel that this will be helped if the Government decide to make good some of the shortfall. There is no question of that.

It is clear that the chain of responsibilities had failings at many links, including trustees, banks, auditors, and investment advisers. The Government are doing all that they can to ensure that the assets of the Maxwell companies' pension funds are restored. We believe that all who have profited from Maxwell must meet their full responsibilities to help the Maxwell pensioners. Only those on Opposition Front Bench seem to think that this will be helped by the Government stepping in to offer compensation.

Mr. Boateng: And the pensioners themselves.

Mr. Nelson: The position of the pensioners themselves varies. As has been said, some of them are being provided for by the acceptance of responsibility and continuation of payment of funds. Of course, for the time being, those pensioners are certainly content with that position. I acknowledge that there may be some uncertainty about what the future holds when a pension is not fully funded and is reliant on the commitment of the company involved. However, the Governnment have proposed a package of financial help and have instigated a review, which is as much as they can and should do in this instance. Such measures are to be warmly welcomed by contributors to and beneficiaries of pension funds at large and, in particular, by the Maxwell pensioners.

No doubt the Goode committee will consider whether a wider compensation scheme should be established for occupational pension schemes. In the meantime, the Government are not prepared to pre-empt the committee's discussions or anticipate its recommendations in any way.

I turn finally to the regulatory framework, to which the hon. Member for Brent, South referred in his closing remarks. Perhaps it will help some Opposition Members if I explain how it works. The Financial Services Act 1986 introduced a new framework for investor protection, including wide-ranging statutory powers and new criminal offences. Responsibility under the Act is shared between the Treasury, which is responsible for the Act as a whole, the Securities and Investments Board, to which responsibility for the discharge of statutory functions under the Act has been transferred as the designated agency, and the regulatory and practitioner bodies, including IMRO, which are recognised by the SIB to discharge its statutory functions.

IMRO is responsible for ensuring that, in carrying on investment business, its members meet standards of honesty, competence and solvency. It is the SIB's job to be satisfied that IMRO continues to meet the criteria for self-regulatory bodies under the Act. These include having adequate arrangements and resources for the effective monitoring of its members and for enforcement and compliance with its rules and procedures. The Treasury is responsible for ensuring that the SIB is able and willing, as the designated agency under the Act, to discharge the statutory functions which have been transferred to it.

I do not accept that the Maxwell case demonstrates that the supervisory structure itself is deficient. The failings identified by IMRO and the SIB are shortcomings of implementation. The integrity and success of other businesses authorised under the Financial Services Act show that the regime can and does work well.

I acknowledge, however, that regulatory standards need to be strengthened. I have informed the House of the steps that are being taken by the SIB and IMRO, and the steps that my right hon. Friend will be taking to ensure that the operation of the regulatory system is sufficiently strengthened to deliver effective protection to investors.

I understand full well the concerns that the case has generated. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor stressed in his statement that he will be assessing the effectiveness of all the action already taken and proposed, together with

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the outcome of the SIB's further reviews. There are, of course, other issues which need to be examined, including the role of the other trustees of the Maxwell pension funds.

The lessons will need to be carefully considered to ensure that the regulatory system is sufficiently strengthened to deliver effective protection to investors, including members of pension funds. The Government are determined that all the lessons of the Maxwell affair, in its many aspects, must be learnt and implemented. My right hon. Friend and I will assess in detail over the coming months the effectiveness of the steps already taken by the SIB and IMRO, the additional action now proposed and the outcome of the SIB's further review. My right hon. Friend has promised to report back to the House.

I have spoken at some length about the Maxwell case, the review and my right hon. Friend's statement. I have done so in response to the real concerns that have been raised by the hon. Member for Blackley and the general points that he and the hon. Member for Brent, South made about public confidence in the pension industry. I hope that what I have said provides them and a wider audience with some reassurance.

Local Government Expenditure

4.33 am

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I am sure that you are well aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Members who seek debates at this hour are probably either mad or feel strongly about a particular subject. In the next hour or so, I suspect that you will have the chance to decide which state of mind applies to me.

It seems that the subject needs an airing for the following reasons. Over the years, our debates about local government finance have led to repetitive legislation and repetitive failure. Every piece of legislation has resulted in continued lack of control. That has led to more legislation. The circle goes round and round.

There are appalling relations between local government and central Government and a lack of affection for local government by the public. This adds up to a shaky future for local government. That is why the subject needs an airing, but why does it need one at 4.30 am, shortly before Parliament rises for the summer recess? *[Interruption.]* There is a good answer to why 4.30 am—my luck ran out. If I had drawn a reasonable hour, others would have been mocked for turning up at 4.30 am and I could have gone to bed and slept soundly.

Whether at 4.30, 5.30 or 6.30 am, the issue certainly needs raising before the House rises for the summer recess. The Local Government Commission is about to embark on its review of structure and services and the Government are still examining accountability and local democracy. If those matters are being considered, finance must also be considered. They go together. One reason for the failure over the years to get local government reform right is that one minute we consider finance and the next we consider structure. Whether it is 4.30 am or not, there is a real urgency to make the point that finance needs to be considered alongside those other matters.

There may be a temptation for people to say, "Ah yes, but we have done that. We are replacing the community charge with the council tax." However, the review of the community charge and the introduction of the council tax do not constitute a review of local government finance, just a review of one bit—that is, how to raise income. My argument is about the totality of local government finance, not simply the council tax. The Government need to go further than that.

If the totality of finance is not reviewed, the work of the Local Government Commission will ultimately fail and the future of local government will stay in doubt. If it is not done in the right order, finance will dominate. If all that we do is change to the council tax and say that that is the review of finance and all else follows from it, local government will continue to be dominated by finance as an end in itself, rather than the means that it should be.

If my argument is that the totality of finance needs reviewing now, why have I applied to have a debate on expenditure control in the early hours of the morning? It is because, in all the issues involved in local government finance, expenditure control is the key political issue which must be tackled first in any complete review of local government finance. Finance is a finite resource; there is never sufficient money to go round, irrespective of the political ideology brought to bear on the problem. Yet politicians of all ideologies—my party is as bad as the others—find it desperately easy to pretend that finance is

an infinite commodity. The result is that deficits, borrowings and so on are used to postpone the day of reckoning. Sooner or later, a total lack of realism develops, which leads to absurdities such as the lease and rent back of parking meters, and the whole issue of local government finance falls into further disrepute.

Expenditure control is the key priority and action is urgently needed. Expenditure must be kept within the finances available, whether we like that or not. Until that is achieved, all other financial issues—including whether we have a council tax, rates, or whatever—are red herrings. However—this is the rub—in this day and age the public find it intolerable that all their needs cannot be met at once, which leads to politicians finding it almost impossible to grapple with the problems of expenditure control. That makes expenditure control a high-risk topic, but that is inevitable. Those who ask the Government to face up to it usually end up being unpopular, but I am resigned to that.

To obtain effective expenditure control in local government, we must first control total expenditure, and that is highly controversial. Secondly, we must control properly the allocation of all the funds involved; that, too, is highly controversial. Thirdly, we must control and maximise the value obtained from the money that we spend. That should not be so controversial, but at the moment people seem to focus on that; yet it is mainly a managerial issue. It has become controversial because politicians have homed in on it and interfered in what is primarily a management matter, ducking the first two issues.

Perhaps I may digress slightly to say how we should not seek to achieve expenditure control, and that is by fretting over income. Looking back through *Hansard,* one sees recent attempts at that. There were debates about whether rates are the right way in which to obtain effective control, and it will be seen that that led to the introduction of the community charge. One of the great arguments was that that would make it easier to control things because it would result in greater accountability. That was discovered not to work, so the argument was deployed that the council tax would be the right way forward.

All those debates are about income and the methods of income control which have come on the back of that. First, we had rate capping—the capping of income. That did not work. We then had charge capping—the capping of income. The history of the whole subject proves that the approach of trying to control expenditure via income is doomed to failure. Any attempt to control expenditure via income leads to ever more draconian and ever more silly attempts at expenditure control. That route must be abandoned. The bad news for the Government is that capping will not work. The only way to control local government expenditure effectively is by controlling expenditure itself. That is what politicians hate, but unfortunately they have no choice but to do it.

We should be clear about the Government's role in the process of expenditure control in local government. That, too, is a highly controversial matter. If there were others silly enough to be here at this time of the morning, they would be jumping up and down saying that any discussion of the Government's role is all about centralisation and the removal of local democracy. That point is inevitably made, but it is nonsense. That, too, is a red herring.

There are two areas of expenditure control where the Government have a primary responsiblity about which we should be clear. The first is that, whether we like it or not, the Government have an on-going concern in all expenditure, simply because all expenditure affects the state of the economy, which means that the Government are bound to be involved. As all expenditure affects the state of the economy, that means that Government intervention in such matters is inevitable.

Again, if there were people here on the Conservative side they would be jumping up and down saying that we believe in non-intervention, but in a national economy even non-intervention has an effect on the economy. Therefore, non-intervention amounts to intervention. That particular circle will go round and round so that we end up concluding that, whether we like it or not, the Government have a role in all expenditure. We cannot get away from that. No amount of flag waving about local democracy can change that.

The second reason why the Government have a role to play in local government expenditure control is the good old principle of he who pays the piper calls the tune. Central Government currently provide some 86 per cent. of local government's money, and it follows as day follows night that the provider of such a large proportion of income will, quite properly, want an enormous say in how the money is spent. For better or worse, central Government are involved.

What should we do to control local government expenditure? I believe that there are three requirements. First, we must be absolutely clear about the source of all the finance with which we are dealing. Secondly, we must be absolutely clear about the purpose of all expenditure. Thirdly, we must know on whose behalf the expenditure is taking place; we must be absolutely clear about that, too.

The first requirement is fundamental, for a simple reason. Each source of money requires its own method of control. Central Government, for instance, can best control their own expenditure by simply saying no. In the case of spending by private citizens, however, it is not sensible for the Government to say no; the best way of controlling private expenditure is the imposition of expenditure taxation.

One of the worst examples of categorisation by source of money is the category that we call local government expenditure—the subject of this debate. That is perhaps the best example of how not to do things. What we call local government expenditure has not one but two sources. The first is local money; the second is central Government money. The local source can be further subdivided. Local money comes in the form of local taxation, fees, charges, interest on investments, borrowing, and so forth. Each of those many sources raises different issues in regard to control, and each is best controlled in a different way. In reality, local government expenditure—the label that we apply to all that money—is a pool of funds from a number of different sources, rather than a category in itself. That must be put right.

The second requirement for the proper control of expenditure is the clarification of its purpose. Currently, huge sums are allocated in a very general way, and apportioned to a particular purpose later. The result of that process is entirely predictable: it is acrimony. The recipient of the money does with it what he thinks right; the provider, who has not got what he expected, objects —and rows break out. *Hansard* and the newspapers are littered with examples.

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Why are we in this mess? There are two reasons. First, central Government, the provider of so much of the money, are in fact a multi-agency conglomerate with lots of different Ministries, all making their own allocations. Secondly, local government is a mini-government in its own right, and there are lots of different people deciding what to do with the money when they receive it. Each Ministry, and each council, determines its own priorities, and switches resources around as it thinks fit. Friction and muddle are inevitable in that process, and things are made worse by using the wrong approaches to try to solve that muddle. At present, attempts are made to control expenditure via the type of allocation rather than via the purpose of the expenditure.

For example, general allocations in local government are worked out using wondrous formulae. Allocations against bids, such as those for the housing improvement programme, are worked out in a general way. Allocations against bids for lumps of money or general allocations via grants are both incredibly easy to reallocate. If money is handed out in that way, we should not be surprised if it is not used for the purpose for which it was intended.

The other method is agency allocation. Motorway repair contracts are a good example of that. If money is allocated to repair the M3, it is incredibly difficult for the person who receives it to use it for any other purpose. It seems crystal clear, therefore, that we should allocate all money against specific purposes rather than shovelling it out in large sacks.

The third requirement that central Government must take on board is the need to clarify whether expenditure is being made to purchase a service or to provide a service. Those are fundamentally different functions. The test is to ask on whose behalf the expenditure is being made. Taking the fire service as an example, we must ask whether its expenditure is carried out on behalf of the Home Office or of local government. Confusion may arise, and some people may say that the money is spent on behalf of local government while others say that it is on behalf of the Home Office—but that is because many people fail to think through what local government really amounts to, and what it really does when it provides a specific service. Sometimes—as, I suggest, is true with the fire service—local government acts simply as a service delivery agent. The Home Office provides more than 85 per cent. of the money for the fire service and also sets the standard, so the Home Office is purchasing a service.

On the other hand, when local government acts as a mini-government in its own right, it is free to decide what to do. It cannot be acting in that capacity with the fire service, because it is not free to abandon its fire service or to lower the standards. One has to think that conclusion through. If we give local authorities large amounts of general money and leave them to get on with it, they will always act as mini-governments.

For example, the standard spending assessment for my county of Surrey says that the authority needs to spend a certain amount on social services, so it is given an allocation of money to spent that amount. But Surrey spends £8 million less than its allocation on social services, with the result that my mailbag is full of complaints about the poor standards of social services—yet the county still receives that money.

However, if we look on the process as one of purchasing services from local government, an authority is pinned down to acting as a contractor, not as a mini-government. Then one can control the expenditure if one provides the money, and can specify via a contract the standards that, as the provider of that money, one expects. Thus, effective expenditure control requires us to be absolutely clear when local government is acting as a contractor and when it is acting in its own right. That confusion must be sorted out.

How can central Government improve their role in the control of local government expenditure? The thought process starts with a paradox: the current arrangements appear to be designed to weaken rather than to strengthen expenditure control. The source categories are wrong and there are huge, generalised allocations—both marvellous ways of weakening control rather than strengthening it. If central Government want to control local government finance effectively, they must reorganise provision, allocate all moneys to specific services, end the use of general formulae, and specify the basis on which funds are transferred to local government.

The first step is to reorganise the provision of finance. I said that central Government is a multi-agency arrangement. The process is that central Government gather in most of their money via one Ministry—the Treasury. Many separate Ministries then decide expenditure allocations, and the resources are then handed over to the Department of the Environment to pass on to local government.

That is a wondrously effective recipe for ineffective control. All sorts of different people have a finger in the pie. I argue that every Ministry should pass on its own funds direct to those whom it chooses to provide services. That is bad news for my hon. Friend the Minister, and I am sorry—but the Department of the Environment should be involved in handing on only money for which it is responsible, rather than in passing on money via a general allocation in respect of services in which the Home Office or the Department of Education, for example, is involved. That fundamental change must be made as quickly as possible.

The second step is for central Government to allocate all their funds to specific services and to specify and clarify the categories of service to which moneys are being allocated. The problem is that we do not get those categories right either. The general formula used now includes many categories which do not represent whole services. If money is allocated to such categories, attempts to exercise control become fragmented—with the result that the public's needs are not met, services are duplicated, and there is a great deal of waste. That is a recipe for disaster.

If service categories are too big, other problems arise. Education provides a classic example. As a label for local government purposes, it covers a wide range of provision—including nursery services, primary schools, secondary schools, school lunches, clothing grants, and special help for the poor and handicapped. They are all separate services, and they each raise different issues of service provision and control. If progress is to be made, they all require a different approach and must not be lumped together.

Education is seen as an all-embracing term, but for a local government councillor, it does not encompass private schools or universities. Muddle comes out of that. Large categories also mean different things to different people.

When councillors meet a Minister and say, "We want to talk about education," they mean schools, lunches, clothing grants, and special schools. However, the Minister in the Department of Education to whom they were speaking would not mean the same thing when he or she replied. The Minister would mean schools and universities, but the councillors would not be talking about universities. While listening to the councillors saying that it was very difficult to help the handicapped, the Minister would have no right to discuss that issue. Councillors would mean one set of services and the Minister would mean something else. That would be a dialogue between two people using different languages. Using too large categories can produce that kind of muddle and that must be sorted out.

The Government must move away from using formulas which are the consequence of having too large categories and simply shovelling out large amounts of money. Because they do not work, they become ever more complex and silly. The best example of that at the moment is the fact that the allocations of all councils in England have been affected in the current year by the number of tourists in London. That cannot be sensible or a recipe for effective service delivery or financial control.

The Government must also specify the basis on which they are handing over the money. By that I mean that they have three choices: they can tell local government that they are handing the money over as a grant; they can tell local government that they are lending the money and that they want it back at some stage in the future; or they can say that they are paying local government to do something for them.

If one gives someone a grant or loan, one puts a huge distance between oneself and the person who receives the grant or loan. If that distance is established, it is almost impossible to control what happens after one has made the grant. If one makes a payment for something, however, one maintains that link. If one focuses on making payments and treating local government as a service delivery contractor, one will have maximum control of expenditure and maximum input into the standards received.

For example, if one makes a general grant to a local education authority, one has very little control over what happens in that LEA, but if one makes a payment to a grant-maintained school, one has a great deal of say in what happens in that school.

It follows that deciding who purchases each service is at the heart of getting effective expenditure control. However, local government seems to be obsessed with what it controls, even though it provides only 15 per cent. of the finance. In other words, it does not control what it thinks it controls, but only a very small part of it. That thought process must end. I believe that in future local government should control only what it actually purchases with its own money. It should not control what it purchases on behalf of central Government using central Government money. That amounts to a fundamental change in the role of local government.

We must be careful when we ask ourselves who should purchase what. My argument is that those who decide what needs will be met, and what standards should be achieved, should be the people who purchase the service. If we break that link and the person doing the purchasing does not decide the needs or standards, there will be an endless dispute about the adequacy of money, about value for money and about standards. That is exactly what we have now.

Although that approach is radical, I believe that it is the only way to achieve what we seek. Turning every central Government Ministry into the purchaser of its own services would enable each Ministry to decide who to use. Of course, the Ministries will want to continue to use local government when local government seems to be the best way to deliver the service, but they will have a choice. That route will maximise effectiveness and improve value for money, because there will be a much closer specification of what is expected from the allocation of money than there is at present.

There will be some who say that such an argument appears to preclude any local input. That is the centralising argument which will crop up from time to time. Nevertheless, there is a role for local government and for local governing bodies, and that must be strengthened; however, I would digress if I went down that track.

Those proposals add up to a radical overhaul of local government finance. Central Government must assume responsibility for their own expenditure. Each Ministry must do its own purchasing. Local government, when acting as a service delivery agent, must compete for the work that it wants to carry out. Each service delivery organisation, be it local government or the voluntary sector, must have it own governing body. The impact of that for local government is clearly profound. Some say that it will take away power, but the impact on local government will be to free local government from its preoccupation with the limited range of services that it currently provides.

Local government will be free to play a monitoring role in all local services, whether or not it provides them, which is a great enhancement of the role of local government and would give it scope to have an input into meeting all local needs. Even if local government does not provide the service, it will have a role in saying how such needs should be met.

The result for local government is not bad news, but good news. It will make local government focus on the needs of the people, which is what it should be doing. It will make councillors' work much more rewarding and much more respected by the public. It will also give central Government Ministries far better control over their own standards. It will mean that central Government will be seen for what they are—the source of help when a service is provided and when central Government pay for it. Councils will be free to spend their own funds in any way they wish. For the money that they raise locally, it will be much easier for them to set their own priorities. Local taxation will be drastically cut and, with a bit of luck and a following wind, there will be far fewer debates on local taxation. The real bottom line of that train of thought is that, for the first time in a very long time, we shall achieve expenditure control in local government.

The benefits of such a radical rethink are huge. We shall have an increased diversity of services, greater sensitivity to needs, better management, increased competition, reduced centralisation, and greater accountability to the public. We shall actually have stronger local democracy, because it will be more respected, and there will be more scope for citizens to do their own thing and to take part. That list of benefits was to be found in every party manifesto at the previous general election, so my points

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should not upset any hon. Members, whether they support my party or somebody else's party. That radical rethink leads to what all manifestos want. Therefore, I not only urge my hon. Friend the Minister to go down that track but hope that Labour Members and others will encourage him.

5.8 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robin Squire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) for the lucid way in which he made his case. At the very least, he has ensured that, in years to come, if I am asked whether I have lost sleep over control of local authority finance, I can answer in the affirmative.

My hon. Friend and I go back a number of years. On the Environment Select Committee, we somehow contrived not to discuss that issue, but we have obviously enjoyed the experience today. I have a certain sense of déjà vu coming to another debate about the control of local government expenditure so soon after we have completed the capping round for 1992-93. My hon. Friend has, however, taken this opportunity to raise a number of significant issues about the way forward.

I am, of course, happy to set out why we have attached and will continue to attach great importance to the level of local government spending. Although there is a good deal of common ground between us, I feel that the approach which he advocated, which would involve a much greater role for central Government as the purchaser of services that are currently the responsibility of local Government, has distinctively different emphases from the vision which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State recently expressed as to how we see the future of local government.

The starting point of expenditure control must be that Governments are responsible for the overall management of the economy. I know that I am at one with my hon. Friend on that point. The Government are concerned with levels of borrowing, spending and taxation at national and local level. There is nothing new in that. Parliament has always exercised control over the financing of local government as regards the nature of local government's sources of revenue and the extent to which local expenditure is supported by central Government.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) made this point to the House with his accustomed eloquence on 5 December 1990 when he said:

"in the end, power lies in this House . . . no Chancellor of the Exchequer can tolerate a challenge to his authority to manage the economy with prudence and discipline."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 319.]

Local authority revenue expenditure, whether it is financed by national or local taxation, affects the overall burden of taxation in the economy. Local authority taxation—whether community charges under the current system or council taxes from next April—feeds directly into the retail prices index. Indeed, what I might call the twin purposes of capping are to contribute to the control of public spending, thereby continuing the pressure on inflation and maintaining economic progress, and to limit the burden of national and local taxation.

It is worth reminding ourselves that local authorities are responsible for more than a quarter of all public spending. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities told the House during the recent debate on the capping order, local government expenditure is now running at some £65 billion. That is well over £1,000 for every man, woman and child every year.

The need for some control over that volume of expenditure is scarcely a new idea. I recall that it was a Labour Secretary of State for the Environment who declared all those many years ago—indeed, even before the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and I were thought of in political terms—"The party's over." He secured a considerable reduction in the level of local government current and capital expenditure.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): When the then Secretary of State said of local government that the party was over, I am sure that he did not mean that the wake was about to begin. The tragedy for local government under the stewardship of the Conservative party is that that stewardship precipitated the end of local government as we knew it and the beginning of something different, totally centralised, grossly under-resourced and ill-equipped to do its job.

Mr. Squire: I reject that view of what has happened in local government. As I said not a moment ago, when local government spends some £1,000 each year for every man, woman and child, I would have to go a long way to recognise the description that the hon. Gentleman gives.

We take the view that it remains reasonable in the interests of our wider economic goals to expect local authorities to play their part in restraining their expenditure, just like others, throughout the public and private sectors.

Indeed, I may embarrass my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne by quoting back at him, with approval, some remarks that he made at the time of the capping debate in 1990. That debate, which I am sure that many hon. Members will recall, was a somewhat highly charged affair, full of speeches about savage cuts in services which came to assume the generic, if not necessarily elegant, title of "bleeding stumps". His comments then were a salutary corrective to some of the wilder allegations and, if I may make so bold, form an excellent summary of the Government's position. He said:

"The debate . . . is not about how local government is financed . . .It is not about the structure and size of local government . . . Nor is it directly about services themselves . . . However important services might be, and I do not seek to underplay them . . . This debate is about how much local government spends . . . at the end of the day we cannot spend what we have not got."

In 1990-91, local authorities used the move to the new system as a smokescreen to disguise vastly increased expenditure. Spending rose by 13·5 per cent. and during the two-year period to April 1991, spending had risen by about a quarter. That was, I am afraid, the result of allowing authorities to decide what level of expenditure they felt appropriate. Such increases could only be described as staggering.

With the fundamental shift from local to national taxation for the funding of local services, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the 1991 Budget, we were even more determined to ensure that there should be no repetition of such overspending.

I am happy to report that those extra resources from national taxpayers have not been frittered away. Although

I am sure that that is in large part due to a greater sense of realism on the part of authorities, it is also because we signalled our determination that it should not happen.

For 1991-92 and 1992-93, we took action to announce provisional capping criteria, so that authorities were aware of our intentions before setting their budgets. As a result, local authority spending came out only about 1 per cent. above the amount for which we had made provision in the settlement.

This year, more than 400 authorities have budgeted within, or very close to, the limits implied by our provisional criteria. That is a result in which local government can take considerable satisfaction. It is also one which shows that some of the more hyperbolic statements made from time to time about capping are, to put it mildly, exaggerated.

That is where we are. There is certainly room for improvement. We would wish to see—and my right hon. and learned Friend has expressed the hope—the year when no authority will be capped. For 1993-94, we have signalled our intention to follow the precedent of this year and the preceding one, and to announce provisional capping criteria in the autumn, so that those can be taken into account by authorities in the process of setting their budgets for the year.

Next year is, of course, an important one. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities mentioned in the debate on the capping order that local government needs an independent tax which can be brought in at sensible and affordable levels. Next year is the first year of the council tax. Some things will change. Perhaps most significantly—unlike both the rates and the community charge—the council tax is both a property tax and a personal tax. But, although the nature of the tax will change, the wider context will not.

We remain committed to the principle that local authorities should not be able to obscure their true levels of expenditure from their domestic taxpayers. That is bad for business and bad for accountability. We consider that there should be stable grant system to equalise bills throughout the country. The council tax system will not be accompanied by significant changes to the revenue support grant system. We remain committed to the principle that overspending against standard spending assessment should come home directly to those who pick up the bill. But we are also determined to safeguard the position of local residents, as both local and national taxpayers. We have taken powers in the Local Government Finance Act 1992, which are analogous to the current charge-capping powers.

Those with good memories may, however, recall that, for the first year of capping under the community charge, we used only the "absolute excessiveness" criterion—the comparison between an authority's budget and its SSA. That allowed many very significant increases in budget from the last year of the old rating system to go largely unchecked. I should therefore mention that our powers under the 1992 Act allow us to specify a base position at the start of the new system for measuring increases in budget for 1993-94. That is important.

Looking further ahead, we can expect the structure of local government to change as the Local Government Commission goes about its work. Although organisation and functions may alter, there is no reason why local taxpayers should be exposed to higher bills as a result. They will be receiving the same services albeit, perhaps, from a new authority. Nor is there any reason why new authorities should be removed for the first year of their existence from the capping regime, as far as increases in budget are concerned. Thus, for the years after 1993-94, we shall also be able to specify a base position for measuring increases in budget, where there has been structural or functional change. However, although we must ensure that we are able to take action, as I have said, we very much hope that it will not be necessary to do so.

My hon. Friend has suggested that the achievement of financial control is concerned with three issues. The first is the control of total expenditure, and as I have said, I think that we are at one on that. Secondly, my hon. Friend suggests that the allocation of funding between competing needs should be directly controlled. His concern is that purchasers of services should be identified and have responsibility for the necessary resources; thus, central Government would assume full control of much expenditure and would directly purchase those services that it funds. Local government would raise only that amount of funding required to meet community needs that are truly local.

My hon. Friend's third main point relates to the importance of maximising value for money. It is a point closely related to the purchasing of services and is something to which I wish to return a little later. My immediate concern is with his proposals for the allocation of responsibility for certain services and their associated funding. That issue is, at heart, about local accountability and responsibility. My hon. Friend had some words of wisdom in the capping debate in 1990 with which I cannot but agree. He said:

> "Local councils are best at assessing local need, and in responding to it. They are best at service assessment and arranging service provision. Parliament exists to settle what is best for the nation . . . the Government will settle what expenditure limits there must be, and local councils, which are closest to the people, must sort out the priorities."—[*Official Report*, 11 July 1990; Vol 176, c. 416-420.]

We do not wish to tell local councils how to order their priorities or which services to provide.

Mr. Wilshire: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Squire: Yes, but I do not want to do so too often.

Mr. Wilshire: I should like to draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that central Government, quite properly, do not leave those things to local government. If I understand the situation correctly, Derbyshire police force, which is a local government matter, has been refused a certificate of competence. The Government have stepped in, entirely correctly, because they recognise that certain things cannot be left to local government although the money goes to it. Is that not the point that I have been trying to make?

Mr. Squire: I draw a distinction between the monitoring of areas of local authority expenditure, including the example that my hon. Friend cited, that will often fall either on Government or on a Government agency, and, quite separately, the centralised funding of local authority services where, as my hon. Friend knows and as I am seeking to make clear, the Government believe that local authorities should be able to determine their priorities. It is the proper exercise of that local discretion that forms the basis of local accountability by which we all set considerable store.

[Mr. Squire]

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State made clear in his recent speech to the Association of District Councils' annual conference, we do not need to imagine that central and local government will agree about everything to accept that there can and should be a good working relationship between the two within a broad consensus. There will never be complete agreement about spending. That is perhaps too much to ask. However, the vast majority of authorities have accepted the need—albeit, perhaps unwelcome—for restraint and the need to set sensible budgets which local people and the country can afford. But within those broad constraints there is considerable scope for authorities to improve the quality and the value of their services while setting reasonable levels of council tax.

I am sure that the majority of authorities no longer consider that there is a pot of gold from which an endless supply of resources can be provided. They accept that it is for the Government and Parliament to decide what the country can afford and for local authorities themselves to use that provision to the best possible effect. In doing so, they should be mindful not only of costs but of the quality of the service provided. Through our powers to cap, we can exert restraint on the amount that authorities can raise from local people so that they are not soaked. Through our other initiatives to encourage greater efficiency, particularly the client-provider split and increased competition, we can move towards securing a better return for those resources.

I know that my hon. Friend has consistently argued that councils should be representative of the whole range of local services rather than those which are currently the responsibility of local government. Our views about the future structure of local government will be well known to my hon. Friend. He has made a valuable contribution to the final form of the legislation and his views have helped to shape the guidance which we will issue to the commission. I know that there are still differences between us on some specific points, but certainly we share the same goals. We want the authorities emerging from the commission's work to be well placed to address the needs of local people. We want a structure of local government to suit the needs and wishes of local people, not the administrative convenience of service deliverers. There is nothing between us on that.

Local authorities are responsible for a wide range of functions and it is in discharging those functions that they meet or fail to meet the demands and proper expectations of their people. We therefore must have a structure of local government which enables local authorities to carry out their functions effectively and conveniently. That is not, of course, to say that the authorities must deliver all their services themselves—far from it. The best way to meet local needs is to check all the options for service delivery and to go for the best. That is the heart of our policy on the enabling role of local authorities.

Our view of the role of local government is one of facilitating the provision of services and of acting in partnership with central Government and others to secure that provision. We see a clear role for local government as the representatives of local communities, responsive to their needs and—this is the vital point—best able to assess in many instances their requirements. It is being close to the grass roots, to those for whom the service is being provided, that is important. Local government in many cases fulfils that role and does so effectively. It is therefore frequently appropriate for local government to decide how it responds to local needs.

I know that my hon. Friend distinguishes very clearly between the centralised purchase of specific services and the provision of those services. Some of the initiatives that we have developed—I am thinking here of grant-maintained schools—show that it is not necessarily local government which is best placed. Sometimes it is possible to move even closer to the grass roots and to respond, for example, to the views of parents. In these cases, we are providing people with greater say on choice and we are involving people more directly in the way that services are run.

I have my doubts that creating councillors who are responsible for monitoring the standards of local services but who are not responsible for securing their provision and who raise only a very small amount of money locally is likely to enhance local accountability.

Mr. Boateng: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Squire: I am delighted to welcome the hon. Gentleman for the second time.

Mr. Boateng: Is not that precisely what the Government have done in housing? They have taken away from local authorities the responsibility for the direct provision of housing, given it to the Housing Corporation and housing associations and then expected local authorities to provide for the homeless and to have an overall monitoring role. Given the hon. Gentleman's rational analysis, is it any surprise that that simply is not working?

Mr. Squire: The House will have difficulty recognising reality in what the hon. Gentleman says. My memory is that, in the current year, local authorities are still spending up to £3 billion, which is a significant sum by any standard. Many of those authorities are spending it wisely to improve their existing stock. If they are also bringing into use many of the empty properties that, sadly, too many local authorities still have, they will be doing a double service to their local charge payers.

It seems to me that the principle of local accountability must rest on the decisions of local councillors—rather than central Government—who are responsible for services which their communities use and who raise a reasonable amount of money locally to contribute towards those services. I suspect that, if local taxation were to be marginalised to the extent that my hon. Friend suggests, the importance of local government would be correspondingly reduced and there would certainly be problems with accountability if they had only limited influence over service issues.

It seems to us that the key to securing better value for money in the provision of local services does indeed lie with the purchaser-provider split. We believe that the closer the purchaser is to those for whom the service is being provided, the more responsive and effective will be that service. It is for this reason that we believe that local authorities will continue to have a major role as a facilitator and hence purchaser of services for local people.

The purchaser-provider split in local government is a major force in securing value for money on behalf of

councils' residents. It ensures that councils are accountable not only for the choices which they make between competing priorities but for the efficient delivery of high-quality services to meet those needs.

Local government has historically been at the forefront of delivering services, often of a high quality, to the general public. The challenge facing local authorities is to identify local requirements, establish priorities, determine the appropriate levels of service which charge payers need and demand and ensure that those levels of service are consistently achieved. Those tasks are the very heart of what a local authority should be achieving for local people. An authority is not simply a bureaucracy which imposes restrictions on their aspirations; it is the means by which local communities can secure a better quality of public service and a better quality of life.

Compulsory competitive tendering has not just been a financial success but has made local authorities consider carefully, perhaps for the first time, what levels of service are required and how to measure outputs to ensure that those services are properly provided. That has given local authorities the ability to decide what standard of service they should seek. They have found that there is often room for quality to improve without a corresponding increase in costs. It is generally recognised that CCT has encouraged greater efficiency. Far from declininig, standards of service in the activities subject to CCT have, in fact, generally been maintained or improved. Authorities have taken advantage of the need to sit down and think through the needs of their communities and to demand higher standards. CCT has made a direct contribution to an improved quality of public service and we look to seeing it continue to do so in services currently subject to competition.

I think that most people accept that CCT for manual services has been successful in terms of the benefits which it has delivered both to local authorities and to their charge payers. However, now is not the time for authorities to sit back contented, or perhaps even to breathe a sigh of relief. There are other local authority activities that could benefit equally from the improved levels of service, greater efficiency and better value for money which can be realised through competition.

Many authorities have already recognised that and have gone beyond the requirements of legislation to try novel approaches to the delivery of a much greater range of services—*[Laughter.]* A number have organised service departments into separate business units that now act as contractors, working to the specification of the client core of the authority. Others have market-tested or contracted out a range of professional and executive services, and all have found that they have shown financial benefits or benefits in the quality of service delivered, sometimes both.

I note that some of my comments in the past few minutes have apparently aroused amusement in the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng).

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): And among the Back Benchers.

Mr. Squire: And among the massed Back Benchers.

As recently as yesterday, I met and spent a long time with representatives of a county council who convinced me of the many significant steps that they were already taking, in advance of any legal requirements, to make themselves more efficient and effective. I congratulate them on that, as I do all authorities that are taking such steps. I do not regard that as humorous; I regard it as in everybody's wider interests.

Mr. Boateng: It is because a number of Opposition Members present——

Mr. Squire: Two.

Mr. Boateng: I repeat: it is because a number of Opposition Members present——

Mr. Home Robertson: One.

Mr. Boateng: It is because one of us has a certain fondness for the Minister, remembering him in his role as the representative—sometimes the lone representative—of sanity among the Conservative ranks against the then Government, and as a distinguished member of the Select Committee on the Environment, that I laugh now to hear him become so very much the perfect ministerial man. He repeats a brief——

Mr. Home Robertson: Parroting.

Mr. Boateng: As my hon. Friend says, the Minister parrots a brief that bears no resemblance to what he must know is the case on the ground—the tragedy of what local government has become.

Mr. Squire: My only response is to regret that the hon. Gentleman—who indeed spent many happy hours in my company on the Select Committee on the Environment—has lost contact with what is happening in local authorities since he turned his attention to Treasury matters.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): The hon. Gentleman has become an embittered man.

Mr. Squire: As my hon. Friend suggests, the hon. Gentleman may have become an embittered man. It is very sad.

The Government have made clear their commitment to the principle of extending competition in the provision of local authorities. The proposals contain plans to extend CCT to the construction-related professions such as architectural, engineering and property management services. We recognise that those services differ in character from the blue-collar services that are already subject to competition. The evaluation of tenders, for example, is not simply a matter of price. Authorities may also need to evaluate the quality of tenders, in itself sometimes a subjective judgment.

The areas to which we have proposed to extend CCT are different from those activities that have thus far been subject to the regime, and the consultation paper recognises that there may be a need to modify legislation in some cases. I cannot pretend that there has been a positive rush of support from all sides of local government for our proposals. Perhaps many of the objections stem from a misunderstanding of what we propose. It is clearly not sensible simply to apply the existing CCT regime to professional services which are themselves different in character from services such as refuse collection or street cleaning.

The question that we need to ask is not whether competition is appropriate for these services but how best it can be achieved, and how best to balance the flexibility that authorities rightly seek against the need to ensure that

[Mr. Squire]

the benefits of competition can be brought to authorities unwilling to look properly at alternative forms of service delivery.

Both central and local government have as their raison d'être the provision of high-quality services to the general public. The citizens charter will play an important part in promoting high standards. Local authorities are already responding to the challenge. Competition has also proved an effective tool in improving public services and has benefited not only local taxpayers but authorities themselves.

We have successfully moved away from the idea that in order to improve services, it is necessary to spend more. I think that there is also broad acceptance of the need to spend only what the country can afford. I hope that this will mean that our capping powers become more a symbol of our determination not to let up on the need for sensible and affordable budgets, rather than being a tool which we frequently use to curb the excesses of individual authorities. I hope that all this will mean that we can concentrate on the real job of local government, which is to facilitate the provision of services to their local communities, which are high in quality and low in cost, and to be accountable to them for the results.

Nuclear Waste Store (Torness and Hunterston)

5.36 am

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I seem to recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you and I were elected to the House at by-elections on the same day in October 1978. I wish that I could congratulate you at a time other than 5.36 on a Friday morning on your elevation to the Chair, but I do so anyway.

I am grateful for this opportunity to debate the proposal by Scottish Nuclear Ltd. to store 1,200 tonnes of highly radioactive waste nuclear fuel for at least 80 years in a building at Torness in East Lothian and a slightly smaller quantity at Hunterston in Ayrshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), whose constituency includes Hunterston, cannot be present for the debate, although he has an obvious interest in the subject and had an article on it published in the *Glasgow Herald* earlier this week.

There has been remarkably little public debate on the proposal. Therefore, I am anxious to ensure that all aspects of the idea should be fully understood. That is why I have asked the Secretary of State for Scotland to order a public inquiry in the Dunbar area to consider the whole subject before any decision is taken on the construction of a dry store for nuclear fuel.

I stress that my comments about the lack of public debate are no criticism of Scottish Nuclear, which from the start has been commendably open about its ideas and plans. That is a welcome contrast to the regime of secrecy which has tended to surround all aspects of nuclear energy policy in the past. Scottish Nuclear originally gave me a full briefing at Torness power station on 12 April 1991, and last month it went to the length of taking me and my hon. Friends the Members for Cunninghame, North and for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) all the way to Denver in Colorado to see a dry store for nuclear fuel which is almost identical to the facilities that it plans for Scotland.

I put a parliamentary question to the Secretary of State for Scotland on 18 April 1991 asking for a statement on Government policy. I raised the subject in a debate on 25 April last and I wrote to the Secretary of State for Scotland on 27 May 1991 expressing various concerns. On 17 February this year, I tabled a further question calling for an inquiry, and most recently, on 6 May, I wrote again to the Secretary of State for Scotland underlining my view that an inquiry should be held before any decision is made about the construction of a dry store at Torness.

However, the Scottish Office seems to keep hedging. A reply from the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) on 3 June merely confirmed:

"a Public Local Inquiry may indeed be the best way of considering unresolved representations."

Incidentally, I am sorry that the hon. Member for Eastwood, who is responsible for these affairs, is not here to face the music, and I am especially sorry that it is my old friend, the other Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who has had to spend part of the night waiting to reply to this debate.

To return to the issue of unresolved representations, I understand that there have been very few representations, although East Lothian district council and the East

Lammermuir community council, which covers Torness, have joined me in expressing reservations and in calling for a public inquiry.

It is amazing that a proposal to erect repositories for high-level waste nuclear fuel, close to populated areas in central Scotland, has not generated more attention. I say that particularly in view of the fuss some years ago about the proposal for a repository for low-level waste in Essex and the outcry against plans for underground repositories for intermediate-level waste at various sites at present. I cannot understand why a permanently shielded and absolutely secure underground store should be so controversial if the storage of high-level waste fuel in a simple concrete building at Torness can progress without any opposition from the organisations which usually have so much to say about the possible hazard of nuclear physics.

It seems that debate has been somewhat restricted because of a very unusual coincidence between the financial interests of Scottish Nuclear and one of the campaigning objectives of organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace: Scottish Nuclear properly wants to save money by avoiding the costs of having fuel reprocessed and stored at Sellafield, and the anti-nuclear lobby wants to undermine the future of Sellafield by depriving it of its work.

That is all very well, but the lack of the usual chorus of objections might lead to a decision being taken before my constituents in East Lothian have a proper opportunity to consider the possible consequences for their neighbourhood and their descendants in the next century and beyond. That is why I am taking this opportunity to make a further plea for a public inquiry, and I hope that the Minister will be able to say something positive about that.

I stress again that I have no complaints about Scottish Nuclear. It has a duty to make decisions on a commercial basis, and that is what it is doing. I also fully accept the important role of nuclear power generation at present and in the foreseeable future. Most of Scotland's electricity is generated at Torness and Hunterston, and the nuclear industry is an important element of the economy not only in my constituency but in North Ayrshire, Caithness and, indeed, in the Minister's constituency of Dumfries. The nuclear industry in Scotland has a good record and I welcome the fact that it is still in public ownership. That should impose a duty on the Government to face long-term decisions about the storage of waste fuel and other radioactive residues. The industry requires decisions for the permanent storage of its radioactive residues, and my main concern about the current proposals is that they are another stop-gap effort to postpone costly decisions which the Government should face.

I have already said that I have seen the modular vault dry store—MVDS for short—which has been constructed, and loaded, to the design of GEC Alsthom at Fort St. Vrain in Colorado. It is an admirably simple design. The fuel elements are contained in steel tubes, which are retained vertically in a concrete structure. There is a natural air flow from an inlet at the base of the store, past all the tubes and out through a chimney at the top, which keeps the stored fuel cool. It is a bit like an old-fashioned farmyard corn stack.

The principle is admirably simple and it is difficult to believe that much could go wrong. In theory, nothing should go wrong although there was serious trouble at the only similar facility in the United Kingdom at Wylfa in Anglesey in 1991 when water got through a flat roof—surprise, surprise! it has been known to happen in other buildings—and corroded the magnesium containers. A report in the *New Scientist* of 2 March 1981 states:

> "Rotting fuel rods in the world's largest dry store for spent radioactive fuel in North Wales could cause a catastrophic fire. The magnesium 'can' which surrounds the rods has corroded so badly that the radioactive metal is exposed.
>
> If water penetrates the cladding of the element it can react with the metallic uranium fuel. One of the corrosion products is uranium hydride, which can ignite spontaniously in air. If enough uranium hydride burns, it can ignite the metallic uranium and release the highly radioactive fission products "held" in the uranium bar. This would constitute a major nuclear accident."

Happily, none of those things came to pass. I understand that the problem has been dealt with at Wylfa. I am glad to say that the buildings that are proposed for Torness and Hunterston have pitched roofs. Nevertheless, the incident shows that things can go wrong.

Other possible snags include corrosion from inside the tubes caused by water picked up by the fuel elements while they are being cooled in ponds before storage, or physical damage to fuel if a tube is accidentally dropped during handling.

The fundamental issues that must be addressed are, first, whether it is right to be proliferating stores containing highly radioactive fuel elements at power stations around the country and, secondly, how long will the fuel remain in these temporary stores? Thirdly, where will it be taken for permanent storage and/or reprocessing? Given our habit of fudging difficult questions about radioactive waste, there must be genuine concern that the fuel might remain for literally centuries in stores that are supposed to have a design life of about 80 years.

I mention in passing that we have at least five nuclear submarine hulks gathering barnacles in the water at Rosyth and Devonport docks because nobody wants to decide what to do with them. I fear that temporary dry stores might have to linger on indefinitely if we continue to avoid long-term decisions.

As for proliferation, I know that Windscale and Sellafield have had problems over the years, and I am familiar with the public anxiety about the transportation of nuclear waste to Sellafield. I have to say that the transport flasks that are now in use are virtually bomb-proof. Certainly they are spectacular when compared with the light vehicles that I saw being used during my visit to the United States. As for Sellafield, there appears to be evidence that British Nuclear Fuels plc has developed a high level of efficiency and safety at its thermal oxide reprocessing plant. Its expertise in storing radioactive material must be second to none after all the experience that it has gathered.

The nation has invested heavily at Sellafield and it seems rather perverse not to use the facility to the full now that we have it. Given the complex and hazardous nature of radioactive material, it would seem more prudent to operate the single centre of excellence, where there is all the necessary expertise and equipment to manage such material, rather than distribute the material throughout the country to on-site stores at power stations at different locations.

That point is connected with my next concern, which is the day-to-day supervision, security and management of a dry store. I accept that it is straightforward for the normal staff at a power station such as Torness to look after a dry store, but it must be said that the 1,200 tonnes of waste fuel

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

would remain in store for at least 50 years after the power station had been closed and the reactors had been decommissioned.

The life of the Torness power station will come to an end in about the year 2030, but the fuel would remain in the temporary dry store until it stopped generating heat, which would be about the year 2080. By that time, I shall be dead. If my children are lucky, they might be centenarians, and their grandchildren will have to worry about the nuclear legacy that we may be leaving at Torness power station. I think that it is worth putting that chronology on the record.

It is one thing for a dry store to be supervised by nuclear technicians at a working power station, but 50 years later it would probably be left to occasional visits by a contract security man and his dog. Vegetation might choke the air inlet. If I know seagulls, they would probably invade the air outlet. Concrete and other parts of the structure might begin to decay. Goodness knows what mischief might be wrought by 21st century vandalism, accidents or neglect of a building whose significance may be largely forgotten with the passing of time.

That is not the end of the story. In theory, the contents are supposed to be shifted for reprocessing or permanent storage after those 50 years. That means handling the material in cylinders that might not all be in perfect condition 80 years on, shifting them to Sellafield or a similar facility for reprocessing and storing what is left in an underground repository for spent fuel, about which Nirex has not yet even started thinking.

Sooner or later, we will have to face the need for long-term decisions to deal with the long-term problem of nuclear waste. We cannot continue stacking the stuff in temporary stores for ever, whether it is submarine propulsion reactors in the water at Rosyth and Devonport or all the stuff at Sellafield or Drigg or, indeed, the proposed short-term, on-site stores such as Torness and Hunterston. Temporary storage is no substitute for permanent storage. There must be doubts about the economics of investing in such short-term measures. It is a little like investing in a temporary shed for one's house to store the rubbish, instead of getting a contractor to take it away in a skip.

The radioactive residues of the nuclear industry will not disappear if we bury our heads in the sand. As this generation is getting the economic advantage of today's nuclear industry, surely this generation should face up to the difficult and costly decisions about safe storage of nuclear waste, instead of leaving a load of trouble for our great grandchildren to worry about at the end of the 21st century. That probably means a permanent underground store in a geologically suitable location, which will have to be monitored and managed for all time.

I do not underestimate the political problems of finding such a site, but it will have to be done sooner or later, and it is perhaps time that we stopped running away from that decision. That brings me back to the proposal to spend £40 million on a temporary store at Torness, which might have to outlast its design life if we keep avoiding decisions about permanent storage.

From what I saw at Fort St. Vrain in Colorado, and from what I have heard and read about the design of the MVDS, I would not necessarily object to the principle of such a temporary store at Torness, provided that it genuinely will be emptied at the end of its planned life—in other words, a maximum of 50 years after the closure of the power station.

I raised that very point during my visit to the dry store at Fort St. Vrain last week. The radioactive waste programme's director, who manages the facility on behalf of the Public Service Company of Colorado—Mr. Steven Sherrow—specifically told me:

"The dry store is a short-term solution to a long-term problem."

The trouble is that it will be difficult to believe any undertaking that the store at Torness will be cleared within that 50-year time scale, in the absence of any progress towards planning and constructing a permanent storage facility in the United Kingdom for nuclear fuel and high-level waste.

The Secretary of State for Scotland has certain statutory duties, and one is to establish that any new process involving radioactive material uses the "best available technique" under section 7 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. In other words, he must positively establish to have temporary local stores such as that proposed by Scottish Nuclear for Torness and Hunterston, or to continue with the current plans to transfer the material to Sellafield and processing and storing it there.

The Secretary of State also has a duty to recognise that the proposals are a major departure from the planning consent originally granted after public inquiries into the proposals to build the reactors and generating stations at Torness and Hunterston. Those plans and the relevant consents clearly stipulated that high-level waste fuel was to be removed from the site for reprocessing and storage on another site. We are talking about major changes from current plans and consents and that underlines the case for a further proper public planning inquiry before the matter is concluded.

I have sought to approach the question fairly and constructively, and I do not want to indulge in any nuclear scaremongering, not least because I have the highest respect for the skill and diligence of Scottish Nuclear's staff and management at Hunterston and Torness. But I am concerned that there has not been a proper public debate about the proliferation of stores containing nuclear fuel and the implications of further temporary decisions about material which requires permanent solutions.

I am grateful for this opportunity to put those points on record in the House of Commons and I hope—I say this once again—that the Minister will now be able to agree that there should be an inquiry into all aspects of the proposals before the Secretary of State makes his decision.

5.55 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): I am grateful to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) for initiating this important debate. He has great expertise in nuclear matters and has been assiduous in representing his constituents with regard to Torness. As he mentioned, we have an affinity in that I probably live as near as any Member of Parliament to a nuclear power station, Chapelcross. His comment that there has been little high-profile debate about the nuclear dry store was interesting because when the Central Electricity Generating Board considered Chapelcross as a possibility

for a similar type of store a few years ago there was a good local debate but, because at the end of the day the board did not put in a formal application, the possibility of an inquiry did not arise.

So often in nuclear debates the word "waste" is used when it is spent fuel that is being discussed, which is a somewhat different matter because if it is taken back to Sellafield it can be reprocessed, as the hon. Gentleman well understands. However, I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, as I do the high standards that Scottish Nuclear has achieved and the way in which it has been open and frank on all issues. Obviously, it keeps its Member of Parliament well informed about what is going on. Scottish Nuclear is one of the most important Scottish companies and Torness is one of the two advanced gas reactors operated by SNL, which is a major employer in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and elsewhere.

The hon. Gentleman, like all of us, is interested in the safe operation of reactors, which provide up to 50 per cent. of Scotland's electricity needs. It is a matter of pride for the company that it has set and achieved such an excellent safety record. But the debate is really about the proposed building of a dry store. I do not need to tell the hon. Gentleman what is proposed because he has obviously had detailed discussions with SNL. He most interestingly told us about his visits to Fort St. Vrain in Colorado, where he saw a dry store which had been completed and was in operation. He is probably as well informed about the issue as any Member of Parliament.

In essence, SNL has been looking at the whole range of its fuel handling and other services. As part of the process, it has been considering options, very much with safety in mind, for controlling costs. As a result, it has concluded, as other nuclear operators in other countries have, that dry storage of spent fuel for a number of years would be an appropriate immediate method of handling such material.

The proposal would involve keeping irradiated fuel in vertical storage tubes within a concrete structure. The vault storage would provide the necessary radiation shielding for the stored fuel, with integrated air flow ducts for the removal of heat from the vaults. I liked the hon. Gentleman's observation that it was similar to a haystack. I hope that it keeps cooler than most of mine, which sometimes look rather lopsided after a day's heating.

The drawing in of cold air would provide a continuous self-regulating cooling system. There would be safety features to contain any escape of radioactive material. The whole plan would be subject to approval by the nuclear installations inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive.

I cannot say more about the proposals. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Scottish Nuclear has applied to the Secretary of State for Scotland for consent under the Electricity Act 1989 to construct such a spent fuel storage facility, or dry store. The company's present application is for a dry store at Torness only. I understand that Scottish Nuclear has it in mind to proceed down the same route at Hunterston, but it has not yet developed its proposals in that regard.

The company's proposals raise a number of issues. The application has been accompanied by public advertisement, and the preparation of an environmental assessment which addresses the issues. As a result of that wide consultation exercise, a number of representations have been received by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. As the hon. Gentleman said, local councils and individuals have written letters, and I know that he has done so as well. The representations will be considered as required by the procedures laid down in the Electricity Act.

I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's anxiety that relevant issues should be thoroughly examined, and a public local inquiry may well be the best way of doing that. Indeed, everything that the hon. Gentleman has said suggests that it would be the right course. My right hon. Friend is now examining the matter very closely. It is only a matter of weeks since the formal application was presented to him, but I hope that he will be able to reach a conclusion very soon. As the hon. Gentleman said, wide debate is necessary on such an important issue. It would set a precedent in Scotland, and I think that the more discussion that takes place, the better.

Meanwhile, as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to comment in any way on Scottish Nuclear's proposals. This is a quasi-judicial decision for the Secretary of State for Scotland, and I must not prejudice the consideration that he must give to the proposals—and to representations from the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister referred to his right hon. Friend's duty to make a decision in terms of the Electricity Act. Will he confirm that his right hon. Friend also has a duty to consider the matter in terms of the Environmental Protection Act 1990?

Sir Hector Monro: I can give that assurance and I hope that there will be the widest possible opportunity for consideration and discussion of all the issues. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates my difficulty in going further, but it is very likely that we shall proceed by means of the public inquiry system.

I emphasise the high regard that I share with the hon. Gentleman for the safety factors in the nuclear industry in Scotland—and, indeed, throughout the United Kingdom. We can move forward with confidence, but always in the certain knowledge that safety is the prime consideration.

I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman talk in terms of the future, because we know that with Chapelcross, for example, the design life has long since passed. Yet it can still satisfy the most stringent safety requirements, because of the high standards of maintenance and the continued development throughout the life of the plant. I am sure that will be SNL's view and that that is what it will put into practice.

Mr. Home Robertson: I do not want to be difficult; I take the Minister's point about the quality of the work at Chapelcross, Torness and all the other locations, but does he accept that there is a distinction between an operating reactor at a power station or at the Chapelcross facility, where a full range of specialist nuclear staff are on the spot to keep an eye on it, and a "ghost" situation—a building with fuel simply in store, being supervised by security men from time to time? As the decades pass, it is quite possible that there could be difficulties.

Sir Hector Monro: That question will be discussed in depth if there is a public inquiry, which seems a likely conclusion following my remarks. If I said any more than that, however, I should be doing what I said that I must not do and prejudicing the Secretary of State's decision on the inquiry and what may come out of it.

[Sir Hector Monro]

Nevertheless, I am glad that we have had the chance to discuss the matter. It has now been highlighted, and I hope that there will be a decision from my right hon. Friend on the inquiry in the not-too-distant future.

Pornography

6.6 am

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I am grateful for the opportunity to address the House on the subject of action against pornography. Pornography is a subject of great concern to my constituents, who often raise it when they write to me and when I meet them.

I am disappointed to see that no Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament has seen fit to attend this important debate.

Before I talk about the action against pornography which I propose, let me first put the matter in context. Some people think that the 1960s were a golden age, but I believe that they were a decade when our country embarked upon a moral decline which has not yet ended. The time has come to reverse that decline and to rediscover the Christian values upon which our society should be based.

In the 1960s, we saw the breakdown of respect between men and women and between parents and children; there was a breakdown of respect for the aged and a general breakdown of respect for our fellow citizens and for their persons and property. Since then there has been an unacceptable rise in crime of all kinds, and a horrifying increase in teenage pregnancies, to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health referred in her excellent document, "Health of the Nation" published yesterday.

Child abuse causes us all great concern nowadays, the number of births outside marriage has soared from 51,000 in 1961 to 235,000 in 1991, and the number of divorces rose from 27,000 in 1961 to 167,000 in 1990. Also some people now believe homosexual behaviour to be just as normal as heterosexual behaviour.

What has been the cause of all this? There are many causes, but two are especially significant. One is the permissive ideas which got into the education system in the 1960s, and the other is the increasing availability, and the increasingly disgusting character, of pornography.

Permissive ideas still exist in the education system—in schools, in local education authorities and in training colleges, but I am optimistic that the Government's reforms are beginning to put things right. But what of pornography? It is no accident that in the 1960s television became widely available in homes throughout the land. Those who remember television in those days, as I do, cannot fail to have noticed the steady and insidious increase in pornography and violence which has been fed into the living rooms of our nation over the past 30 years.

Television producers argue that they merely reflect public attitudes. I say that television is the most powerful medium ever invented for changing attitudes and moulding ideas. Anyone who doubts that should consider the thousands of pounds that companies are willing to pay for a few seconds of television advertising.

I well remember the "Lady Chatterley's Lover" trial in the 1960s. It concerned a book, but that case had an influence on television, films, newspapers, magazines and, more recently videotapes. I recall the legal arguments about that book's artistic merits, and the venerable witnesses called by the defence. However, I have no doubt that that case gave the green light to the pornographers. It showed them that there were vast profits to be made from

peddling their wares in the United Kingdom. In this country today, pornography is a multi-million pound industry.

I am as much in favour of commercial enterprise as anyone on these Benches, and I believe that the freedom of the individual is the essential foundation of our society. There is, however, a difference between freedom and licence. In any civilised society, it is necessary to balance the freedom of the individual against the public good—so we were right to ban publications calculated to incite racial hatred.

It is often argued that pornography should be allowed unless it can be shown that it causes deviant behaviour. That is the difficulty with the "deprave and corrupt" test found in section 1 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959. In 1990, the Home Office commissioned Messrs Howitt and Cumberbatch to inquire into the connection between pornography and deviant behaviour. Their report was inconclusive. Paragraph 3 of their conclusions stated:

"the recording of sexual crimes lacks the detail which would help understanding of changes over time while evidence on patterns in hard core pornography and their possible relationship to sexual offences is virtually non-existent."

Paragraph 5 stated:

"There has been little attempt to categorise pornography into types which may be related to possible specific effects. We also lack any understanding of the ways in which the symbolic messages of pornography are communicated and interpreted by the reader or viewer. Research evidence in this area could be easily obtained."

I find persuasive the following passages from an article by Dr. Raymond Wyre, a specialist in the treatment of sex offenders, published in *The Scotsman* on 4 April 1991:

"The cause and effect argument can never be conclusive. Most men have seen pornography, and most men will not afterwards go out and rape women. Pornography is not the cause of the problem, it is part of the problem . . . In working with sex offenders over 15 years, it is impossible not to believe that pornography plays a part in sexual violence. As we constantly confront sex offenders about their behaviour, they display a wide range of distorted views that they then use to excuse their behaviour, justify their actions, blame the victim, and minimise the effect of their offending. They seek to make their own behaviour seem normal and interpret the behaviour of the victim as consent, rather than a survival strategy. Pornography legitimises these views."

Dr. Wyre concluded:

"So, in the case of pornography, I believe that there is overwhelming evidence that there is a connection between offending behaviour, sexual aggression, and sexist attitudes."

It is no mere coincidence that pornography is almost always found in the homes of rapists and serious sex offenders. Whether or not Dr. Wyre is right, I do not think that it is necessary to establish that pornography causes deviant behaviour, because I have no doubt that pornography coarsens and degrades our society and has an insidious and corrosive effect on us all.

It does not matter what time of day we buy or see that material; it affects us whether we are young or old; it does not matter whether we have to pass a notice that warns us before we go to buy the material. The question is whether, and to what extent, pornography should be banned. That is a question of balance between, on the one hand, the protection of society against degradation and corruption and, on the other, the freedom of the pornographers to make vast profits and the freedom of the individual purchaser to engage in a pursuit which, at the very least, is to be discouraged.

I do not think that those particular freedoms are worth protecting. The Government have a right and a duty to take action not only against the worst and most revolting examples, but also against material that is euphemistically described as "soft porn". Lest it should be thought that the Government have been idle in the matter, I pay tribute to the Government for the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981; the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, which empowers local authorities to adopt a licensing system for sex shops; the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act 1982; the Video Recordings Act 1984; the Criminal Justice Act 1988; the Malicious Communications Act 1988 and the Broadcasting Act 1990.

I also pay tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury), my hon. Friends the Members for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) and to the work of Mr. Gerald Howarth and Mr. Andrew Stewart who are no longer Members of Parliament.

They know—and I share their view—that in the battle against pornography we are dealing with an industry, which I would prefer to call a racket, which is well financed, well organised and very ingenious. We cannot afford to let it win the battle. We must equip our law enforcement agencies with the legal tools and backing that they need. Above all, the House must show leadership. We must make it clear that the activities of the pornography industry will not be tolerated.

Having read the debates on the subject before this one, I must say that I am concerned by the flippant attitude to the matter displayed by some members of my sex and, indeed, by some members of my party. Their very considerable talents, wittingly or unwittingly, have served the interests of the merchants of degradation.

If the Broadcasting Act 1990 is adequate, how is it possible that BBC2 screened a programme called "Do the Right Thing" on 28 June 1992 and Channel 4 screened a programme entitled "Bill Hicks-Relentless" on 4 May 1992? In both those programmes language was used that was so revolting that I will not read it out as I do not wish to turn *Hansard* into an obscene publication. I have, however, given a copy to my hon. Friend the Minister.

We must give the Broadcasting Standards Council our full support so that, in next year's annual report, we will not read what we have read in this year's report. At page 26, the commission says that it chose one week when it monitored all television programmes and that its

"analysis showed that bad language had been used in 112 programmes (40 per cent. of all programmes analysed) and on 833 occasions."

At page 29 of the report, we find that

"One in ten of all the programmes analysed contained some element of sexual activity, and just under one-quarter of all scenes portrayed coital acts."

When the BBC charter and the commercial franchises come up for review, let those who are responsible for those broadcasting organisations be in no doubt that their conduct between now and then will be watched very carefully by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

If the Video Recordings Act 1984 is adequate, how is it possible that the British Board of Film Classification has given a certificate to a video called "Gay Man's Guide to Safer Sex"? It purports to be an educational video, but in reality it is as lewd and disgusting a publication as one would ever be likely to see. If the Obscene Publications Act 1959 is adequate, how is it possible to pick up a family newspaper almost every day of the week and see in it

[Mr. Michael Stephen]

written and visual material which one would have had to go to the top shelf of a seedy newsagent's to find 10 years ago? If the Obscene Publications Act 1959 is effective, how is it possible to print and distribute a book so disgusting that no fewer than 87 hon. Members have signed early-day motion 312 about it? I will not name the book or its publisher because I do not wish to advertise it, but I shall read the rest of the early-day motion. It states:

"this House deplores the publication"

of that book, and—

"notes with deep concern that this book both glorifies and positively advocates the torture, rape and murder of babies, children and adult women and men including the inmates of prisons and patients in mental hospitals; regrets that the Director of Public Prosecutions decided that there is insufficient evidence to prosecute the publishers of this book under the terms of the Obscene Publications Act 1959; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government urgently to review the laws on obscenity and pornography to ensure that the desire of this House to encourage freedom of speech is balanced by the responsibility which it has to protect children, women and men from degradation and violence."

We need to introduce a new definition of obscenity, and look again at Gerald Howarth's 1987 Bill. I would be quite willing to introduce a new Bill, but that should not be a matter for private Members. This is an important matter for the moral health of the nation. The 1982 legislation to control sex shops was a Government Bill, and the Government should bring forward further legislation. In the meantime, I urge the Government to use section 3 of the 1959——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying now, referring to future legislation. This is not the time to discuss that. I am advised by the Clerk that incidental reference is allowed, but the hon. Gentleman must not stray too far.

Mr. Stephen: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the meantime, I urge the Government to use section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, which enables a constable to apply to a magistrate for a warrant to search premises and seize material which he has reasonable grounds to believe to be contrary to that Act. He must bring that material before a magistrate, and the magistrate can then decide whether it is contrary to the Act, and, if so satisfied, order that it be forfeited.

In that way, one will avoid two problems which one encounters using section 2 of the Act to prosecute a person. First, the question whether the material is or is not obscene has to be decided according to the civil standard —on the balance of probabilities—not the criminal standard—beyond reasonable doubt. Secondly, juries are not involved. These two factors of the difficulty of proving to the criminal standard and of satisfying juries make prosecutions under the 1959 Act so difficult.

I tabled a parliamentary question to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General about the matter. He said that he did not think it appropriate to use section 3 of the Act against the book to which early-day motion 312 refers. I cannot understand that. Taking essentially civil proceedings to confiscate pornographic literature is a different matter from taking criminal proceedings to impose criminal penalties on a person or company.

The difficulty with seizing pornographic material under section 3 is logistic. The police would have to bring in many tonnes of the material. I suggest that private contractors could be used, as they are used for wheel clamping and the management of prisons. We need a company which knows the printing, publishing and distribution industry, will know where to go to find the material and could bring the material before magistrates and secure orders for confiscation. The intervention of the constable would be necessary only for the execution of the warrant.

If the material is found to be pornographic, the court should order the pornographer to pay the costs of the private contractor in confiscating the material. There should also be no question of the pornographer being able to claim tax relief in respect of the expenditure that he incurred to print, store or do anything else with the pornographic material.

I will not go into the European dimension, except to say that pornography is so readily available in Germany, Holland and other parts of the continent that it is vital to do what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in the House a short while ago he intended do and make sure that our own border controls are maintained.

I am grateful to the House for listening to me. I should like to conclude with two short quotations. The first is from *The Guardian* of 8 May 1990, from a man who was introduced to pornography in the 1960s and has since become a reformed character:

"Some three years on from my decision, I cannot deny that I am still sometimes attracted to pornography. But mostly, I now feel that it is not only unappealing to me but also degrading and dangerous to women. I no longer feel shame or guilt about having used it, although I do feel sad and angry at how it has affected me."

The second quotation is from the sermon which the Archbishop of Canterbury delivered to us all at St. Margaret's church on the occasion of the opening of this, my first Parliament. He said:

"I ask for recognition that the sense of shared values, so vital to long-term wellbeing, derives from our Christian heritage; I ask that we should not be ashamed to declare our loyalty to Christ in this nation. If we do so, I believe that we will acknowledge that human life, and hence the ordering of society through Parliamentary Law, has a religious and spiritual dimension which is a source of hope."

6.28 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Jack): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) on securing this important debate and on the clear and powerful way in which he put his case on a subject which matters a great deal to him and to many millions of people. He expressed his views with considerable clarity and I listened to him carefully. His remarks were made in the context of a view of the state of the nation's morals and of some of the influences that have affected them, especially in the 1960s. I noted a powerful plea about television in his introductory remarks. I agree that television is a powerful medium of communication, with considerable ability to influence people.

I also noted my hon. Friend's argument about advertising. He was generous to the Government about what they have done and I hope that he will take some comfort from the fact that the Government have set up the Broadcasting Standards Council and enabled, for the first time, an independent voice to have its say on standards in television.

I want to put on the record the Government's comprehensive view of pornography because, in considering parts of the law, there is a danger that we may miss the whole picture of control. I also believe in the power of people and of public opinion. I hope that those who read my hon. Friend's words and this debate will take comfort from the fact that there is now an outlet for their views, as the Broadcasting Standards Council can listen to them.

I thank my hon. Friend for his courtesy in giving me a copy of the script of the television programmes which so troubled him and, I am sure, many millions of viewers. That is precisely the sort of subject on which the council should receive letters—and other forms of appropriate representation—if people feel that it is not reacting.

It may be useful for me to list the subjects that I intend to cover. They will include the book that my hon. Friend mentioned, and I shall try to deal with the decisions not to prosecute its publishers. I shall consider the legal controls on obscenity and the implications of the single market for our controls. My hon. Friend mentioned Europe, and it is worth talking for a few moments on that subject. I shall also mention the ways in which he suggested that we might amend the Obscene Publications Act 1959, and deal with the Government's attitude to legislation and reform of the law. I hope that he will not find my remarks unsympathetic. Not unnaturally, I shall also reflect on that which has gone before.

One difficulty in discussing pornography is that it is sometimes difficult to decide what is meant by the term. In legal terms, the word has no significance, but for an individual it can encompass anything, from pictures of scantily dressed women, which appear in certain newspapers and which some people may dismiss as merely risible or titallating, to unspeakably vile child pornography, which amounts to a real sexual abuse of children. My hon. Friend referred to that, and I understand his point about the way in which some of that material is handled by newspapers. He was right to draw attention to that.

The Government's task, and indeed the task of the House, is to ensure that the law is strong enough to catch the worst material, while safeguarding the rights of citizens to see, read, write and do what they wish, without an oppressive level of state censorship or intervention.

Where precisely the boundary should be drawn between material which is caught by the law and material which is not is still a difficult question, and one which can never be resolved to everybody's satisfaction. However, it is clear that many hon. Members believe that the law is balanced too much in favour of the pornographer and not enough in favour of the ordinary, decent citizen. On balance, the Government agree with that view and believe that the law could with advantage be tightened. That is why, when there have been clear cases of gaps in the law on videos, indecent displays, broadcasting and child pornography, the Government have been only too willing to introduce or actively support legislation to plug those gaps. However, it is more difficult fundamentally to change the whole basis on which the law operates, and I hope to consider that aspect in greater detail later in my speech.

I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I mention the title of the book in question. I do not want to advertise it any more than he does, but it was the subject of an Adjournment debate and, for the sake of clarity, I must mention it. The book, as my hon. Friend knows, is called "Juliette" and that earlier debate revealed hon. Members' passion and feeling about it.

I asked to see a copy of the book and was revolted by the language which it contained. I can tell my hon. Friend unequivocally that I would not have used my money to buy it. I can appreciate the sensitivities that it shocks. Anyone who thought that it was an easy, titillating read is in for a rude and nasty shock. It is a disgusting publication.

My hon. Friend referred to the actions of the Director of Public Prosecutions in relation to the book. As I said last week in the Adjournment debate, last December it was decided not to prosecute the publishers on the ground that there was insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction. I appreciate hon. Members' concern at that decision. As my hon. Friend probably gathers from my description of the book, I share some of their views.

However, it would be quite wrong for me or for any Minister to attempt to persuade the DPP to prosecute in a case where she did not believe that she would be justified in doing so. It is right that the DPP should not seek to prosecute in cases where, after detailed consideration, she concluded that there was insufficient evidence for a conviction. Nevertheless, as I promised last week, I have reported the concerns of hon. Members to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and I know that he has taken careful note of what was said in that debate.

My hon. Friend said that the book highlighted a weakness in our law, because the Obscene Publications Act 1959 was unable to catch it. He deduced that that Act must be inadequate. As I have said before, I have some sympathy with that view. But it is not easy to go on to say that X is the cause of the weakness and Y is the solution. A decision whether to prosecute in a particular case can be based on one of a number of considerations touching on the likely chances of success.

In the case of a possible prosecution of a book under the 1959 Act, it must first be decided what the likely readership of the book is—will it, for example, fall into the hands of children? Then there must be an assessment of whether the book has a tendency to deprave and corrupt that likely readership. The chances of a successful public-good defence must also be evaluated. Only if the DPP believes, after weighing up those different factors, that there is a realistic prospect of conviction, taking account of any possible defence or any other relevant factors, can she properly decide to prosecute. That is, of course, the criterion that she applies to all offences.

Whatever change might be made in the law, no one can guarantee that a particular publication would be caught by it and there would inevitably be some who would be disappointed that the law was not as effective as they had expected. Even if the DPP thought that a case was suitable for prosecution, in the end everything would still depend on the decision of the particular jury which heard the case.

I believe that, last week, my hon. Friend raised the possibility of the book being available in prisons. Concern was expressed about the possibility of that publication circulating freely in prisons, perhaps even among sex offenders. I understand that it would be contrary to our international human rights obligations to enforce an arbitrary ban on the circulation within prison of material which was legally available outside. However, a prison governor has a discretion under Home Office standing order No. 4(b)(23) to withdraw or withhold any book if he

[Mr. Michael Jack]

considers that its contents could present a threat to good order and discipline in the prison, or is likely to have an adverse effect on an inmate from a medical point of view. It is for individual prison governors to decide whether "Juliette" comes within the terms of the standing order.

My hon. Friend rightly spoke of seizure of materials. He and others have asked why some action cannot be taken to seize "Juliette" under the provisions of section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act. My hon. Friend tabled a question on this, to which he referred. Forfeiture proceedings would not be appropriate because, after the book was seized, the magistrates would have to address precisely the same issues as to whether the work had a tendency to deprave and corrupt which a court would consider on a prosecution and about which the DPP had already come to a view.

Mr. Stephen: The point I was making was that the magistrates would determine the matter according to a different standard of proof. If they were not being asked to convict somebody of a criminal offence, the standard of proof applicable would be the civil standard. Furthermore, no jury would be involved.

Mr. Jack: I note what my hon. Friend says, and I shall give a little more detail about success in seizures, which illustrates the effectiveness of that point in general terms, although I note the terms in which he questions the use of that part of the Obscene Publications Act in respect of this book. It is important that the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is drawn not only to those remarks but to concerns about this aspect of the law.

During the Adjournment debate on this subject instigated by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms. Lynne), I wa anxious to allow as many hon. Members as possible to have their say. One of the problems that we faced was that we did not look at pornography in the round and at all the controls on it. If the House will bear with me, I shall try to remedy that deficiency. It is important that our discussions on pornography—my hon. Friend was kind enough to mention some of the Government's successes—should not be based solely on the Obscene Publications Act. It is one important element in a series of controls, both statutory and common law, that affect pornography.

Last week I mentioned the Post Office Act 1953 and the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act 1955 in some detail. There are also the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981, which makes it an offence to display indecent matter in a public place, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, which allows local authorities to control sex shops, the Theatres Act 1968, the Video Recordings Act 1984, which my hon. Friend mentioned, and the Cinemas Act 1985, which provides for licensing or regulation of these forms of entertainment and prohibits obscene performances of plays. All those Acts play their part in the legislation to deal with pornography.

Most important, in my view the law properly contains very stringent provisions to protect children against sexual exploitation. In the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which my hon. Friend also mentioned, we reinforced earlier legislation—the Protection of Children Act 1978—so that it is now an offence to take, distribute, advertise, show or even possess any indecent film, photograph or video of a child under the age of 16.

In the Criminal Justice Act 1991, we implemented the Pigot report's recommendations and allowed children to give evidence by pre-recorded video. We plan to implement those provisions in October. More generally, the Government's commitment to the protection of children was demonstrated in the Children Act 1989, which provides that when a court is determining any question relating to the upbringing of a child, the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration.

The importation of obscene material is prohibited by the Customs Consolidation Act 1876, and that prohibition is enforced under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. Those measures amount to the toughest controls in Europe on pornography. It is an important package in total. I want to emphasise that the Government have played a significant role in either introducing or supporting many of the Acts that I mentioned. As I have made clear, the Government are committed to maintaining those tight controls.

I understand that there has been concern about the possible effects of the European single market and the abolition of trade barriers on our control of pornography. The first thing to stress is that our internal domestic controls will remain unchanged. The suggestion that we will be obliged to accept supposedly lax continental standards in relation to pornography are simply misplaced. That matter will continue to be judged by each European Community member state for itself, and the difference in standards between the United Kingdom and, for example, the Netherlands will remain.

Customs controls will be affected by the general move towards selective, intelligence-based customs checks, rather than random checks, but the Government have no intention of relaxing their prohibitions on the trade in obscene materials. No Community measure requires them to do so. There is increasing recognition across Europe of the danger presented by the worst kind of pornographic material. The Council of Europe has considered the problem of the distribution of video works having a violent, brutal or pornographic content and has issued advice to member states. Although the European Community has not formally considered that matter, when the opportunity has arisen we have made known our view that European Community members should act against pornographers, particularly against the trade in child pornography. I hope that my hon. Friend will take some comfort from that.

I noted my hon. Friend's comments on seizure. I was interested in his remarks on private contraction, and some of the solutions that he proposed. I should like to take time to reflect on those matters and then correspond with him.

Debates such as this inevitably dwell on weaknesses in the law. But as I said last week, whatever criticisms there may be, the existing legislation is effective, especially in controlling the worst sorts of pornographic videos and magazines. In 1990, the most recent year for which figures are available, 73 people were convicted of offences under the Obscene Publications Act. In 1991, 20,000 articles were forfeited under section 3 of that Act in the Metropolitan police district alone. I do not want to distresss hon. Members who may have returned from breakfast in the Tea Room by reading out a list of the titles of the material,

but I shall be glad to supply that information to my hon. Friend so that he understands the seriousness with which we take such matters.

In practice, prosecutions seem to be successful when they concern explicit visual representations, in magazines or on video, of actual sexual intercourse or of such activities as cannibalism, bestiality, buggery, sadism and child abuse. However, it is possible that prosecutions purely in respect of written descriptions present greater difficulties. As my hon. Friend mentioned, ours is a visual society, and the written word is a less direct medium of communication, requiring some intellectual interpretational effort by the reader. The impact of the written word is less immediate than images and there may be problems in persuading juries that the written word by itself has a tendency to deprave and corrupt. When deciding whether to prosecute, the Director of Public Prosecutions must take into account all those matters, in terms of their application in law.

At the heart of my hon. Friend's remarks was the question whether we should reform the Obscene Publications Act. The Government are not complacent about the matter. We believe that there is room for reform of the Act, but, hitherto, suggestions for reform have concentrated on replacing or supplementing the "deprave and corrupt" test, which is at the heart of the Act. I commend a Library note to my hon. Friend, who has considerable knowledge of the subject. It is a useful document and summarises the issues and work and the fate of some of the legislative attempts on this matter.

Mr. Stephen: I have seen it.

Mr. Jack: I am glad that my hon. Friend has seen it; I found it a useful work when I was preparing for this debate.

Problems have been encountered in previous legislation containing features such as a shopping list of activities or the test of gross offensiveness to a reasonable person. My hon. Friend mentioned that test in relation to the Bill which was introduced by Gerald Howarth but which, sadly, ran out of parliamentary time. If my hon. Friend reads the report of the debate on that Bill, he will find that the Government were supportive and helpful.

In many respects, the difficulties that the Bills encountered reflect the wider problem of legislation on this matter. For example, if one sought to compile a list of activities or subjects that must not be depicted, there would be considerable debate about what the list should contain. One would have to decide whether all depictions of a listed activity should be prohibited, no matter how oblique or inoffensive they were, or whether the restriction should be limited to a portrayal which is regarded as offensive—for instance, because of its blatant or titillating nature.

There would be particular difficulty in applying such a test to the written word. One might think, for example, that it would be right to ban a work which opens with satanism and includes insanity and child murder, or one which includes eyes being gouged out, hanging and suicide, or one which includes rape, cannibalism, murder and mutilation. But, of course, hon. Members will recognise these references as brief descriptions of "Macbeth", "King Lear" and "Titus Andronicus", all by our greatest playwright. I do not think that anyone seriously advocates a return to the days of Dr. Bowdler's edition of Shakespeare.

It could be argued that a work's offensiveness to a reasonable person is an easier test to apply. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage supported Gerald Howarth's Bill. We are also conscious, however, of the potential dangers that some would see to freedom of speech in making something illegal simply because it is offensive to some or even most people, and we would need to be sure that any future legislation did not open the way to an enforced political correctness before we could support it.

My hon. Friend asked why the Government have not acted in that area and he addressed the problems of deficiencies in the law. We did not introduce legislation, because of the difficulties that I described. I spoke about child obscenity and pornography on which we have moved decisively. There has never been a difference of opinion in the House on the need to act in such cases. It appears to be possible to distinguish between attempts to reform wide-ranging obscenity laws in a fundamental way and much more limited measures to deal with specific identifiable gaps in the law.

I hope that what I have said about our attempts to deal with the vile trade of child pornography illustrates the Government's willingness to act where there is a clear reason so to do. Such measures are important because we must ensure that children are not caught up in the production of pornography. As my hon. Friend said, we do not in any way want to fuel the activities of paedophiles. The extension of the obscenity legislation to broadcasting was a recognition of the indefensible situation whereby that most important and pervasive of media was the only one untouched by the law.

Legislation to reform the Obscene Publications Act is a different matter. Obscenity legislation is all-embracing and involves difficult questions of balanced priorities, on which there will be genuinely differing opinions about the sort of material that should be prohibited. By contrast, child pornography has no creditable proponents and can never be justified.

Pressure to reform the Obscene Publications Act takes a range of forms and the nature of the demands varies greatly. For instance, most people, thankfully, do not encounter really objectionable material such as "Juliette", but my constituants tell me and I know from my postbag that there is much concern about material widely available in our high streets.

Some people agree with my hon. Friend about the contents of our newspapers. Some of the correspondence that we receive argues that, because of the wide circulation of such material and its easy accessibility, it is a more serious threat to our national life than hard-core pornography because it acts insidiously in reinforcing sexist attitudes, which my hon. Friend mentioned. Other people, while seeking controls over what may lawfully be made available, are also legitimately concerned that any new measure should not oppress the rightly valued freedom of expression on which the vitality of our national cultural life so depends.

The difficulty is, therefore, that there is a wide continuum of possible measures, from the comparatively mild to the draconian, each of which has its own constituency. Unlike the specific measures to which I referred earlier, it is not enough to agree generally that the

[Mr. Jack]

law needs changing. Any legislation must be based on a clear assessment of what material should be caught and what should be excluded.

There is an understandable but unspecific general concern that the law is inadequate, but there is no identifiable consensus on precisely what changes are necessary in the public interst and on the basis of which a Government would be justified in acting. I am aware of my hon. Friend's personal wish to introduce legislation, but it is from our search for common ground that we draw some of our reasons for continuing to believe that our predecessors' policy was right: legislation in this acutely difficult, sensitive and personal subject is essentially a matter of subjective judgment and personal conscience. We still feel that the traditional prerogative of private Member's business is the right way to proceed.

The fact that the House has so far not succeeded in agreeing on a general reform of the law is proof of the difficulties that we face. It does not mean that the Government have shut the door to reform. On the contrary, as our record shows and as I have sought to show this morning, we remain willing to support attempts at reform, provided that they seem to us to be desirable in themselves, enforceable and likely to commend parliamentary support.

My hon. Friend made his comments courteously, forcefully and clearly. I hope that the debate will continue the dialogue between us so that we can find grounds which might ultimately satisfy him and those whose views he represents.

Marchioness Disaster

6.57 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I take no pleasure in raising the issue of the Marchioness tragedy and, in particular, the publication two days ago of the report of the Hayes inquiry.

At this stage, it should not be necessary for an hon. Member to raise an issue which it is the Government's responsibility to pursue. I very much regret that the Government have not yet been seen to do so. The Minister was only appointed to the Department of Transport, with particular responsibility for London, in this Parliament. Most of the matters to which I shall refer were the responsibility of his predecessors in the previous Parliament, so I absolve him, but he has a hot potato to handle.

I shall make my own position clear. One of my constituents was unhappily a victim of the Marchioness tragedy, but I raise the issue rather because it is 50 years next year since I first navigated the tidal Thames, and I have been doing so fairly regularly ever since. In politics, emotion has a part to play, and in this instance it has given me the necessary steam. In the mid-1940s when I was a teenager, I brought a small craft down river and moored it to a buoy at Westminster pier. I had my tea alone in that small boat. I looked up at Big Ben and thought, "Goodness, wouldn't it be extraordinary if ever I were in that place." I have been here now for 22 years. I found that I was on the wrong mooring. A boat came along—it was literally a steamer—and a member of the crew shouted, "Come along here, sonny. Moor against us." I did so and chatted to the watermen. That craft was the Marchioness. It was then in its first edition, as it were, as a steamer.

Apart from that specific interest, I have taken a non-political interest in rail and water transport for some years. It is the responsibility of the House and of the Government to have a structure of protection for marine, road and rail transport which helps to provide safety. When things go wrong, we have a responsibility to ascertain why. In the case of the Marchioness, those who are left bereaved and those who are concerned about the matter are determined that those who died so close to the House should not have died in vain.

When the tragedy occurred there was not a great deal of surprise, unfortunately, among the river fraternity. The Bowbelle had been known for some time as a rogue vessel. It and its two near sisters, the Bowtrader and the Bowsprite, were well known on the river. The Bow boats had been involved, so the Hayes report tells us in the appendix, in no fewer than 40 incidents on the river since 1965. It is notable that only the Hayes report, which was published two days ago, has brought out that fact. It could not be inferred from the earlier report of the marine accident investigation branch, which was published in August 1981.

One would think that the purpose of a statutory inquiry —the Hayes inquiry was one because the then Secretary of State for Transport requested that the matter be examined —is to ensure that we pinpoint problems and ensure, as far as possible, that repetition does not occur. That should be the purpose of statutory inquiries. Unfortunately, I do not think that there can be public confidence in the report which has been so recently published. If anything, the position is the reverse of that.

There have been three unsatisfactory phases. First, the content of the MAIB report was clearly deficient, as was the manner in which it was produced. Members were not properly notified and it was difficult to obtain copies of it. The report leaves much to be desired, as I shall demonstrate. Secondly, after much agitation the then Secretary of State, in December 1991, appointed the Hayes inquiry, which was popularly supposed to be a follow-up. As I shall demonstrate, its terms of reference were somewhat constrained. Thirdly, one of its principal recommendations has been turned down. The current Secretary of State for Transport welcomed the report, but promptly turned down one of its major recommendations even before some Members had been able to read it and before there had been an opportunity to debate the report in the House. It was thought by some—cynically, perhaps—that the report would be published later next week after the House had adjourned for the summer recess. At least we have had the small mercy of its publication earlier this week.

The statutory side of the procedure has been dealt with in three phases. There is the coroner's procedure, which may not yet have been completed. I think that everyone would agree that a coroner's court is not necessarily the best place to deal with some of the technicalities which arise in transport tragedies. Such a court does not necessarily have the scope to investigate the technicalities. The Director of Public Prosecutions has brought a charge against the master of the Bowbelle. Two court cases ended in the juries failing to agree.

There has also been a private prosecution against the owners of the Bowbelle, but a few days ago the court decided that it could not proceed. There is now no sub judice block on debate in this House or outside. However, as yet there is no sign, other than the completion of the coroner's proceedings, that there can be any further public inquiry. Indeed, so far as I am aware, the Secretary of State's decision earlier this week—taken before there was much opportunity for informed comment or debate—is that there will be no further inquiry. That is is not good enough. The proceedings to date have left as many questions unanswered as were answered during those proceedings.

I shall start with the legal proceedings in the court, and I shall use lay language. The Director of Public Prosecutions brought the marine equivalent of a charge of driving without due care and attention against the master of the Bowbelle. I understand that that was done because bringing any higher charge might not have led to a successful prosecution, as the DPP explained on the radio only a few days ago. Although it might appear not to be a grave charge in view of the results of the tragedy, we can at least understand its nature.

To be successful, however, the DPP had to prove that there was no contributory cause. I understand that, contrary to what may be the public 's impression, only a limited number of witnesses were called in the proceedings. I have some sympathy, as we all have, with the master of the Bowbelle. Despite the traumatic experience, he was not called and he did not volunteer any evidence. The jury disagreed. There was a second case hearing——

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I remind the hon. Gentleman that the jury disagreed, and then disagreed again on the second trial.

Mr. Spearing: I was about to say that. If I am inaccurate in my speech, I should like the Minister to intervene again and say so. We want to get the matter right and not have to correct ourselves.

We all waited for the MAIB report, which arrived in August last year. Some of us who know the river and know something about that tragic affair read the report with considerable interest. Frankly, I was shocked. I knew—it is in *Lloyd's List*—that the Bowbelle had been involved in six previous collisions. Only one was mentioned in the report; the others were not. I wrote to the Secretary of State pointing that out. However, that was only one of a number of matters of concern about the report. There were no quotations from eye witnesses, but there must have been quite a few of them. There did not appear to be the same logical description of events that we found in the two parallel inquiries that everyone has in mind: King's Cross and Clapham.

There was no description of the qualifications, experience or biographical details of the two skippers concerned, or of the background to the instructions of their respective firms. That was dealt with only in outline, if at all. Another matter that the report did not cover was a question which arises immediately, but was not even asked: why did the Bowbelle not stop after the accident? We know from the description that the man was standing by on the bows ready to let go of the anchor. That was one of his duties. It is suggested in the report that he was more concerned with that than with keeping a look out. Why did he not do that?

Fifthly, even if the Bowbelle had decided to proceed for whatever reason, or was instructed to do so, what about throwing overboard some of the floating equipment which must be carried by sea-going vessels, or launching a boat? Could it have moored at Tower pier, only a few hundred yards further downstream? That vessel could manoeuvre easily because it was going against the tide at that point. That was not raised in the report.

Sixthly, we read that the two other Bow boats had arrangements for an officer to be on the fo'c'sle during such a journey, but for a reason which does not carry much conviction, that was not done in the case of the Bowbelle. That was not followed up.

Seventhly, there is not much in the way of description of the Thames navigation service and tapes which I believe were taken by the Port of London authority officials at the barrier controls. That is not gone into. So far as I know, evidence was not taken from those persons either.

Eighthly—this is only a selection of matters which should have been raised—there is the whole question of the considerable time taken for the rescue vessels to reach those still in the water. That is not dealt with in the report either.

So from the time when the report was published until the belated appointment of the Hayes inquiry, there was great concern. In fact, it was rather more than that. I would say that there was evasion on the part of the Secretary of State. I wrote immediately to the Secretary of State to ask about the six collisions. I tabled a question to be answered when we returned on 14 October last year asking what representations the Secretary of State had had relating to facts not in the report and he said that he had had none.

After a series of exchanges through written questions, it emerged that the Secretary of State or the Minister thought that the six collisions were not relevant factors.

[Mr. Spearing]

Yet they were clearly relevant to any sort of investigation at that point. It was not until 21 January this year, when I used the device of asking the Minister to refer the six collisions, which I listed, to the Hayes inquiry, that we finally got those on the record at column *157*.

The Hayes report, although headed "The Marchioness", was not just about the Marchioness, as people may have thought it to be. The terms of reference are as follows:

"In the light of the Marchioness/Bowbelle disaster to examine the handling since 1980 by the Department of Transport of its responsibility for the safety of vessels on rivers and inland waters and to report on the effectiveness of the present approach. The enquiry should take account of developments in the field of marine safety at the international level."

In other words, although the Marchioness disaster was relevant, the terms of reference of the Hayes inquiry were not specifically related to that tragedy, or any deficiency in the report already published, but tangential to it. The conditions on inland waterways of the United Kingdom, particularly non-tidal waters, are different from those which pertain on the relatively dangerous tideway of the Thames. After initially being glad to have a proper inquiry, those concerned were perturbed because of the relatively limited nature of the Hayes inquiry.

Having looked at the Hayes inquiry and consulted others, I had the impression that it did a good job, but only within the limits of the terms of reference. I submitted evidence asking Mr. Hayes to send it to the MAIB for its comments on what I considered were deficiencies in its report. He did not feel able to do so, because in his view —with which I sympathise—the terms of reference did not cover that point.

Mr. Hayes's main recommendation is very germane. Paragraph 2.5.8 on page 5 states:

"There should be an early review of the rescue arrangements and equipment on the Thames which should take account of the Marchioness/Bowbelle disaster and the views of those who witnessed it. The results should be published and it should be undertaken by an independent person. The recommendations from such a review should be disseminated widely and considered as a basis for action by Riparian and Canal Authorities. It will need to be wider in scope than the present POLACAP emergency plan"—

a plan which the Port of London Authority implements when it has problems on the river.

Although I would welcome such an inquiry, it does not seem to amount to what was required following the King's Cross and Clapham disasters—and, indeed, the Marchioness disaster. More than one person may be needed to conduct the inquiry, and it may need to be even more precise than the recommendation suggests. On Tuesday—as you will know, Madam Deputy Speaker; you made some helpful comments, which can be found in column 275—the Hayes report was published, and Lord Caithness, the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, made some radio and television broadcasts. A summary of the report was sent to the press, and appeared the next day. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and I were not officially informed, although we had been heavily involved in the matter; we were informed by Thames Television. Even before we were informed, however, the Secretary of State for Transport sent out a press statement, which said

"Mr. Hayes recommended that there should be an early review of the rescue arrangements and equipment on the Thames. The Government has given careful consideration to the recommendation but has concluded that a further review of this kind would not be justified."

I am staggered that in 1992 a Secretary of State, knowing all about the public concern that was felt about this terrible tragedy, and knowing that it had not been examined to the same extent as two rail tragedies which had preceded it, could make such a statement, even before those most closely concerned had so much as seen the report, let alone read or debated it. It struck me as extraordinary behaviour for any Secretary of State. I do not know whether the present Secretary of State could possibly have reached such a conclusion: he is new to the job, but he was a good Leader of the House. Perhaps the Minister can give us some of the background.

As I have made clear, many questions have been left unanswered. The Hayes report is good as far as it goes, but it could not go very far. Paragraph 7.10 contains a couple of sentences about the inadequacies of a previous report, mentioning that survivors had not been interviewed. Of course it is difficult to interview survivors and report on the interview, but Hayes merely says:

"They also confirmed the view expressed in paragraph 4.2 of their report that 'requiring them to rehearse yet again the events of the night would in many cases simply have added to their distress without any gain to the Inquiry'. It is difficult to criticise MAIB for wishing to protect survivors from further anguish but there are a number who still feel that they had material evidence which was not considered during the investigation."

The unfortunate people who were in the water are not the only ones who feel that. It is also felt by those who know something about these matters, who presented evidence to the Department, the MAIB or Hayes and who know that that evidence has not received due consideration.

Now the Secretary of State is apparently putting a stop on any further investigation of any sort. As I understand it, it is still open to the Government to institute a proper inquiry even wider than that recommended by Mr. Hayes, which the Minister turned down.

The Minister must tell us why there has been such a degree of reticence. All sorts of wild rumours about what happened on that terrible night are heard up and down the river. I have not repeated any of them. The only question that has been asked is about the relationship, if any, between the ultimate owners of the Bowbelle and any political funds which may have benefited from that firm. That question is in order, and if the answer to it were positive, that would make clarity in such matters even more important. If there were any such connection, it would be unfortunate if people drew the wrong conclusions.

The House has debated the tragedies which took place at Clapham and at King's Cross. Surely it is the duty both of the Government and of the House to ensure that those who died in the middle of our city in such tragic circumstances did not die in vain. Only a proper inquiry, parallel to the other two, can clear the air. It is the Government's duty to set up such an inquiry, and if they do not want to do so it is the duty of the House to insist that one takes place.

7.20 am

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on his success in initiating the debate and on its timeliness. I congratulate him, too, on the excellent manner in which he presented his case.

My hon. Friend and I have both had a long involvement with the issue, since the tragic disaster in August 1989 in which 51 people were killed as a result of the collision between the Marchioness pleasure craft and the dredger, the Bowbelle. Since then, I have worked closely with the Marchioness action group and have presented its considerable concerns to the various Secretaries of State for Transport who have been in post since that time.

As my hon. Friend said, that group has consistently called for a proper public inquiry, such as would be established—indeed, such as has been established—for other comparable transport disasters. However, as we have heard, those arguments have always been rejected by the Government, who first authorised the marine accident investigation branch to carry out an inquiry and then set up the broader inquiry into river safety conducted by Mr. John Hayes.

As usual in such cases, the Department of Transport made the Hayes report available to the press but not to Opposition spokespeople. The report is welcome, but it is no substitute for a public inquiry into the Marchioness disaster.

Before I comment further on the report, I wish to put on record the continuing distress caused to survivors and to the families of victims of the disaster because of their great sense of injustice. The lack of a public inquiry has prevented those who survived from cross-examining experts and has prevented public scrutiny. Many questions remain unanswered—my hon. Friend listed some of them. Not least among those questions are those about possible negligence on the part of the operators, about the lack of observation of the rules of navigation and the lack of enforcement by the Department of Transport, and—perhaps more significantly—about the lack of a proper analysis of the rescue operation. I remind the Minister, who is new to his post, that on that fateful night more people died in the water than in the fabric of the Marchioness.

The survivors and the families are still pressing for the resumption of the inquest. Part one has yet to be held for seven of the victims, and the holding of part two is still a matter for debate. It is imperative that the proceedings are resumed as quickly as possible.

I apologise to the House, I have lost my place in my notes, due to the late hour and lack of sleep and concentration—or perhaps I should say the early hour rather than the late hour, depending on where one considers we are as between night and morning.

We are deeply concerned that the inquest proceedings should be resumed as quickly as possible. I ask the Minister to state his view of those proceedings, and to comment on the inquest legal expenses incurred by the victims' families. Many of them have been in financial difficulties as a consequence, which adds to their sense of great injustice.

The Hayes report is welcome, and it author must be commended for his attention to detail and care. I congratulate Mr. Hayes and strongly support his recommendations for improving river safety.

The report's key finding was that the Department of Transport must take considerable responsibility for failing to give a lead on river safety. The marine accident investigation branch report referred to an historic malaise in the Department and listed a number of its failures. They included, in particular, lack of attention to improving the conspicuousness of passenger launches, lack of action to improve visibility from the wheelhouse and the fact that it allowed to remain on the river vessels whose design hindered the task of lookouts. Those are serious charges.

Mr. Hayes supports those statements and draws his own conclusion. He states:

"the Department showed technical competence and dedication but lacked the vision and the drive to lead the river marine industry into accepting that high safety standards and commercial success were compatible."

Mr. Hayes specifically draws attention to the hands-off culture promoted by the Department in the 1980s, which asserted that less regulation was required in order not to fetter business. Although Hayes does not suggest that safety was put at risk, it is clear that the Government's ideological preoccupations at the time meant that the Department did not take the lead that it should have taken in creating a safety culture on our rivers.

Such inactivity is all the more inexcusable when set against the growing awareness of many of the dangers posed by pleasure launches and the problems of lack of manoeuvrability of vessels such as the Bowbelle. The Hayes report states that, despite being aware of the problems and agreeing measures to improve the situation, the Department agreed that the responsibility for enactment should rest with the operators themselves. No checks were made on those operators. That failure to take a more proactive role meant that when incidents occurred no action was taken, when it should have been.

In answer to a parliamentary question of mine, the Minister's predecessor admitted that the Bowbelle and her sister ship the Bowtrader had been involved in 14 accidents since 1981. The collision between the Bowsprite and the Bowbelle in 1983 highlighted the lack of a lookout. That failure was to prove critical in the Marchioness disaster. Mr. Hayes comments that, despite that warning, the Department took no action to require lookouts, believing that the company itself would remedy matters.

The Bowbelle has at last been barred from the Thames—presumably in response to Mr. Hayes's concluding question. He asked whether large vessels with limited manoeuvrability and pleasure boats with limited vision could safely remain on the same stretch of water, especially at night. The answer is clearly no.

I echo the concern expressed in the report that implementation of the new regulations from the MAIB that were drawn up after the Marchioness disaster is again being delayed for commercial reasons. The consultation period is to be extended, which will further delay the regulations' implementation. I endorse Mr. Hayes's warning to the Government against going for the lowest common denominator.

The regulations cover vital safety aspects, such as minimum standards of visibility and hours of work and

[Ms. Joan Ruddock]

giving boatmen's licences statutory status. They must be implemented without further delay and I ask the Minister to comment on that when he replies.

I want to comment on and draw attention to several specific points in the Hayes report. I make no apologies for first reiterating the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South about recommendation 8 which states:

"there should be an early review of the rescue arrangements and equipment on the Thames which should take account of the Marchioness disaster."

Like my hon. Friend, I am appalled by Government's precipitate and negative response. It is extraordinary that, despite all the clear evidence that improvements to the rescue operation are needed, despite what Hayes has said and despite the fact that more people died once they were in the water than died because they were trapped in the boat when it sank, the Government immediately responded negatively to the request for an early review of the rescue arrangements and equipment.

There is no statutory authority responsible for rescue in inland water accidents. That problem is compounded in London by the absence of a Londonwide strategic body. The Marchioness disaster showed confusion between the existing emergency services. The Port of London authority does not deem rescue to be its responsibility. Some person or some organisation should have the responsibility for rescue equipment.

I also want to support and draw attention to the recommendation that the Department of Transport should promote legislation to introduce a breath test for skippers and crews similar to that applied to car drivers. I understand that the Department is considering that idea and we are glad about that.

When the Minister replies, I hope that he can tell us what further steps he intends to take to control the design of craft like the Marchioness. Clearly, if there is insufficient visibility, the passenger certificate should be withdrawn. Repeated concerns have been expressed to me that those boats are totally unsuitable for conversion to their present-day use.

The Marchioness action group has asked me to raise another point which is of concern to the group. The group will shortly publish its own report now that the sub judice rules, which have hung over the case for the past two years, have been raised. The report will contain many issues that will have to be addressed by the Government. One of the group's concerns is that there is still no provision for lifejackets on pleasure boats, nor do those boats have rope ladders or ling rope around the side, which is an important safety issue. The survivors strongly believe that if there had been lifejackets on the Marchioness, some of the victims would have survived. I ask the Minister to comment on that particular point and its relevance to the Hayes inquiry's call for a proper investigation into the rescue operation.

It is time for clear and consistent policy on marine safety and it is obvious that such a policy is long overdue. I hope that the Minister will take up the challenge issued by the Hayes report. It is not good enough to depend on self-regulation and market forces. It is up to the Department to ensure that the highest safety standards for our rivers are formulated and enforced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South said in conclusion that it was our wish, desire and determination that never again should river safety on the Thames be so jeopardised that we could have a disaster of such proportions, resulting in the death of 51 innocent people.

7.33 am

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I thank the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) for giving us the opportunity to consider the Hayes report this morning. I acknowledge his considerable interest and experience in these matters. I acknowledge also the interest and concern of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock), who is also present this morning. I hope that the hon. Lady will allow me to call it "this morning". I normally refer to 25 to eight as the morning, but no doubt our clocks, as in so many other matters, are differently arranged.

The hon. Gentleman referred to legal actions that have taken place since the disaster. He will know that it is not appropriate either for me or, dare I suggest, for him to rerun cases which have been heard in the courts. The hon. Gentleman was generous enough to allow me to intervene on his speech. I did so just to confirm that, as he knows, on the first occasion, the Director of Public Prosecutions instituted against the master of the Bowbelle proceedings under the merchant shipping Acts in which the jury failed to agree a verdict. That of itself may or may not be significant. As I have said, it is not appropriate for me to draw any conclusion from that other than to note the verdict.

What is perhaps of greater interest is that, on the second occasion on which the DPP instituted a rerun of the first case proceedings, the jury again failed to reach a verdict. I shall not go over the reasons why I conclude that. The hon. Gentleman will know what principal issues would have been of interest to the jury, but it is worth putting it on record that there has been no lack of enthusiasm by the DPP in bringing appropriate proceedings. On the two occasions when evidence has been heard, the jury have failed to agree. The hon. Gentleman will know also that the private prosecution which was brought against senior officials in the company which managed the Bowbelle also failed.

Mr. Spearing: I assure the Minister that I, too, do not suggest having a rerun of those three cases, but they underline my point about the need for a wider inquiry. In prosecuting the skipper, who may have been under some constraint over which he had no control, perhaps any hon. Member would have come to the same verdict as the jury. To emphasise the personal responsibility of either the officials of the firm or the skipper is surely not the right way to consider the totality of the tragedy, which illustrates the inappropriateness of using the normal courts in respect of such a tragedy. That is why there should be a big inquiry.

Mr. Norris: As the hon. Gentleman will expect of me, I shall refer to the desirability of any further inquiry proceedings. In essence, the hon. Gentleman has raised two issues. The first is his long-standing concern about previous collisions in which the Bowbelle was involved. As my predecessor explained to him last year and as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, the MAIB was aware of those

collisions but it considered that only one of them was relevant to the collision with the Marchioness. That is why the others were not mentioned in the MAIB report. That is a matter for the investigation board, but it was also for Mr. Hayes to decide what should be included in his report to the Department. Hon. Members have acknowledged that Mr. Hayes produced a good piece of work—one which challenges the Department. He, too, took the view that those incidents, which were related to the disaster and which referred to the history of the Bowbelle had been appropriately treated. I merely leave that on the record.

As for the idea that there should be a further public inquiry, there have been two major inquiries into matters connected with the Bowbelle-Marchioness collision. One was the MAIB report and the other was the report by Mr. Hayes. They are substantial pieces of work. Evidence was collected widely. Advertisements were placed in the press for contributions to the work. In addition, there have been the three prosecutions to which I referred, all of which have been unsuccessful.

Hon. Members will know that the purpose of a public inquiry is to establish what happened and to ensure that the accident or incident does not recur. There is no case for one in this instance because, as far as we are aware, all the facts have been established. An inquiry would therefore serve no useful purpose. It is worth noting that the Hayes report does not suggest that a public inquiry or any other investigation into the cause of the Marchioness disaster is needed.

If the hon. Members for Newham, South and for Deptford have any new evidence, they should come forward with it at the first opportunity. Knowing the assiduity of the hon. Member for Newham, South, I am sure that he would have done so if he had such evidence. Although I understand that, for example, some members of the Marchioness action group have called for a public inquiry—a call reiterated by the hon. Member for Deptford this morning—there is no case for an inquiry. It is clear that all the facts have been established.

Ms. Ruddock: I do not believe that the Minister can substantiate his remark that all the facts have been established.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): What facts?

Ms. Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman asks from a sedentary position, "What facts?" If he waits a moment, I shall try to explain my position. I had hoped to make a brief intervention.

Those who survived the disaster, who might have most information on what happened that night, and the eye witnesses have not been given the opportunity to present their evidence in a public arena. Just as importantly, they have not had the opportunity to cross-question the assumptions, presumptions, opinions and judgments of the experts who compiled the reports. For those two salient reasons, the Minister cannot substantiate the assertion that all the facts are known. We are convinced that they are not known. Those who have suffered most —those who survived and the families of the victims— have an on-going sense of deep grievance at the injustice of not having had a public inquiry.

Mr. Norris: I understand the sincerely held feelings of grievance among relatives of those who lost their lives in the disaster and of the survivors. I understand their natural concern. We are in difficult territory when either of us attempts to allege that all the facts are known or not known. However, in support of my proposition, I have the reports of the inquiries which have already been held. Both reports are substantial. On the hon. Lady's own admission, Mr. Hayes's report is challenging. I know that she does not suggest for one second that either inquiry has attempted to cover up information which is available and ought to be in the public domain. Therefore, the onus is on her. If she makes allegations that evidence is available which has not so far been adduced, I suggest in all seriousness that it is for her to bring that evidence forward.

As Mr. Hayes concluded more expertly than I, on the basis of what is currently known, no grounds exist for a public inquiry. That is not to say that many of those who were involved in one way or another in that accident do not have an understandable desire to express their feelings about the actions of some people on that dreadful night. I quite understand that. It is the most natural human emotion in the world. But we are dealing with the proposition that a public inquiry is needed. The basis for that inquiry would be that some part of the affair needs to be investigated because it has not previously been considered and material conclusions relating to it have not been drawn. I do not believe that either the hon. Lady or the hon. Member for Newham, South has made that case.

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman mentioned me as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock). May I draw the Minister's attention, when he reads *Hansard,* to the six unanswered questions in the MAIB report which I listed. There are many more. Surely it is not merely a question of the opportunity of witnesses to give evidence. For example, witnesses on the Hurlingham are not quoted at all. Questions which have arisen in the informed public's mind should be investigated and answered. I produced some questions that were not answered.

Mr. Norris: Perhaps I may say a few words about the Hayes report, and in that context we may be able to answer some of the detailed questions that the hon. Gentleman asked. I intend to cover much of the ground that he mentioned.

Ms. Ruddock *rose*——

Mr. Norris: I hope that the hon. Lady will allow me to continue for a few seconds.

Last December, as the House will know, Mr. Hayes was invited to conduct his inquiry into river safety. His precise terms of reference were:

> "In the light of the Marchioness/Bowbelle disaster to examine the handling since 1980 by the Department of Transport of its responsibility for the safety of vessels on rivers and inland waters and to report on the effectiveness of the present approach. The enquiry should take account of developments in the field of marine safety at international level."

I shall deal with the report first and then come back to the specific matter of the Marchioness disaster.

Ms. Ruddock: It is helpful that the Minister has given way at this point because he has just given the terms of reference, which contradict his recent statement that the facts of what happened in the Marchioness disaster had already been established. It is clear, from the terms of reference of the Hayes committee, that Hayes was not charged with finding out what happened during that

[Ms. Ruddock]

disaster. He was charged with wider terms of reference and therefore it is wrong to say that Hayes and his report have established the facts of what happened during the disaster.

Mr. Norris: But the hon. Lady did not hear me say that, precisely because I entirely accept her definition of what Mr. Hayes was dealing with. She has ignored the existence of the MAIB report, to which I shall refer later.

I remind the hon. Lady that the Hayes inquiry is the subject of our debate and that it was conducted on an informal and independent basis. Mr. Hayes had two advisers, one to cover marine matters and one to advise on safety. The inquiry received written and oral submissions from more than 130 sources and was given full co-operation by the Department of Transport. Mr. Hayes completed his work and submitted his report in May, and it was published by HMSO on Tuesday 7 July.

As I believe that the whole House acknowledges, Mr. Hayes has prepared a thorough and comprehensive report. He has not pulled his punches, and the report is all the more valuable for that. It makes it clear that there is, of course, a fundamental obligation on those who provide services for profit for travellers. But, as he also points out, it is the Department of Transport which, with the Port of London authority, is responsible for regulating the operators on the Thames.

I make no bones about straightforwardly saying that Hayes has concluded that while the Department

"showed technical competence and dedication",

it

"lacked the vision and drive to lead the marine industry into accepting that high safety standards and commercial success were compatible."

That is straightforward and, as I think that the House would agree, it does not mince words in any sense. It makes it clear that the Government, together with industry and the authorities concerned, have to aim higher in the future.

The report made 22 specific recommendations, which cover the future organisation of marine safety, specific action on river safety, the staffing and organisation of the marine accident investigation branch and its role in the dissemination of information, specific minor improvements to marine legislation and merchant shipping Acts in various contexts and new powers over boat owners and operators. I want to make it clear to the hon. Member for Newham, South that we are considering all those recommendations carefully, because he said that some had already been rejected. My specific advice is that all those recommendations are being considered.

Some recommendations will require further consideration and consultation with other interested organisations —as the report suggests—so we cannot give a full response to them now. Action on others, however, can be taken quickly. In some cases, action is already in hand. That has been fully described in the set of initial responses to the report, which we also released on Tuesday.

Several of the Mr. Hayes's recommendations concern the Department's overall approach to the exercise of its functions in this sector. The report urged the Department to take a much higher profile in promoting safety among a variety of disparate operators and regulators. We clearly intend to do that. The House will know, however, that part of the background to this matter is that a variety of bodies have responsibility in relation to safety on rivers and inland waters. That is as it should be, but it follows that a uniform approach would not necessarily be practicable, because conditions vary so greatly between one part of the country and another and between one river and another.

Mr. Spearing *indicated assent.*

Mr. Norris: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that.

The police and harbour authorities and the Health and Safety Executive have different safety responsibilities and it is proper that they should continue to have those individual responsibilities. We have therefore decided, as the hon. Gentleman knows, to establish a series of district marine safety committees throughout the United Kingdom, which will be based on the Department's six marine districts.

The committees will review in each area the way in which the responsibilities for safety, rescue and accident prevention are currently distributed. They will identify the scope for improvements; suggest ways of making those improvements; and most importantly, ensure that the improvements are implemented and maintained. They will also make proposals for legislative change if they think that that is necessary.

We intend that each committee will include representatives of relevant organisations in the district, both public and private, and will be chaired by a departmental chief surveyor. We will achieve national co-ordination and a consistent approach to how those committees undertake their work through a national steering committee. I am sure that the House would agree that it is appropriate, on that basis, that after two years, we should review what those committees have achieved and consider whether they should be established as permanent bodies.

We have endeavoured to accept that it is right that a multiplicity of bodies should have responsibility in various locations for various safety issues of local importance. We also believe that there should also be a mechanism to ensure that the new impetus, which Mr. Hayes has charged us to give to the matter, is maintained.

Mr. Hayes also made a number of recommendations about the way in which the surveyor general's organisation —SGO—should exercise its responsibilities in future concerning safety on rivers and at sea. Following recent reports by the National Audit Office and a Committee in another place, an internal review of this matter has been carried out. It recommended that the SGO be reconstituted as a marine safety agency; it would be responsible to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and would have the same degree of independence as other next steps agencies. Work is now in hand to establish whether the organisation should become a candidate for executive agency status. The conclusions on this will be announced in due course.

The hon. Member for Deptford spoke of the importance of recommendation 8 of the Hayes report, which I know we will all agree is the most crucial: it is that there should be an early review of the rescue arrangements and equipment on the Thames. We have reflected on this carefully, but our conclusion, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, and as we discussed earlier, is that a further review would not be justified.

Action is being taken to ensure that the lessons learnt from the Marchioness-Bowbelle disaster have been fully assimilated. The Home Office is asking the main parties

involved in the rescue—in this case, the Metropolitan police and the PLA—to confirm that they have drawn the appropriate lessons, that their contingency plans have been amended and that those plans are regularly reviewed and practised. In addition, Thames rescue arrangements and equipment will be examined by the relevant district marine safety committee under the new arrangements that I mentioned earlier.

Mr. Hayes recommended a number of measures that, as I have said, are already in hand. For example, we have increased tenfold the number of spot-checks on Thames passenger vessels since the loss of the Marchioness, in addition—I want to make this clear in case there is any doubt—to the annual survey of every passenger vessel. I know that Opposition Members will know that, rather than there being on average less than one spot-check a week, there are now half a dozen spot-checks in addition to the annual safety check. We are monitoring the effectiveness of the bridge lighting system. The hon. Member for Newham, South has a lot of experience of this, and that was shown by the way that he narrated the history of the Bow class vessels. He will know that passenger certificates will not be granted to any vessel that does not satisfy the new stringent visibility criteria.

Mr. Spearing *indicated assent.*

Mr. Norris: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's acknowledgement of that.

We are also reviewing the M notice system to make sure that the whole process is much more user friendly, and I think that that will be useful. I am sure that everyone will agree that to issue notices to all the vessels where the advice in those notices need apply to only a small number is the wrong way to ensure that those operating that small number of vessels realise that this is one of those countless pieces of paper that they should read and understand. Full details of our initial response to the Hayes report are available in the Library. We shall inform the House as our consideration of the recommendations proceeds and we are able to give firm responses.

I should like to say a little about the Marchioness-Bowbelle disaster. I know that the House will want to join me in saying that, despite the passage of time, the grief does not lessen. We shall all want to express our sympathies to the survivors of, and those bereaved by, one of the most horrific disasters that we can remember. This is my first opportunity to express my personal condolences.

Although the Hayes inquiry looked at the overall issue of river safety, it was clearly prompted by the concerns expressed after that disaster, which happened in August 1989. The Government were, and remain, determined that a disaster such as that should never happen again. An investigation by the independent MAIB was at once mounted and some new safety measures—for example, passenger counting and safety announcements—were initiated immediately after the accident. The MAIB's interim report was made 10 days after the accident and included six further safety recommendations, consideration of which was put in hand immediately. The MAIB carried out a thorough investigation and produced a hard-hitting report. It made 27 recommendations, all of which were accepted.

Although the report could not be published at once because of the proceedings that were then being taken against the master of the Bowbelle, its recommendations were published in July 1990 so that action could begin as quickly as possible. The Department has moved rapidly to implement those recommendations.

It being Eight o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 14th July, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on any Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Office Costs Allowances not later than one and a half hours after the Motion has been entered upon; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments to the said Motion which she may have selected and which may then be moved; and the said Motions may be proceeded with after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Motion made and Question proposed,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 15th July, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Patten relating to Education not later than one and a half hours after the Motion has been entered upon; and the said Motion may be proceeded with after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

HUMAN FERTILISATION AND EMBRYOLOGY (DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION) BILL

[Lords]

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Disclosure of Information) Bill *[Lords]*, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

War Crimes Act 1991

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

8 am

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): I am pleased to have this opportunity to raise in the House an issue that has divided both sides of the House and another place, and has divided the House from another place: the War Crimes Act 1991.

From time to time, the Government of the day, sometimes for lofty reasons, embark on a course of action that immediately strikes one as being astonishingly stupid and bound to end in disaster. Over the months, more and more people sense that something is going badly wrong, but do not feel able to speak out; disaster finally strikes and, suddenly, everyone wonders why that action was embarked on in the first place. Something similar happened in the case of the poll tax, and that pattern of events has occurred in relation to the War Crimes Act, except that disaster is still round the corner.

This controversial piece of legislation is believed to have flowed from a visit paid to Israel by Baroness Thatcher when she was Prime Minister. Having correctly criticised the Israeli Government for the abominable treatment of the Palestinians on the west bank and in Gaza, she was looking for a sweetener for the Israelis. She was asked whether the United Kingdom would be prepared to try alleged war criminals said to be living in Britain, and she agreed to have the matter investigated on her return to London.

In February 1988, the then Home Secretary was persuaded to set up an inquiry, the terms of reference of which were:

"To obtain and examine relevant material, including material held by Government Departments and documents which have been or may be submitted by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre and others"——

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My hon. Friend seeks to draw a parallel between a visit of the then Prime Minister in May 1986 and the setting up of the inquiry in February 1988. Is he not aware that Baroness Thatcher normally works at a faster rate of knots than that?

Mr. Townsend: My hon. Friend will know that there was considerable feeling against the proposal in the Cabinet and in Government ranks, which may be one reason for the long delay before the inquiry.

The inquiry was told to obtain and examine relevant documents, which it duly did. Sir Thomas Hetherington and Mr. William Chalmers submitted their report to the Home Secretary in June 1989. They considered that some action should be taken

"where the evidence is sufficient"

and suggested

"legislation to allow prosecution in this country is preferable to extradition."

Bearing in mind that the countries in which these crimes allegedly took place have since gained their independence, has extradition been reconsidered?

The inquiry looked into just over 300 cases, of which it recommended that 75 should be accorded further investigation. The inquiry then came to the remarkable conclusion that there were only three individuals against whom evidence to mount a prosecution existed. Rightly, Parliament was given an opportunity to express a view on the inquiry's report and the proposed legislation. Debates were held in both Houses in 1990 and in 1991.

On a free vote, the Commons backed legislation, and the Lords rejected it by an overwhelming majority, the Law Lords apparently being unwilling to go down this path. With due respect to their lordships, they are inclined to be slightly older than Members of this House. They represent the generation that went through the war and they know all about the Nazi horrors, the holocaust and the events at Nuremburg. Their wisdom was overwhelmingly against proceeding with the proposed legislation.

In the House of Commons, 55 Tory Members, including myself I am delighted to say, but, sadly, not the Minister—I checked this morning—voted against the legislation and the total included at least two members of the present Government. I understand that the Prime Minister voted against the concept right at the beginning of the proceedings.

The Act is directed against a small group of men, now British citizens but formerly citizens of the Baltic states, who are accused of being responsible for murders in German-occupied territory during the second world war. It is restricted to them and does not cover the all-too-many atrocities committed elsewhere during and after the war. Japanese war crimes are ignored, although we know that they were horrendous, as are war crimes committed in the former Soviet Union. We know that Stalin killed considerably more of his own people than Hitler killed in Germany. More recent crimes in Palestine, Cambodia and Iraq are not covered, either.

It is retrospective legislation, and surely we should all be cautious of that. It is also selective. Britain is about to follow the old Soviet Union and modern Israel in staging vindictive show trials. The grim and grisly affair of the wrong "Ivan the Terrible" being convicted in Israel should surely ring the alarm bells in the Minister's elegant private office.

Conservative peers who opposed the legislation were led by those of the calibre of Lord Carrington, Lord Hailsham, Lord Home of the Hirsel and Lord Havers—men of great experience in international affairs. In this Chamber, we were led by my distinguished parliamentary neighbour my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who fought in western Europe and ended up a lieutenant-colonel. They believed that the more atrocious the crime, the more scrupulously the rules of criminal justice should be observed. Amendments to the normal rules of evidence procedure will give an unfair advantage to the prosecution and penalise the defence.

My second question to the Minister is, what is currently being planned to enable fair trials to take place? With regard to evidence, there has been talk of televised interviews being transmitted from the Baltic states. Has such procedure been used before, and is it seriously contemplated now? Are videos to be used? One must bear it in mind that most of the witnesses live there, although I gather that some are to be flown to Britain—is that still being considered?

Lord Shawcross, a chief prosecutor at Nuremberg, wrote in *The Times* on 29 July 1989:

"Revival of these sad and terrible matters by sensational trials of a small handful of aged men, which will take years to conduct and which will start with an assumption of guilt, will not help to promote understanding and friendship between

the different peoples of the world, will not help eliminate the evil of anti-semitism nor, still less, enhance respect for British justice."

Those remarks very much represent my views. We are all aware that anti-semitism has been growing in eastern Europe.

As I said, only three elderly individuals are expected to be prosecuted. There must be a chance that none of them will still be alive by the time they are due to be sentenced, even if a jury can be found to convict them after 50 years. I draw the Minister's attention to a trial following the recent riots at Wapping. It was dismissed by the judge on the grounds that the event took place too long ago for people to recall the exact details, but here we are talking about events of 50 years ago.

The whole sorry saga has been brought about by a tiny, highly financed overseas pressure group, which, I believe, is seeking not justice but revenge and retribution. It has effectively activated the Jewish voters in the constituencies. I believe that many hon. Members found it prudent to go along with the legislation rather than be thought to be soft on Nazi criminals. It is a deplorable case of the tail wagging the dog.

A special group of police officers has been formed to seek the evidence. From parliamentary questions, I have learnt that in England and Wales there are 11 such officers, led by a detective chief superindendent and a detective chief inspector. Scotland has a further three officers led by a detective inspector. I say unhesitatingly that those detectives would be much better used bringing to justice today's terrorists, murderers, rapists and burglars in Bexleyheath and in Bexhill, and in other of my hon. Friends' constituencies. It is a truly remarkable waste of precious police manpower, especially detective manpower.

In answer to a parliamentary question in February, I was also told that the additional police expenditure associated with the War Crimes Act 1991 is estimated to be nearly £1 million for the financial year 1991-92. No doubt it will rise year by year. My third question is, what are the estimated costs to the Home Office in the next three years? In addition, there will be legal costs. Does the Minister's brief state what those costs are estimated to be? Is it conceivable that they will be even greater than the police costs? Perhaps we could be looking at a bill of some £10 million before this shocking affair is behind us.

At a time of considerable financial restraint, which affects the Home Office and other major Departments of State, it is perverse and foolish to spend such a sum raking over the ashes of the past and events that took place nearly 50 years ago, possibly before the Minister was on the earth.

The purpose of this short debate is to warn the Government that this matter will blow up in their face during the lifetime of this Parliament. The Government will come under growing pressure here and in another place. It looks increasingly like an exposure and spiteful vendetta against a group of pathetic old people. Whatever may be alleged about what they did or did not do in other countries so long ago, the reality is that they have nothing left to offer and a short while left to live. The British people will pick up that what is being proposed is unBritish and inherently unfair. They will be right, because it stinks.

If show trials take place, the tabloid coverage and the radio and television coverage, gruesome and appalling as it will be, will do nothing to help the reputation of the House, it having allowed the trials to take place in the first place. Many decades ago, Winston Churchill, with his usual verbal vividness, spoke about the need to draw a sponge across the crimes and horrors of the past. He well understood that it would not be possible to prosecute every lance-corporal for what happened in Nazi Germany. I believe that Churchill was right. I call upon the Government to be prudent and to think again.

8.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) on his success in raising an important and sensitive issue. How to deal with allegations of the most dreadful crimes and whether to deal with them such a long time after they are alleged to have been committed were matters that were debated at length and with much feeling by both Houses of Parliament in 1990 and 1991.

My hon. Friend has spoken powerfully and has given his interpretation of the events that led to the war crimes legislation. He asked several questions. First, extradition has not been reconsidered. The War Crimes Act 1991 is now the law. Secondly, my hon. Friend asked about the use of television for giving evidence——

Mr. Townsend: Have there been any discussions, bearing in mind that certain countries are now independent sovereign states, which they were not when the machinery moved into motion?

Mr. Wardle: There have been discussions with the new sovereign states. I repeat that extradition has not been reconsidered.

Bearing in mind the time, I shall take now my hon. Friend's second question. He talked about the use of television for giving evidence. In England, the procedure for evidence by live television link is enabled by section 32 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. The provisions were brought into force by a commencement order of 26 November 1991 in respect of cases of murder, manslaughter or serious and complex fraud. The procedure has not been used in Scotland because there is no equivalent statutory provision that equates to the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. The Government have brought forward provisions in the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Bill, which recently completed its stages in the other place. The measure will come before the House in the autumn. Its provisions will admit evidence from abroad by live television link in Scottish criminal proceedings. I understand that an amendment tabled in the other place has sought to disapply the relevant provisions to any proceedings under the War Crimes Act 1991. That is the present situation.

Before taking up some of the other specific matters that my hon. Friend raised, it might be helpful if I briefly remind the House of some of the background to the War Crimes Act.

In February 1988, the then Home Secretary established an inquiry to consider allegations that some perpetrators of war crimes committed during the second world war had taken refuge in this country. The House will recall that the inquiry reported in June 1989. It had concluded, among other things, that there were, among the many innocent people who had come here at the end of the war, some who might have committed the most terrible of crimes—the

[Mr. Wardle]

mass killing of the civilian population in towns and villages in central and eastern Europe. Some allegations relate to the destruction of entire villages with the murder of all inhabitants in reprisal raids following partisan activity.

Most often, the victims of those atrocities were Jewish men, women and children who were targeted for extermination as part of Nazi policy. They were punitive organised murders and not part of military conflict. The subjects under investigation for those crimes are mainly collaborators from the local communities who were formed into auxiliary police battalions under German command to control the civilian population, and they were also used for those killings.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that there has never been a statute of limitation on murders in the United Kingdom? Indeed, this very week someone has been accused of a murder that he allegedly committed 14 years ago. Those who believe that war crimes should not be prosecuted are suggesting that those who were guilty of especially offensive murders should be given a degree of immunity denied to any other British citizen.

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend makes a telling point most forcefully. The Government, having considered the inquiry's report, decided to introduce the War Crimes Bill. For reasons with which the House will be familiar, and to which my hon. Friend alluded, the Bill received a Second Reading in this House on two occasions. It is worth reminding the House of the majorities on those occasions. On the first, on 19 March 1990, the Bill was passed on a free vote by 273 votes to 60. On the second occasion, on 18 March 1991, again on a free vote, it was passed by 254 votes to 88. The Bill proceeded to Second Reading stage in another place on 30 April, where it was defeated for a second time. That vote cleared the way for the operation of the Parliament Acts and the legislation came into force on 9 May, just over a year ago. I am sure that my hon. Friend will recall the emphatic support given to the Bill.

I want to deal with the progress being made in the investigation of allegations of offences under the terms of the Act. The task of investigating allegations of those offences has been given to police officers based at New Scotlandyard and to the Crown Office, assisted by police officers from Lothian and Borders police in Scotland. As my hon. Friend is aware, the police war crimes unit in England and Wales is staffed by 11 police officers, led by a detective chief superintendent, and in Scotland three police offices are led by a detective inspector. That is a significant number of police officers.

Police costs of more than £900,000 in 1991-92 and estimated costs in the order of £1·6 million in the current financial year show the commitment that the Government have made to this investigative effort. I must tell my hon. Friend that he should take this year's expenditure as some indication of the expenditure trend over the next two or three years. Legal costs will depend on the number of cases brought to court.

There are those who suggest that the employment of valuable detective expertise on investigating allegations of those offences must have diverted officers from the investigation of more contemporary offences. My hon. Friend made that point. I hope that I can reassure the House that because the two police units are fully funded by the Government, neither the commissioner nor the chief constable of Lothian and Borders police have to divert officers from other work; they are separately funded by the Government.

It might be helpful if I set out the nature of the work of the police war crimes unit based in New Scotland Yard to illustrate the challenges facing our police officers. That is a matter of concern to my hon. Friend. Some 301 relevant cases were identified by the Hetherington-Chalmers parliamentary inquiry. Since its establishment, the unit has received a further 54 allegations.

Each of those allegations has had to be separately reviewed to establish the following essential facts: first, that the allegation, if proved, would come within the terms of the War Crimes Act and, secondly, that the person against whom the allegation is made can be traced in this country and is still alive. As a result of that exercise, the unit has been able to eliminate some 250 people from further investigation at this time.

Independent from the police unit, but working closely with it, is the Crown prosecution service war crimes unit headed by a senior lawyer. Over the past year the police and Crown prosecution service have made joint visits to Austrlia, Canada, the United States and the former Soviet Union.

Those visits have been very productive. Agreements were made with the Australian, Canadian and United States war crimes units to share information and to co-ordinate inquiries. Agreements were also obtained with the procurator general of the former Soviet Union that our officers could carry out work in their jurisdiction.

Of course the collapse of the Soviet Union meant that separate such arrangements needed to be made with the procurator generals of the new sovereign states to which my hon. Friend referred—Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. That delayed the work of the units. However, representatives of the police and the Crown prosecution service units have now visited each of those jurisdictions and have received co-operation from the authorities there.

The House will be aware that those investigations are unusually challenging. The Crown prosecution service unit is working closely with the police and will continue to do so, advising as to evidence, how it should be presented and, where necessary, supporting the police unit with advice on the interviewing of witnesses in the former Soviet Union and the Baltic states.

The police and prosecutors are, of course, working against considerable pressure of time. As my hon. Friend has made clear, the alleged offences were committed some 50 years ago and many of the suspects and witnesses are elderly. Core evidence from witnesses and documents must be gathered from abroad. Interpretation and translation at every stage means that completion of inquiries takes longer than in more usual police investigations.

Although investigation into priority cases will be completed as soon as possible, I cannot say when all investigations will be completed. Whether or not there will be any prosecution will depend on the most careful scrutiny of the available evidence to determine whether there is a realistic prospect of conviction.

The Demjanjuk case in Israel highlights the importance of accurate identification of suspects. I can assure my hon. Friend and the House that the Attorney-General and the Lord Advocate require a very high standard of evidence,

and will therefore scrutinise very carefully the issue of identification before they agree that proceedings may be instituted.

The House will also be aware that there is a case in the Court of Session in Edinburgh concerning an action of defamation against Scottish Television. The Lord Advocate is aware of the case, but the question of a criminal prosecution is separate from and is not determined by a decision in the civil court where the issues and standard of proof are different. Nor should the House make any assumption about whether any individual is being investigated. It is not the Crown's practice to discuss individual cases. Any such investigations are confidential. Any decision on criminal proceedings will be a matter for the Lord Advocate in Scotland or the Attorney-General in England and Wales.

I conclude by reminding the House again of its overwhelming support for the legislation that the Government introduced to deal with dreadful crimes committed during the last war. Some of the allegations relate to punitive organised murders where innocent people were herded to mass graves. To those who witnessed and survived those terrible events the experiences of many years ago doubtless remain as clear as if those events had occurred only yesterday.

It is now for the police and prosecutors to carry out their duty to investigate and bring to justice those who committed such crimes.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 10 July 1992

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Points of Order

9.30 am

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that the second motion on the Order Paper is on Government social policies on Merseyside and stands in my name. It has been drawn to my attention that the civil servants of the Under-Secretary of State for Wales have been ordered to produce extra long briefs to ensure that he uses all the time available on the first motion on the Order Paper. It has also been drawn to my attention that the Government Whips have been active in recruiting Conservative Back-Bench Members to speak in that debate.

It is absolutely clear that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), is running away from debating the second motion. I hope that when you, Madam Speaker, observe what goes on in the Chamber this morning, you will be censorious about the Government's behaviour.

Madam Speaker: Let us continue with our proceedings and hope that we can make some progress.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. It may assist the House and you to know that, in opening the debte on the motion, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) will have said all that there is to say on the topic within about half an hour. My hon. Friends and I intend to speak briefly, as I am sure you would desire, to ensure that there is time to debate the second motion, as my hon. Friends representing the Merseyside area wish. May I endorse the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth)? It is clear that Conservative Members have been thrown into the Chamber by the Whips, having been drawn from hither and thither, with the intention of frustrating proper debate.

Madam Speaker: I can go no further than what I have just said. We must now make progress and see how we go.

Toxic Waste Disposal (Wales)

9.37 am

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the import of toxic waste into Wales should cease and that the commercial trade in toxic waste should come to an end; notes that there is considerable unease among the people of South East Wales about the activities of ReChem International, Pontypool; and calls upon the Secretary of State for Wales to hold a full, independent and public inquiry into that plant.

In a sense, I am delighted that many Conservative Members are present this morning because the matter clearly concerns those hon. Members who represent areas with toxic waste incinerators, such as mine.

The motion has two aspects: first, it calls for a complete ban on the import of toxic waste into Britain; secondly, it refers to the need for an independent public inquiry into the ReChem plant at Pontypool in my constituency. The issue has been simmering for nearly two decades. My predecessor, the hon. Member for Pontypool and then for Torfaen, Mr. Leo Abse, had a great interest in the ReChem problem. Since 1987, when I became a Member of this House, I have tabled a number of early-day motions asking for an independent public inquiry into ReChem and on each occasion a clear majority of Members of Parliament representing Welsh constituencies have called for such an inquiry.

Members of the European Parliament, including my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), when he represented South East Wales, and my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), who is still our representative in Brussels, played a sterling part in trying to ensure that European legislation covers plants such as ReChem, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent will explain later.

All the local authorities are involved, including Torfaen borough council, Gwent county council, Pontypool community council and many others, are opposed to the Government's insistence that there should be no public inquiry into ReChem. My party, including the ward party in New Inn, the constituency party in Torfaen, the Welsh council of Labour's annual conference and the national British conference of the Labour party have all expressed, through resolutions and motions, that there should be an end to the import of toxic waste and that there should be a public inquiry.

A number of pressure groups have sprung up in my constituency which are opposed to what is going on in ReChem, including Mothers and Children Against Toxic Waste, the excellent STEAM headed by David Powell and the Panteg Environmental Protection Group. All the different groups, together with the whole community, are opposed to what is going on in ReChem and are concerned about the need for a public inquiry.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): As the hon. Gentleman has the advantage of having been a Member since 1987, may I ask him whether the groups to which he has referred had the opportunity to present evidence to two Select Committees which have met since the hon. Gentleman has been a Member? Did those Select Committees come to the view that a public inquiry was necessary?

Mr. Murphy: The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs dealt with the matter in 1990. Evidence was given by those groups and by the local authorities to that Select Committee and, by way of petition, to the House.

Never was there such solidarity across party boundaries. If this morning Conservative Members seem to think that they oppose the essence of the motion, they must realise that many supporters of the Conservative party in my constituency and across Wales believe that there should be a public inquiry into ReChem. Never was that more vividly illustrated than when the Canadian imports of toxic waste coming thousands of miles across the Atlantic were sent back. When a march and demonstration was held in New Inn around the ReChem plant, all the mayors and chairmen of the local authorities, wearing their chains of office, led the way. My hon. Friends the Members for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), and for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), myself and many thousands of people joined the march and demonstration to show that all our civic leaders, almost all our Members of Parliament and the majority of people who live in Torfaen and beyond in Gwent and south-east Wales are deeply concerned about the import of toxic waste.

Why is it that for almost 20 years, the controversy has developed? The plant was given planning permission in 1972 by Monmouthshire county council and it opened in 1974 when the regulations governing such plants were in a vacuum and, more importantly, when the company said that all it would do would be to process industrial wastes from south Wales, from the south-west of England and from the midlands. The company never mentioned that it would deal with the most deadly poison known to mankind and it was not until later that the plant decided to process polychlorinated biphenyls. That is the main reason why people are concerned about what goes on at the plant and why there should be a public inquiry.

Everyone knows that PCBs are highly dangerous and how, if they are incorrectly incinerated, handled or stored, they present a risk to all forms of life, especially human life. We also know that to get rid of PCBs, they have to be incinerated at the highest possible temperature.

One of the Opposition's first concerns is about the nature of the incinerator. We believe that the incinerator does not achieve 100 per cent. success and we do not believe that the temperature capability is adequate. We also think that the ancillary processes involved in dealing with the waste, such as taking in large transformers, draining off the PCBs and cutting up the units for incineration, present difficulties and dangers because they are dealt with in buildings with no controlled ventilation system.

The incinerator was designed in the 1960s and was built almost 20 years ago. Since that time, technology has developed apace. The incinerator does not compare favourably with incinerators on the continent. Over the years, deep unease has been expressed by those whose job it is, in Torfaen borough council and elsewhere, to monitor the impact of the incinerator and to see whether the level of PCB contamination in the area immediately around the plant is bad.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although he is talking about the plant being many years old and as if no money has been invested in the plant since it was set up, massive sums have been invested in the plant to ensure its safety?

Mr. Murphy: That is perfectly true. The Welsh Office spent about £1 million in grants to the company so that it could do something about the stack. It is a classic example of, instead of the polluter paying, the polluted paying because the taxpayer had to fork out money for so-called "improvements" which, far from improving the plant, as far as we can tell, meant that water vapour reached the ground far more quickly than it did before, sometimes causing a fog in the roads around the incinerator which was a nuisance to residents and to travellers.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): The hon. Gentleman has said that the ReChem plant in his constituency is not being operated correctly and he has even said that it is being operated in a way that is dangerous to the general public. That is a serious allegation and I should like the hon. Gentleman to produce some irrefutable evidence to support that allegation.

Mr. Murphy: I did not make that allegation; I said that there was unease. I am no scientist and I have never pretended to be. However, I represent 90,000 constituents and I know that they have genuine fears which must be allayed. We are not calling for the plant to be closed down, but for an independent public inquiry. That is totally different.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Murphy: No, because I must finish what I am saying. I do not see why it would be so bad for Conservative Members, the company or for the toxic waste industry to support such an inquiry. I will come to that matter later.

Many of us believe that the incinerator is well past its sell-by date and that it was wrongly sited in a valley near a residential area. There is always the possibility of technical and human error and there have been a number of incidents over the years which have caused great concern. I do not intend to go into all of them, but I shall mention a few that my local authority has had to investigate.

There was an explosion which damaged the incinerator hearth and enveloped the neighbourhood in clouds of smoke. There were blow-backs through the furnace doors which resulted in PCB-contaminated aluminium foil strips being deposited in large numbers on nearby residential land. Quantities of contaminated foam from the plant's cooling towers were blown over nearby residential land. There are instances of chemical spillages in storage areas which, because the plant's management did not see fit to alert the local services, resulted in the widespread mobilisation of all emergency services as there was public disturbance about heavy odour which spread for distances of up to six miles from the ReChem incinerator. Finally, the breakdown of various elements of the gas cleaning section of the plant resulted in palls of black smoke and other chimney stack emissions.

One of the worst aspects of those incidents was that, except on one occasion, the company refused to give evidence or to hold discussions with the local authority. Yet at the same time, the company says that it wants to set up a liaison committee to smooth the path. Local residents and the local authority say—in my view, quite rightly—

that they will not take part in such a committee because the company will give no undertaking that those taking part in the deliberations will be free from litigation in the courts.

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that Torfaen borough council is under a legal obligation to set up the liaison committee and that it is a most unhelpful way of proceeding for it to decline to do so?

Mr. Murphy: No. I certainly do not. I repeat that, as long as a sword of Damocles in the form of the threat of law suits hangs over the heads of the council and local residents, it is pointless for them to serve as members of a liaison committee. The company is trigger-happy when it comes to the courts. Let me list just some of those who have been sued by ReChem simply for speaking their minds on an issue of great significance to the people of Wales: David Powell of STEAM—that case is still under investigation; the former Member of Parliament for Bootle, Mr. Allan Roberts, who was threatened with the law just months before he died; Red Dragon Radio; the *Western Mail*; Greenpeace; *The Guardian*; *The Daily Star*; the BBC. All of them have been taken to court for daring to express doubts about the incinerator and saying that there should be a public inquiry into what is happening at ReChem.

Mr. Roger Evans: Whereas comment in the press is open to the law of defamation simply and easily, those who participate in a properly constituted liaision committee, which it is the legal obligation of the borough council to establish under the Act, are protected properly by qualified privilege, and any litigant would have to prove actual malice. The threat of litigation is not an explanation or an excuse for Torfaen's failure.

Mr. Murphy: If ReChem could find a way of getting round qualified privilege, it would certainly do so.

All the nonsense in the courts does nothing to improve ReChem's public image. It has paralysed the media, created a climate of fear among my constituents and subverted local democracy.

Torfaen borough council is the local waste disposal authority and has within its area a plant which, over the years, has developed techniques for destroying PCBs from abroad. The authority has to spend thousands and thousands of pounds on monitoring the incinerator—at the last count, £25,000 a year. Yet the Welsh Office has given no extra help to Torfaen borough council. It has not even exempted it from the penalties to help it to monitor the plant.

Gwent county council is the local authority whose duty it is to deal with emergency plans. We all know that, like other incinerators and plants, ReChem is exempt from such an emergency plan under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations. If fire broke out, as it did in Canada, it would lead to the wholesale contamination of land, housing and industry for years. Yet there are no emergency plan regulations to cover the area around ReChem. One of the borough councillors for the New Inn area—Councillor John Turner—has complained to the European Community with a view to ensuring that the Seveso directive, which covers similar matters, applies to the ReChem incinerator. When Gwent asked the Health and Safety Executive for help, the HSE would do nothing, even though the law governing emergency plans did not apply to ReChem.

Another reason why there should be a public inquiry is that there is unease about the way in which the Government agencies charged with monitoring plants such as ReChem are simply not doing their job well enough.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is the responsibility of the county council, in association with borough councils and the emergency services, to introduce an emergency plan for whatever emergencies may arise? I am sure that ReChem will have been taken into account by the county council; if it has not, we are talking about a failure by the county council.

Mr. Murphy: The whole point is that that the council could not do that; the law prevents it from doing so. Even when it tried to do what the hon. Gentleman suggests unofficially and draw up an emergency plan, it was given no help by the HSE.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution does not play a happy role in all this. I served on the Standing Committee that considered the Environmental Protection Act 1990. We repeatedly pressed the Government to give extra resources, increased funding and more people to HMIP, but they refused. HMIP simply does not have enough people to cope with problems that arise from plants such as ReChem. Moreover, they operate only during office hours. If something happens at the plant outside HMIP's office hours, nothing can be done. My constituents are constantly complaining to me about HMIP. At best, they get an answering machine message and, at worst, nothing at all. The response times are wholly inadequate. No proper control measures are available for laying down standards of PCB emissions. And will HMIP ever demand more than the company is willing to pay?

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Has not HMIP served two notices on the company in the past 12 months?

Mr. Murphy: That is exactly what I intended to say. I was concerned about the openness surrounding the two notices recently served on ReChem. Neither the local authority, which is, after all, the waste disposal authority, nor I—the local Member of Parliament—knows anything at all about why those notices were served. Something must have gone wrong. Statutory regulations must have been broken. We are told that £2·5 million has been spent on improvements to the plant. But I know, and the world knows, that those so-called improvements have been made in response to requests from HMIP. I hope that the Minister will tell us what exactly went wrong to cause HMIP to serve two notices on ReChem in my constituency.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that notification has been given by both the company and HMIP of what the £2·5 million-worth of extra investment is intended to achieve? That is in accordance with notices served by HMIP and, I understand, sent to the hon. Gentleman on 27 May 1992.

Mr. Murphy: Certainly not. We have been told only that the notices have been served. We have been told none of the details. Perhaps the Minister will tell us the details later.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Considering the nature of the debate, it is most interesting that one of the major discussions on the radio this morning concerned the lack of information that is available when notices are served. That underlines the need for an inquiry of the kind for which my hon. Friend argues.

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for adding to my case.

The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which has already been referred to by Conservative Members, met during 1989 and reported in June 1990. On this occasion, it was charged with dealing with toxic waste disposal in Wales in general, but so important did it consider the ReChem incinerator that it prepared a separate report on what was happening at Pontypool.

The Committee acknowledged—as did the Government in their response to the report—the public concern regarding the plant. It drew attention to the under-resourcing and under-staffing of HMIP and the serious problems of unpublicised emissions into our sewerage and water systems and—most significantly and quite rightly—recommended the monitoring of PCB levels, a fact for which the Opposition were grateful to the Government. The Government accepted that, and Professor Roberts of the University of East Anglia is currently engaged in that activity. At the end of that survey, the Secretary of State for Wales will determine whether a public inquiry should be held.

On many occasions my predecessor and I have raised the issue of a public inquiry in the House and the Government have consistently said no. But following a meeting of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, even the Government realised that the weight of opinion among local people was such that a public inquiry was more than possible. I go further and claim that, because of the overwhelming case that exists, such an inquiry is inevitable.

The Select Committee acknowledged the total unsuitability of the site where ReChem now stands. The incidents to which I have referred, the doubts about the incinerator, the inadequacy of proper control and monitoring and the total lack of confidence of the people of Torfaen, New Inn and Gwent about what goes on at ReChem prompted Mr. Justice Garland in 1987, in yet another court case, to say:

> "The plant should be the subject of further research or public inquiry. The company and the Government have nothing to lose if such an inquiry takes place."

What is there to hide? If it is believed that the place is safe, why not hold a public inquiry? If the inquiry finds that all is well, that will be the end of the story. But if it finds that all is not well, it will have been worth while from the start.

Public confidence in the plant is further eroded by the other matter that is before the House, which is the increasing number of PCBs and other toxic wastes that are imported into this country and particularly into my constituency. About 16 per cent. of all toxic wastes that come into the United Kingdom end up in Pontypool. That is possibly 500 tonnes of PCBs every month. About 95 per cent. of those toxic wastes that come to Pontypool to be dealt with originate in Europe. All the rubbish that we have been told about the way in which the incinerator deals with wastes from undeveloped countries is shown to be completely untrue by the figures and places from where the waste emanates.

Spain and Italy top the list, and the others include Australia, Belgium, Canada, Ireland, Iceland, Germany, Holland, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland and Austria. They are not undeveloped or third-world countries. Indeed, some are wealthier than Britain, and they are certainly capable—because they have the technology and wealth—of building their own incinerators.

The toxic wastes come through 17 ports in the United Kingdom, including Immingham, Harwich, Newport, Felixstowe, Ramsgate, Holyhead, Seaforth, Liverpool and Hull. It all goes against the basic idea, which even the present Government accept, that every developed country should deal with the disposal of its own toxic waste. That is why the Basle convention preamble says that hazardous wastes should be disposed of in the states where they were generated.

The whole international trade in toxic waste is a disgrace to modern society and the brokers who engage in that murky and sinister trade must accept that, as a result of their activities, the poisons, the worst known to man, come to my constituency to be disposed of. Pontypool—indeed, Wales as a whole—is fast becoming the dustbin for the world's worst poisons.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): The hon. Gentleman said in his speech——

Mr. Murphy: I was giving way to the hon. Gentleman. I have more to say.

Mr. Sweeney: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was resuming his seat. Does he accept that over half the highly toxic waste produced in Wales goes to England? Is not it a fact that pollution is no respecter of national boundaries?

Mr. Murphy: That is not the point. I am talking about the import of PCBs and I have not mentioned industrial waste. Those PCBs come across the world to Wales. It is a totally different issue. I apologise if I gave the impression that I had concluded my speech, and I hope to continue to be as effective in the rest of my remarks as I have been so far.

The House should be aware that so many PCBs are coming to Wales—causing such controversy—to be generated that ReChem makes a great deal of money from processing PCBs. Most of ReChem's profits come from dealing with the waste that no other country is prepared to handle. So the company trawls the world, and in recent days reported profits down to just under £10 million. As a percentage of turnover, ReChem is one of the United Kingdom's most profitable businesses.

The company was originally owned by British Electric Traction. There was a management buy-out in 1985 and it was taken over by Shanks and McEwan. At that time, the then chairman, Richard Biffa, and managing director, Malcolm Lee, jointly owned 42 per cent. of ReChem. When that merger took place, Mr. Biffa collected £10 million and Mr. Lee £24 million worth of shares. That gives the House an idea of the money that is to be made from processing poisons.

No wonder there has been a public outcry, as more and more imports flood into my valley. The latest, from Western Australia, the Government rightly stopped. So that did not come here. Canadian waste was sent back, and it is interesting to note that even the community concerned in Canada, which experienced the fire that received

publicity at the time—was not responsible; the Government of Quebec had forwarded the material and the mayor of the town, St. Basile-le-Grand, said:

"In returning the waste to Canada, you gave us a gift—the gift of awareness."

The world is becoming impatient with threats to the environment and with thousands of tonnes of deadly poisons travelling by rail, sea and land. That is why Britain should use its presidency of the European Community to strengthen, not weaken, legislation on these issues. We must not agree to bilateral arrangements. We should give a lead to the world in the coming months. The British Government should work to achieve a total ban on toxic waste imports and an end to the commercial trade in those poisons. They should ask Belgium and Sweden why they are still sending wastes to us when they said that they would stop doing so. They should end the burning of chlorinated solids at the plant and extend the emergency plan regulations to plants such as ReChem.

The Government should compensate my local authority for the unique and enormous cost of monitoring ReChem, send in the Department of Health to survey the health of the local population, ensure that plants such as ReChem are never again built close to residential areas and, above all, have the courage today to announce a full-scale independent public inquiry into the ReChem plant at Pontypool, not just for the sake of the future of my constituents, but for the sake of the future.

10.7 am

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): The ReChem plant is in the portion of Torfaen represented by the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), but it is just on the borders of his constituency, and that part of Torfaen which I represent, and the part of Monmouth borough which I represent, is at least as directly affected by the operations of the plant as is his constituency.

I wish to make it clear at the outset that I share wholeheartedly, and welcome, the concern that the hon. Gentleman expressed. There is undoubtedly, as one speaks to constituents on the doorstep and at farm gates in the area—it is on the verge of an extremely beautiful tract of countryside—grave concern about the operations of the plant.

The difficulty that the hon. Member for Torfaen and I face is that hard evidence that the operations are dangerous has been extraordinarily difficult to come by. Indeed, we face in expressing concern on the issue a number of conclusions made by various bodies which are disbelieving of the concern which our constituents firmly express.

For example, the second report of the Environment Select Committee concluded that high temperature incineration was a safe and effective way of disposing of combustible wastes. The pollution inspectorate believes it to be the best and most practical way of dealing with these dangerous substances. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that David Wheeler, ReChem's operations director, can put it in an attractive way, on the face of it, that he and ReChem are on the side of the angels because they destroy these dangerous chemicals rather than permitting them to pollute the environment.

The problem facing the hon. Member for Torfaen and myself, and our constituents, is that a great body of opinion believes that the plant is safe, which is why Torfaen borough council has failed in litigation to have it closed down. It has been extremely difficult to prove the danger. No more than the hon. Member for Torfaen do I pretend to be a scientist. I have been around the plant. I do not pretend to be an expert in its operations, but the difficulty and doubt appear to arise from the lack of a method of continuously monitoring all the unburnt and newly formed chemicals and metals that emerge in the stack gases. In other words, no system is 100 per cent. accurate in identifying what goes out of the top of the stack.

In fairness to ReChem, I should say that from my visit to the plant, I know that it has a sophisticated scientific system of monitoring what comes out, but it gives only a statistical sample. Like public opinion polls, the British public and my constituents are not necessarily impressed by such statistical analysis.

We want to know whether the process is safe or whether it is simply a scheme for defusing partly disposed of matter over the constituency of the hon. Member for Torfaen, over mine and no doubt further throughout south-east Wales. How will we find out? That is the issue that the hon. Gentleman's motion addresses, and I share and welcome his concern.

Forty years ago, scientists were perceived to be infallible and beyond criticism. I remember being taken to Mamhilad in the 1950s and shown what was then a wonder of the world—the British Nylon Spinners tower, which is now a monument of industrial archaeology as much as an 18th century shop tower in Southwark. It was placed there, Madam Speaker, because it was an area——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been very kind in elevating me, but I am a Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

British Nylon Spinners deliberately constructed its plant in the area because of the lack of pollution. Ever since, as we have seen in a number of respects, doubt has been expressed about whether scientists can be relied on to get these things right. The difficulty, as the hon. Member for Torfaen said, is that it is a matter of democracy. There is a great feeling in our area that, what was given planning permission in 1972 and began operations in 1974, has become very different from what everybody expected long ago. The feeling that there is somehow an absolute right to go on operating a plant unless and until somebody can close it down by hard evidence in a High Court action is not acceptable to our constituents, who want to be reassured now that it is safe to live close to the plant.

The hon. Member for Torfaen and I are not scientists and neither are the bulk of our constituents, but we appreciate that these substances are highly dangerous. I suspect that he and I take the simple view, which is shared by our constituents, that the plant should not operate unless the evidence that it is safe is absolutely overwhelming. We are not prepared to take a risk. It may have been established, so far, that that risk, scientifically, is very small, but that argument is not attractive to our constituents, who take the view that there should be no risk at all.

Where do we go from here? The only part of the motion where I part company with the hon. Member for Torfaen is the call for a public inquiry now. There may be a powerful argument for one at the end of the year, but the Government, particularly the Welsh Office, have realised

[Mr. Evans]

and appreciated the concern in this area of Wales and have acted. The first and most important matter is Professor Lewis Roberts's inquiries, with the University of East Anglia, into whether any PCBs can be found in the environment of the plant and around our constituencies. That inquiry is of the highest importance. It will be a full, independent scientific inquiry, in which I suspect we can all properly have great confidence. If that inquiry finds the hard evidence that has eluded Torfaen borough council, it will be a most important step forward. If it concludes that nothing is awry, it will be some assurance to our constituents. I am content for an independent body of scientific experts to report on those highly technical scientific matters and I welcome the Government's initiative. That is the first thing that the Government have done.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the reasons why the present survey is being conducted is because many hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed much disquiet about the operation of the plant? The initiative did not come from the Welsh Office. It responded to the protests and representations that were made in this place.

Mr. Evans: I respectfully agree that there has been a mounting accumulation of protest, to which, I am glad to say, the Welsh Office has responded. I gladly welcome the fact that Members representing a variety of constituencies have done their duty by raising the issue.

The second thing that the Government have done that goes beyond the Welsh Office—this goes to the crux of the democratic argument that the hon. Member for Torfaen mentioned—is to introduce the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The tradition has been that a company can carry out any process if it has planning permission, unless and until somebody goes to the trouble and difficulty of proving that it is so dangerous that it should be closed down. That tradition prevailed in an era of high innocence, well before the development of highly dangerous industrial processes. The Environmental Protection Act reverses that burden.

The second reason why the call for a public inquiry may be premature is that from the end of this year ReChem will require a licence from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the 1990 Act to continue its operations. At the end of the year, it will be a matter of much concern whether that licence is granted or withheld.

The House would be particularly grateful to know whether Professor Lewis Roberts's report is expected to become available to the Welsh Office before the decision is taken on whether to grant a licence under the 1990 Act. I see heads shaking. It is an important matter and we all want an answer on it.

In conclusion, there is concern that so far there has been precious little hard evidence that this process is dangerous. The plant is carefully monitored, but some of us worry whether that monitoring is acceptable to our constituents. That is not what we hear on the doorsteps. We want Professor Lewis Roberts's team to report as early as possible and the most careful consideration on the decision to grant or withhold the licence at the end of the year.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Llew Smith.

10.20 am

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau, Gwent): If I may, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will give you nine out of 10 for that pronunciation. It was an excellent attempt.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is my pleasure to try and learn the correct pronunciation.

Mr. Smith: You have already shown, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you are an excellent student.

First, I support the demand of my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) for an end to the commercial trade in toxic waste. Countries should stop using the United Kingdom as the toxic dustbin of the world. Each country should be responsible for its own waste. That is not a nationalistic demand; it is a demand for responsible government. Governments should not allow goods to be produced if they do not have the willingness and capability to deal with those goods safely at the end of their natural life.

Unfortunately, Governments and companies have abdicated that responsibility by dumping their waste problems on our communities. They have also been told that ReChem in the United Kingdom has the expertise to deal with the world's waste. I shall show in this debate that that is not so and that, indeed, ReChem has been involved in a massive cover-up to prevent the truth from being told. Today I will tell the truth because of evidence that has come into my possession in recent years. Much of the evidence will be technical and statistical. The House will appreciate that for the truth to be told and for previously unpublished statistics to be explained it is necessary to quote extensively from detailed information.

On 13 September 1938 Alex Falconer, Member of the European Parliament, and I brought to the attention of the EP correspondence between Michael Sanger, head of ReChem's special operations unit, and the then managing director, Malcolm Lee. The correspondence showed that on 12 February 1987, Michael Sanger took a sample of dust from the window ledge of his office at the Pontypool site which was later analysed by the Harwell laboratories. The test showed levels of contamination by PCBs and even more toxic deliverants, dioxins and furans, which were high compared with the levels recommended by the established Californian guidelines.

I want to emphasise that I did not choose the so-called Californian guidelines; they were chosen by ReChem as the most appropriate measuring rod of contamination. Surprise, surprise, after the Californian guidelines had proved high levels of contamination in the ReChem plant, Malcolm Lee all of a sudden began to question the extent to which those guidelines had been used elsewhere. Yet a further document that has come into my possession shows that the Californian guidelines continued to be used for work carried out in establishments, such as the Port of Bristol authority.

On 1 April 1987 the scientist, Michael Sanger, reported his findings to Malcolm Lee, who arranged for further samples to be taken at various locations on the Pontypool site. On 3 April 1987, 10 samples were taken and an 11th was taken at about the same time. They, too, were analysed by Harwell. Four months later, when Mr. Sanger requested the results of the tests, he received a trite, incomplete reply. No relevant test results were given in the reply, although there was an assurance that the checks showed that the position was entirely safe.

During a flurry of media activity which followed the revelations of the memo to the European Parliament, ReChem's Dr. Peter Jones was asked on television about the high levels of contamination. When asked whether he had an answer at that stage, he replied, "Yes I do—faulty arithmetic." When asked about revealing the facts, he answered, "Certainly the data have been published," and during the same interview, he said, "I guess in Chemosphere." In a newspaper report, ReChem's defence of the allegations included the explanation that fundamental mistakes were made in that particular analysis and a second set of test results had cleared the plant. However, two days later ReChem admitted that there was some truth in the allegation of high levels of contamination, but dismissed its significance without stating the facts of the contamination.

Furthermore, in conducting those inquiries it became obvious that the results had not been published in *Chemosphere*. In responding to my request for a copy of the article that was supposed to include those test results, ReChem deliberately tried to deceive me by providing me with another article and an entirely different set of test results. It was not until the intervention and on the insistence of Fred Higgs, the national officer of the Transport and General Workers Union, that I was provided with the test results. I pay tribute to him. Not only has he campaigned over the years for freedom of information but, unlike others, he insisted on this right although his own union members were involved.

I can now reveal to the House that those results had been leaked to me by another source some years earlier. That is why I knew that the information with which the company provided me was false. I knew that they were a completely different set of results. Nevertheless, I required that information from the company to confirm that the results leaked to me were correct and to highlight the extent to which ReChem would go to prevent the general public from knowing the true level of contamination at the Pontypool site.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In view of the hon. Gentleman's revelations today, and bearing in mind his position as an MEP for this area when the Welsh Affairs Select Committee held its inquiry into ReChem, did he draw these facts to the attention of the Select Committee?

Mr. Smith: As the hon. Gentleman will find out, I did not receive confirmation of the results until after the Welsh Affairs Select Committee briefing.

The contamination of extremely toxic chemicals included dioxins, the very type of deadly poisons that caused the disastrous contamination at Seveso in Italy and by Agent Orange in Vietnam as a result of American action.

Before commenting on the 1987 test results, I shall briefly explain the significance of the Californian guidelines. When dealing with the disastrous contamination of a large building nine years ago, the California state authorities sought the advice of a team of scientists who studied all the data available to them on the toxicity of those chemicals. It derived maximum acceptable values or limits for surface contamination to take into account the risks of absorption and ingestion and, secondly, for airborne contamination to take into account the risk of breathing in contamination. It established standards for places where there was no restriction on who went there and for how long, as well as for restricted access areas where only persons wearing protective gear were allowed for limited periods. Surprisingly, the Health and Safety Executive confirmed as recently as this week that it still has no standards for surface contamination by polychlorinated biphenyls or for other and more toxic chemicals associated with PCBs.

If I may comment on a few of the 1987 test results, on a window ledge near ReChem's incinerator there was dioxin contamination at a level more than 2,000 times higher than the Californian guidelines for regular exposure —2378 TCDD, at 8 micrograms/sq m. Another example was taken from above a door at the entrance to a reception area that is open to the general public.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman quotes statistics and seems to claim that they are significant, in which case will he please tell the House what the confidence intervals of those statistics are so that we may know exactly what their significance is?

Mr. Smith: The statistics were provided by ReChem, through the good offices of the full-time national officer, Fred Higgs. Secondly, the Californian guidelines can be seen in back copies of *Chemosphere*. If we relate one set of statistics to another, we can come to a conclusion as to the levels of contamination that are being exceeded.

Mr. Richards: Let me make myself clear, so that the hon. Gentleman understands the question. Are the statistics that you are quoting significant at a 95 per cent. confidence level or a 99 per cent. confidence level? How confident, statistically speaking, are you of the figure that you are quoting?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, I am sorry, but I am not involved in this. The hon. Gentleman needs the third person singular.

Mr. Richards: I beg your pardon, Madam Deputy Speaker. My question to the hon. Gentleman is how confident, statistically speaking, is he of the figures that he is quoting? Can we have 95 per cent., 99 per cent. or 99·9 per cent. confidence in them? Unless the hon. Gentleman can give us the confidence interval of the figures and statistics that he quotes, they are worthless.

Mr. Smith: I was not trained as a scientist, but I suspect that there is no scientific measurement of confidence. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will now explain it. I shall be willing to sit back, relax and listen to his explanation.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): One thing is certain. I am prepared to put more confidence in what my hon. Friend says about the pollution statistics in Wales than I am in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's figures. He gets them wrong almost every day of the week. My hon. Friend is on to a very important issue. When we said that the River Doe Lea in Bolsover was a thousand times above the safety level, they told us that we were wrong and that they had no confidence in our statistics. Coalite is now pouring out dioxin. It said the same about the farmers who complained. After 12 months, that dioxin has not been removed from the land. I will tell you what: you in Wales stick to your guns. You can bet you bottom dollar that you are on the right course.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he should be addressing me.

Mr. Skinner: And I agree with your statistics as well. Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): We are used to hearing entirely new concepts from the Conservative party. The idea that confidence, which is very much a subjective matter, can be measured scientifically is nonsense. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We heard something equally bizarre some time ago. In desperation, the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred to optimism rising. When he was asked what sort of optimism it was, it was seasonally adjusted optimism—as big a nonsense as scientific confidence.

Mr. Smith: I have learnt many things this morning, Madam Deputy Speaker, one of them being that you are both an expert linguist and a statistician. My congratulations.

Because the statistics are important, I shall repeat them. I am sure that hon. Members wish to sit back, relax and listen. The first set of statistics, I repeat, relates to a window ledge near ReChem's incinerator. There was dioxin contamination at a level more than 2,000 times higher than the Californian guidelines for regular exposure. The 2378 TCDD alone was 8 micrograms/sq m. Another example relates to what was found above a door at the entrance to a reception area open to the general public. Dioxin contamination was found there, at a level more than 2,000 times higher than the Californian guidelines—again 2378 TCDD at 8·4 micrograms/sq m. Another example relates to the soil at the ReChem site. There was PCB contamination higher than the company itself had found elsewhere in Wales, at 3,800 parts per billion. That was adjacent to an area of free access. I repeat that those are just a few of the test results that I have in my possession.

Some people would say that one swallow does not make a summer and that one set of test results does not add up to a continuing problem, so enter the flight of swallows in the form of tests conducted by the Health and Safety Executive from samples taken in December 1989.

Once again, the test results had been kept secret. Once again the company failed to provide me with this information, even though I had requested it over a long period. Once again it was Mr. Higgs who intervened and insisted that I received it.

If I may comment on the Health and Safety Executive results, those surface-wide tests were apparently not carried out in working areas where high contamination might be expected and where special clothing and other protective measures might be required. The following are typical examples. The kettle in the rest room, presumably used for brewing up during the shift break, was found to be 29 times above the recommended limit. On the telephone in the office, the dialling bottoms of the handset, hardly likely to be handled except with PVC gloves, were found to be PCB-contaminated 42 times above what the guidelines said was an acceptable level in any office. There is a door from the open air into a corridor that leads to the office and rest room. The handle on the outside of the door, exposed to the cleansing action of wind and rain, was contaminated by PCBs to a level 120 times above the figure recommended in the guidelines.

The contamination on the sweatband of an operator's safety helmet was found to be 400 times above the limit recommended in the guidelines for office furniture. One can imagine the risk to an operator with a sweatband, in direct contact with his head throughout shift after shift, contaminated 400 times above the limit for a desk on which a typist may occasionally lean her bare elbows. Although the California guidelines were not intended to be applied to clothing, the fact that an operator's cotton overalls were contaminated to a level several times, perhaps more than 10 times, above the limit recommended for surfaces in a restricted area, must be a cause for concern.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: When did the hon. Gentleman become aware of the Health and Safety Executive's information? He mentioned earlier that he was not aware of it at the time that the Welsh Select Committee was sitting.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the general public have few rights when it comes to accessing information. I became aware that tests had been made by the Health and Safety Executive and approached the company for information. It failed to provide it, so I contacted the responsible national officer of the Transport and General Workers Union—who provided me with the information in question a little while back. We have since linked those test results to the California guidelines and reached the conclusion that I explained to the House earlier.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman used the words "a little while back". How long ago was "a little while back"? Given the unease that the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) expressed on behalf of the local community, which is shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), perhaps the hon. Gentleman can be a little more specific.

Mr. Smith: Unfortunately, I cannot be more specific now—but when this debate ends, or in the days that follow, I shall provide the hon. Gentleman with the time and date on which I received the information from the TGWU national officer. There is no problem about that.

Lest anyone should suggest that the company will repent and claim that the problem is isolated to internal housekeeping, it ought to be realised that much of the contamination was free to move as airborne vapour or particles. The ReChem site is surrounded by a wire-mesh fence. PCBs and dioxins are not put off by a wire fence—in the same way that radiation from Chernobyl was not deterred by national borders marked on maps of Europe.

During the years in question, local soil, grass and duck eggs began to show high levels of contamination. Last year, another flock of swallows brought more knowledge. A study commissioned by the Welsh Office and undertaken by the university of East Anglia concluded:

"PCB concentrations at Pontyfelin have on occasions been affected by on-site activity at ReChem."

Surprise, surprise—ReChem denies having anything to do with surrounding environmental contamination as vigorously as it denied the 1987 site contamination.

It requires little imagination to gain the impression that some of the foreign poisons of which Britain is said to be disposing at Pontypool are finding their way into our homes, our gardens, our bodies and the bodies of our children. The lesson is clear. We should no longer rely on the absence of evidence and on evidence of absence—especially when health and safety are involved.

I ask the House to support demands that the test results that I mentioned and others in my possession form the basis of the first report of the Welsh Select Committee or the Select Committee on the Environment—before which people such as Michael Sanger and Malcolm Lee ought to be called to give evidence. Mr. Sanger should be asked, for example, why on 12 February 1987 he decided to take a dust sample. Was it because he had time to spare or because something had gone dramatically wrong with the plant's operation? I suspect that it was the latter. In my opinion, Mr. Sanger has behaved honourably—unlike Mr. Lee, who should be asked why for many years he denied me access to the 1987 test results and provided only unrelated results.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen has tabled this motion not as part of a vendetta against the company but because he cares for the community that he represents and for the health and safety of the plant's employees. He also recognises that we do not own this Earth of ours but are merely guardians. As guardians, an obligation is placed on each and every one of us to ensure that we defend that which is good and that of which we are justifiably proud. We do that to ensure that our children can enjoy this planet as we have enjoyed and continue to enjoy it. That is the purpose of this debate and why the commercial trade in toxic waste must come to an end. It puts at risk so much that we cherish on this planet.

10.44 am

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): The significance of environmental considerations and concerns in the 1990s is widely recognised on this side of the House—and has been for a long time. I am the first to accept that the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) and my hon. Friend for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) are concerned about the environment in and around their constituencies. I draw attention to a fundamental flaw in Labour's environmental policies, notwithstanding that I acknowledge the hon. Member for Torfaen's concern.

That flaw is not so much the persecution of ReChem of which the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) made mention, but that Labour's attitude to toxic waste is not altogether honest. I refer in particular to Labour's kith and kin in the eastern bloc, who have been polluting their environment for many years without a word of protest being heard from Labour. Suddenly, after a management takeover in 1985, the Opposition—

Dr. Kim Howells: This is supposed to be a serious debate concerning the lives of people in Wales. It should not be the target of cheap-crack attacks that have no basis in truth. Why not get on with it?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that remark was not addressed to me.

Dr. Howells: I meant to say that the hon. Gentleman should get on with debating Wales.

Mr. Richards: I am perfectly entitled to make such observations. The hon. Member for Torfaen spoke about the profits made by ReChem and the operators of similar plants in other parts of the world. It occurs to me that environmental factors are not the only considerations that motivate Labour.

Mr. Michael: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) to make the scurrilous attack that he did? Would we be in order if we made parallel remarks associating Conservative Members with fascism?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have not heard anything scurrilous so far. If I were to find debates of this sort scurrilous, I doubt that they would continue.

Mr. Richards: The reference to profits appeared to be a philosophical socialist attack on companies that make them. The record of companies these days is far better than Labour is prepared to recognise. I draw the attention of the House to Hamilton Oil Company, which recently applied for permission to develop gas and oil reserves off the north Wales coast. Hamilton Oil is——

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have just been re-reading the motion and it is clear that the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) is filibustering. His speech has nothing whatsoever to do with the motion and it is clear that what I said in the point of order that I raised earlier—that Conservative Members have been organised by their Whip to make sure that we do not get on to the second motion—is exactly what the hon. Gentleman is up to. He should stick to the motion or shut up.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is for me to decide. I usually allow a certain latitude if people want to make passing references or comparisons. What is not acceptable is when they go off the subject altogether. The hon. Member for Clywd, North-West (Mr. Richards) has not transgressed in that way yet.

Mr. Richards: The environment transcends the specific argument put by the hon. Member for Torfaen. What is important is the companies and the way that they approach the environment in this day and age. I have been greatly impressed by the way that companies such as Hamilton Oil have approached the environmental considerations and factors, where they wish to operate a plant. Let me briefly outline how a company such as Hamilton Oil approaches these matters and the policies that they adopt.

Mr. Michael: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would pay attention to the reason why Opposition Members, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), have asked for a debate. It is because of the importance of the disposal of toxic waste in Wales. The way in which companies operate is not a matter for the debate. We are considering public policy, information for the public and the need for a public inquiry. It is outrageous of the hon. Gentleman to introduce extraneous topics into such a serious debate.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Member for Torfaen attacked the ReChem company because it made profits. The case, as presented by the Labour party thus far in the debate, is not entirely honest. It is an attack on companies generally.

Mr. Murphy: May I make it perfectly clear to the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We must have only one speaker at a time, because otherwise the debate becomes disorderly.

Mr. Murphy: I should like to make it clear to the hon. Gentleman and to the House that when I referred to the

[Mr. Murphy]

profits of ReChem, I was merely pointing out that there had been a change in the way in which the company operated in that, because it has dealt with PCBs in recent years, it made a profit. I am neither for nor against the profit; I am merely using it as an example of how the nature of the company has changed. It is more profitable with PCBs.

Mr. Richards: With respect, the hon. Gentleman referred not only to profits but to the remuneration of directors in the form of shares and so on. The implication was that companies such as ReChem have no concern for the environment. I wish to draw the attention of the House to a brief policy document issued by Hamilton Oil, just to give an example of how a company- —

Mr. George Howarth: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Hamilton Oil has nothing to do with toxic waste, and still less to do with Pontypool.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West must be allowed to go a little further so that I can see whether he makes points that relate to the motion.

Mr. Richards: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that our debate this morning is important not simply because we are discussing the ReChem plant in Pontypool, although most of the debate will concentrate on that? ReChem also has plants in Ellesmere Port and Southampton. The environment, which is what we are talking about, has implications for waste disposal units throughout Britain and Europe. The very fact that my hon. Friend——

Mr. George Howarth: Has the hon. Gentleman read the motion?

Mr. Nigel Evans: Yes I have. The very fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) spoke about eastern bloc countries is a recognition of the fact that there are no longer boundaries between Europe and the rest of the world or a boundary between——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will know already that I look askance at interventions that become speeches. Will Mr. Richards please continue?

Mr. Richards: What I mean will become clear as I progress.

The Hamilton Oil company says that it will:

"comply with all applicable laws, regulations and standards, uphold the spirit of the law; and where laws do not adequately protect the environment, apply standards that minimise any adverse environmental impact resulting from its operations; communicate openly with government, the community and industry on environmental issues, and contribute to the development of policies, legislation and regulations that may effect Hamilton;

ensure that its employees, suppliers and contractor services are informed about this policy and are aware of their environmental responsibilities in relation to Hamilton business;

ensure that it has management systems to identify, control and monitor environmental risks arising from its operation."

The Government have an extremely good record on the environment. They have acted in a responsible manner and have been a world leader in environmental factors.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has been saying, but he is now, rather than making a passing reference, going rather wide of the motion. Therefore, I must ask him to address his remarks more closely to it.

Mr. Richards: In that case, I will refer directly to what my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside said on 15 May this year in response to a question by the hon. Member for Ceridigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis). When asked about Government policy on hazardous waste, my hon. Friend said:

"Negotiations are in progress on a draft regulation on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community. The regulations will enable the United Kingdom to ratify the Basel convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal. The Government believe that all developed countries should become self-sufficient in final disposal of waste, but that imports of hazardous wastes should continue from developing countries that are unable to deal safely with such wastes. The Government consider that international movements of waste for recovery should continue subject to appropriate environmental controls, such as those included in the recent decision by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on the control of transfrontier movements of waste destined for recovery operations". —[*Official Report*, 15 May 1992; Vol. 207. c. *234*.]

I wholeheartedly support that statement from my hon. Friend.

It is worth reminding the Opposition what the principal features of the Basle convention are. I have a summary of the convention, which says:

"A signatory state cannot send hazardous waste to another signatory state that bans the import of it."

The summary also states:

"A signatory state cannot ship hazardous waste to any country that has not signed the treaty",

and says:

"Every country has the sovereign right to refuse to accept a shipment of hazardous waste",

and that

"Before an exporting country can start a shipment on its way, it must have the importing country's consent, in writing. The exporting country must first provide detailed information on the intended export to the importing country to allow it to assess the risks . . . No signatory country may ship hazardous waste to another signatory state if the importing country does not have the facilities to dispose of the waste in an environmentally sound manner . . . When an importing country proves unable to dispose of legally imported waste in an environmentally acceptable way, then the exporting state has a duty either to take it back or to find some other way of disposing of it in an environmentally sound manner".

The convention also states——

Mr. George Howarth: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At 9.30 this morning, at the beginning of the debate, I drew the attention of Madam Speaker, who was in the Chair at the time, to the fact that the Government had arranged for a filibuster throughout the debate to prevent my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) and myself from reaching the second and third motions on the order paper. My hon. Friend and I have secured the co-operation of my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), and of our Front Bench, yet it is becoming increasingly obvious that Conservative Members, especially the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) are simply reading out long conventions and bits of paper that have been put into their hands—the hon. Gentleman does

not even understand what he is reading. This is more evidence that the Government are running away from the prospect of facing Merseyside.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I was present in the Chamber when the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) made his original point of order, and it was clear from what Madam Speaker said that this is not a matter for the Chair unless the actual speeches made are not relevant or germane to the debate. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to be the judge of that.

Mr. Michael: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Surely, for the sake of the good reputation of the House, it should be publicly known that it is Conservative Members and their Whips who are orchestrating an attempt to stop a debate about Merseyside, and that there is no lack of co-operation for that debate among Labour Members.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If these are points of order they can be made only on relevant matters for the Chair.

Mr. Richards: May I remind Labour Members what the motion actually says? It says that there is considerable——

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Richards: It says that there is considerable——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. When an hon. Member raises a point of order the hon. Member who is speaking must sit down.

Mr. Winnick: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I make my point of order with many apologies —it will take no more than a minute—and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) will get his debate. I ask you for guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will have heard the latest news about the military involvement of the Western European Union, which includes Britain, in what was Yugoslavia. There is great anxiety about the prospect of Britain's becoming more involved in the civil war there, and as no statement has been made today, although the matter was raised yesterday by several hon. Members, could you, Madam Deputy Speaker, give me guidance as to how we can persuade a Minister to come to the House, if not today, at the earliest opportunity, so that we may debate the matter before the House rises for the long summer recess? I ask you to bear in mind that it would be most unfortunate if this country's involvement were to escalate during the recess without hon. Members being able to question Ministers, if the House were not recalled. Many of us are very concerned.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, but he will be aware that this is not a matter on which the Chair can intervene. He has made his point, and representatives of Ministers are here and will be aware of his anxiety. I am afraid that I cannot take the matter further than that.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have waited until 11 o'clock, when it is traditional on a Friday for points of order and statements to be made, and I wonder whether you have had notice that the Home Secretary will make a statement about the decision of the European Court on Sunday trading. Since a statement was made in the press I have waited and hoped. Is there no way in which Members of Parliament can learn what the Government intend to do about the decision in Europe? Will a statement be forthcoming this morning? If not, will you, Madam Deputy Speaker, pursue through the channels that Madam Speaker would normally use, the question whether the Government intend to make a statement about their intention to change the law in any way—in particular the Shops Act 1950?

I declare a personal interest in that a private Member's Bill of mine was in the ballot and is due for its Second Reading on 26 January next year. One would expect that by now the Home Secretary would have declared his intentions to the House instead of feeding information to the press and the other media, whose record has been one of distorting the whole concept of the Shops Act—and, indeed, the proposals that I have presented to the House in my Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have noticed an increasing number of inquiries as to whether the Government have asked to make a statement. Hon. Members can take it that if there is no announcement on the annunciator on the morning in question, no such request has been made. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has been in the House long enough and is ingenious enough to find a number of ways in which to raise the matter which interests him.

Mr. Richards: I remind Labour Members what the motion before the House actually says. It says that the House

"notes that there is considerable unease among the people of South East Wales".

There is unease among some people in Wales and elsewhere, and one reason for that is that irresponsible politicians quote statistics without sources and without confidence. I am trying, in quoting from the——

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman inform the House what statistics I quoted without giving a source?

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman said that the statistics that he cited were of Canadian origin, but I do not recall his saying specifically who had compiled, collated and analysed the figures to produce the statistics, which he could not support with any statistical degree of confidence.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Richards: No, I shall not give way.

I submit that those statistics are worthless. In order to reassure people who feel uneasy I am quoting briefly from the Basle convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal. As I was saying:

"Shipments of hazardous waste must be packaged, labelled and transported in conformity with generally accepted and recognised international rules and standards . . .

Bilateral agreements may be made by signatory states with each other and with a non-signatory country, but these agreements must conform to the terms of the Basel treaty and be no less environmentally sound . . .

Since the authorities of many countries, especially developing ones, frequently do not have the trained specialists and technical know-how to assess information concerning hazardous waste and to handle it efficiently, the treaty calls

[Mr. Richards]

for international co-operation involving, among other things, the training of technicians, the exchange of information, and the transfer of technology."

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): The hon. Gentleman has referred to degrees of confidence in statistics. I have been listening carefully to what he has been saying and have been trying to decide whether I have any confidence in his knowledge of what he is talking about. I have now decided that I have no confidence that he has any knowledge of what he is talking about. There are degrees of confidence in statistics because a particular statistic may be within the normal and expected variation. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) referred to levels of dioxin 2,000 times higher than the California guidelines in a particular sample. There is no possibility that such a finding could be other than outside the normal degrees of confidence that you are talking about. If you knew anything about it, you would know that that is the position.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Member that he is addressing me. His intervention is becoming rather lengthy.

Mr. Richards: I think that the House has heard sufficient about the analysis of statistics for the time being. I merely say that the hon. Gentleman seems to know a little about statistics. That being so, he knows that what I am saying is precisely the case. If we quote comparisons with what should or should not be the case, we are able to say with what degree of confidence the assertion is being made. I was saying to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) that he was unable to instil the degree of confidence that I would normally expect following an analysis of data resulting in the sort of statistics that he quoted to the House.

I wish to reassure those in south Wales who feel uneasy by referring again to the Basel convention on the movement of hazardous wastes and their disposal. The treaty sets up a secretariat to supervise and facilitate implementation. It appears that the secretariat will be in Geneva. The treaty asks that less hazardous waste be generated and that what is generated be disposed of as close to its source as possible.

To come to the point—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] —some of my hon. Friends and I have real conceptual difficulties with the motion. I acknowledge, of course, that the hon. Member for Torfaen does have genuine concern, but I am slightly uneasy about the arguments that have been advanced by Labour Members. Many of their arguments are based on Labour or socialist dogma. The Labour party will always support an enterprise or business, or any other form of development, that is labour intensive. It will always argue the case against enterprises that are capital intensive. It is—*[Interruption.]* I shall give an example to those Labour Members who are protesting. Let us take coal, for example.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Madam Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Richards *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. When I stand, hon. Members must sit. The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) appears to be developing an argument that is not sufficiently relevant to the motion.

Mr. Richards: I am concerned that much of the unease that has been referred to is being generated unnecessarily. Frequently it is generated by politicians, but the same can be said of the media. Often the media are briefed by the Labour party.

I shall quote from an article that appeared in *The Scotsman* on 7 January. It was written by a Mr. Robert Allen and epitomises why people are frightened and concerned. Part of the article states:

"The toxic waste industry is big money."

That is the very point that the hon. Member for Torfaen was making. The article continues:

"Greenpeace recently estimated that waste imports were worth £734 million in 1988."

Those are the first two sentences of the article. In other words, it concentrates immediately on the profit that might or might not be made from the disposal of toxic waste.

The article then states:

"Since then the profits of the major waste disposal companies have doubled. Expansion has been the buzzword. particularly in Scotland."

It then refers to an

"'interesting little market', as the company spokesman recently described it."

It adds:

"Proposals for incinerators, treatment plant and landfill sites have marginally outnumbered the mergers and takeovers in the scramble for a cut of Scotland's bulging toxic cake."

That is the sort of journalism that creates unease among those who live in or near——

Mr. Flynn: One of the difficulties for those of us who live near ReChem is that its profits are enjoyed by people who live in the home counties. In the same way, profits from coal extraction were enjoyed by people who lived far away from coal-mining areas. When ReChem relocates, as I believe it will, will the hon. Gentleman welcome it unreservedly to his constituency?

Mr. Richards: I cannot comment on whether ReChem will or will not relocate. It would be wrong of me to comment on whether it will or will not or whether it should. The hon. Gentleman should know that.

The hon. Gentleman referred to coal in his intervention. The Labour party is happy to support deep mines that are labour intensive, even though those deep mines have adverse environmental effects. The Labour party would argue against opencast mining because that is capital intensive.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is going beyond the scope of the motion.

Mr. Richards: I shall talk briefly about the cost of clearing up toxic waste and the experience of other countries. I shall refer to an article that appeared in *The Economist* on 29 February. It is headed:

"Toxic waste Paying for the past".

It reads:

"Easily the most expensive part of America's environmental policy is the cost of cleaning up disused toxic-waste sites. If the cost is high today, it will be higher tomorrow."

The article goes on to say that there

"may be as many as 300,000 to 400,000 such places, containing anything from tanks of nasty chemicals to ordinary household waste mixed with discarded car batteries

and drums of pesticide. The cost falls mainly on companies and, increasingly, on their insurers. Some firms believe that no satisfactory technology yet exists for cleaning old sites at a manageable cost."

Estimates of the eventual cost of cleaning are based very much on guess work. A study carried out by the university of Tennessee, which was published in December, arrived at a guess of about $1·18 trillion, that being the cost for the next 30 years. That is at 1990 prices and is for the cleaning to high standards of all old waste sites, including those owned by the Department of Energy and Department of Defence. A more conservative guess by Paul Courtney of Resources for the Future, which is a Washington think tank, is that the average cost of cleaning a site on the priority list of the environmental protection agency is about $40 million. It seems that there will be about 2,000 such sites by the end of the century.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman. What he says is relevant to the United States of America but has nothing to do with the subject of the debate. He is going beyond the reasonable rules of debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have already told the hon. Member that he is straying rather wide of the motion and I issue that warning again. If he does not speak more closely to the terms of the motion I shall have ask him to discontinue.

Mr. Richards: I draw attention to the American experience because it is relevant to what is happening and what will take place in this country. In the United States, such waste dumps are called super-fund sites because they are covered by a law passed in 1980 to set up a large Government fund to clean the dumps. The cost was to be recouped later from the original polluter by the environmental protection agency, unless of course the polluter can be made to pay first.

ReChem says:

"Toxic wastes are an unavoidable feature of modern life. They are inevitable by-products from items of everyday existence such as cars, televisions, computers, medicines, cleaning products, paints ... Although industry is increasingly adopting waste minimisation measures, the need to dispose of those wastes safely, responsibly and permanently remains paramount.

The manufacture of PCBs, for example, has long been phased out. However, a large amount still exists, together with millions of tonnes of contaminated equipment and previously uncontrolled disposal means that PCBs are already ubiquitous in the environment where they tend to accumulate in the fatty tissue of fish, birds, other animals and man.

The options for the disposal of particularly hazardous organic chemical wastes are limited. The only safe option, acknowledged by the majority of scientists and governments as the best environmental solution, is high temperature incineration."

11.23 am

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): It is clear that we were justified in our suspicion that dirty work was afoot in the House, but goodness knows why, because this is an important and serious debate, introduced in an informed and serious way by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy). Why are the Government trying to filibuster? I shall be brief in putting some questions to the Ministers, which would allow plenty of time for the Merseyside debate, but the Government appear to be afraid of that. Why is the Government Chief Whip afraid of this debate and the debate that is due to follow?

The Government have brought Britain into disrepute and made it the dirty man of Europe. Torfaen is an example, but in itself it is a serious topic. The people of Torfaen and Gwent who voted for a Labour Government know that such a Government would have given them the public inquiry that they want and need. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen said, the matter has been simmering for two decades. Residents' groups and local representative bodies have been calling for a public inquiry for much of that time. There has been a unity of concern for nearly 20 years.

We have heard about the notices served on the company. It is coincidental that, on the radio this morning, there was a national level debate about the lack of information available when notices are served on public companies. There is secrecy in the United Kingdom and it is difficult to get information. That was highlighted during an interview in the broadcast, when it was said that information is often available in America about what is happening in the United Kingdom, even though it is not available to our citizens. So much for the citizens charter.

Mr. Ainger: Will my hon. Friend comment on the statement by Mr. David Thomas, the environmental health officer for the Torfaen area, that he may be aware of shipments coming to ReChem, but is unable to inform his own members, the fire brigade or local disposal authorities about the route of the import?

Mr. Michael: I will comment on that in one word—disgraceful. My hon. Friend is right. I have had experience of that when seeking information from my local authority in Cardiff. I shall shortly give an example, but my hon. Friend makes the point succinctly and with great effect. The hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) in his speech against the motion highlighted the difficulty of getting information.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My hon. Friend says that authorities through whose area toxic wastes are being imported are unaware of the movement. Will he comment on the infamous case of the Karin B, which was taking toxic waste from Italy all around the world because no port would accept it? At that time, the port authority in Cardiff tried to find out whether the waste would come to Cardiff. It was discovered that the local authority had no knowledge of the movement of toxic waste through the city. Toxic wastes were being imported through Harwich and, by chance, the importer mistakenly sent to Cardiff port authority the information that the toxic wastes were to be moved on the Pengam freight line through Cardiff. Toxic wastes affect not only a port and a chemical site: they have effects all along the route. When are we to hear from the Government about their so-called freedom of information?

Mr. Michael: It is very unlikely that we will hear anything from the Government. They may make statements about statements, but they are unlikely to give freedom of information or rights to our citizens. I am aware of the case that my hon. Friend mentions. It outraged people in Cardiff, members of the local authority and officers. That consignment, and probably many others that we do not know about, came through my

[Mr. Michael]

constituency. Although I had been asking questions, I knew nothing about the passage of that consignment through Cardiff.

As my hon. Friend rightly says, it entered Britain through the port of Harwich, and its relevance to the debate is considerable because it was destined for ReChem at Pontypool. It was transferred by rail to the freightliner terminal at Pengam and completed its journey by road to ReChem in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen. My hon. Friend is right to say that it came to the city council's attention only as a consequence of the producer and importer erroneously sending a copy of the transfrontier shipment note to Cardiff city council. That is not how such matters should come to the public's notice.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in view of the nonsense that has been spoken in this debate, it is proper to defend investigative journalism? Does he agree that anyone who tries to find out such information is not helped by the fact that ReChem would sue a woodpile on the chance that there was a snake in it?

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend makes a cogent point. The Government have not put in place systems that enable environmental health authorities, elected representatives or the general public to have full information. How are we to debate those issues except in this House, with the privileges that exist here?

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove) *rose—*

Mr. Michael: It is wrong that that should be so, because those are matters of public interest and concern, and should be matters of public debate and information.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) must not continue to stand if the person who has the Floor does not give way. Is the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) willing to give way?

Mr. Michael: I was about to give way at the end of the sentence, as that makes it much easier for the *Hansard* reporters to make sense of one's contribution.

Mr. Thomason: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, but that was the signal that I had interpreted from the hon. Gentleman.

The Government have gone out to consultation under the European general directive on freedom of information in relation to environmental matters. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, once that consultation procedure has taken place, that directive will provide the information which he alleges the Government are not giving?

Mr. Michael: It is outrageous that the Government must be pushed by Europe to do what they should do anyway. During the coming months, we may see the irony of the President of the Commission pressing himself for a change, so we might see some movement as a result of him talking to himself.

The British Government should set in place systems that allow the public to have the facts. The Minister should answer the debate by admitting that there is public concern, that we should get at the truth and say that he will establish the public inquiry requested by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen. Why not do that? Why the secrecy? What are the Government trying to cover up? We know that briefs from ReChem, the Whips' Office or the Minister have been passed around Conservative Members, and we wait to hear from them whether they wish to share the secret with us. It is clear that a considerable exercise has taken place today to try to frustrate straight answers to straight questions, as well as to frustrate the desire of my hon. Friends from Merseyside for the debate that they need.

Notices have been served on the company, but there is a lack of information about their content. They are surrounded by secrecy. That point was highlighted by the hon. Member for Monmouth as he spoke against the motion in obedience to his Whips. He says that he does not want a public inquiry just now. After 20 years, why not?

Mr. Roger Evans: I said that it was premature until Professor Lewis Roberts had reported and the basis of granting or withholding a licence this autumn was determined. If there is no answer to both those matters by then, a public inquiry may well be necessary.

Mr. Michael: The Minister could help us by standing up and saying that he will make a statement in November, and that he is minded to grant a public inquiry then. I suspect that the hon. Member for Monmouth is prevaricating and will be reminded of his contribution in a few months' time. He also made a case for powers for local authorities to act on behalf of local people, although I have no doubt that he will vote against that consistently in this House in the coming years.

By putting scientific evidence on the record, my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) has done us a service. He has also demonstrated that the topic cannot be dealt with adequately in such a debate but needs a proper public inquiry with the capacity to take evidence, cross-examine witnesses, call experts and get at the truth. My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen made it clear at the beginning that he is after the truth. He is after neither individuals nor companies—nor is he knocking profits. He simply wants to bring matters into the open.

The Minister does not need long to answer the debate. I suspect that the piles of papers next to him are to fill any acres of time that may be left so that he can talk the matter through until the end of the time available. However, he must answer some simple questions. Will he agree to set up a proper, searching, objective public inquiry? If he has nothing to hide and if the company has nothing to hide, he can have no objection to that. After all the controversy, the people of Pontypool have a right to seek such an inquiry as a minimum. If he will not grant the inquiry, we must conclude that he has something to hide or has taken leave of his senses.

It is important to get at the truth in this matter, because no standard international definition of toxic or hazardous waste exists. Different bodies use different criteria to form waste categories and the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980, which were introduced to provide tighter control over the carriage of waste that would seriously threaten life during its transportation or disposal defines "special waste" by reference to a schedule of substances known as "list 1".

To qualify as special waste, waste must also be dangerous to life in accordance with the principles of toxicity, corrosivity, a flashpoint of less than 21 deg. C or

the presence of a prescription-only medicine. The definitions of those properties in the regulations do not correspond with similar properties in the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substance regulations. Those regulations apply to the transfer of waste from one site to another—from a production plant to a disposal site—and are genuinely more stringent. None the less, information is difficult to come by.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To illustrate how difficult it is to get information, the latest that I could get dates from 1988, when 83,000 tonnes of hazardous waste were imported into this country. Among those imports were the extremely hazardous wastes of PCBs, much of which is destined to go to ReChem. Does my hon. Friend agree that transporting PCBs, if not absolutely essential, by sea is extremely dangerous because PCBs accumulate in the food chain. They accumulate particularly in the fatty deposits of marine mammals such as dolphins. We already have evidence that the reason for the great decline in dolphin numbers in Cardigan bay is party due to the level of PCBs in their systems.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend makes his point extremely well. The import of hazardous waste into the United Kingdom, which means sea transport, has increased massively. In the year to March 1990, the United Kingdom was importing more than 34,000 tonnes of hazardous waste. Such imports amounted to only some 5,000 tonnes a year in the early 1980s. That clearly shows, as my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen said earlier, that the imports come not from developing countries that might not have the technology to deal with hazardous waste but almost exclusively from the developed world. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central is right to say that it is scandalous for such waste to be skulling around the oceans of the world rather than being dealt with in developed countries that clearly have the capacity to deal with them.

Mr. Nigel Evans: The hon. Gentleman said that, if the Government refuse to hold a plublic inquiry on the matter, they must have something to hide. Must I assume that, whenever an Opposition Member asks for a public inquiry on anything and the Government refuse on the ground that research or studies are already being carried out or that there is sufficient monitoring, they have something to hide?

Mr. Michael: No. I am in some difficulty, because the hon. Gentleman intervened on a subject from which I had moved on when I responded to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones). I have two lines to take. I will deal first with the point raised by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and will then return to the other point.

No, it is not a reasonable expectation that, every time there is a request for a public inquiry, it should be granted. What is reasonable is that, when there has been concern for 20 years, when there is a unity of concern from elected representatives, when there is a unity of concern from local community groups throughout the area, and when those issues have not been dealt with adequately in any way or in any forum, the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) should be answered simply and clearly by the Minister by granting a public inquiry.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the report by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. Paragraph 16 says:

"We recommend that the Welsh Office should ask independent experts to undertake a comprehensive monitoring programme of the plant and its environment. The independent experts should produce a report showing the results of the monitoring programme in a form which is made publicly available and readily comprehensible to the public. The report should be presented to the Secretary of State who should order a public inquiry if the results show that there is a serious risk to public health or the environment."

Surely the Government's response subsequently has been to appoint Professor Roberts. There have been two interim reports. Professor Roberts's study is not due to be concluded until January 1993. If——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This intervention is becoming a speech. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat and allow the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) to continue.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) may be able to make his points in a filibuster—I mean contribution—later in the debate. I respond to him simply by saying that, since the preparation of the report by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, further information has become available, including information contributed in the debate. The grave concern requires a response. No doubt the inquiry being undertaken and the technical information will be of assistance to a public inquiry. However, a public inquiry is needed to restore confidence among people in the area directly affected.

The Select Committee made a number of recommendations, some of which were quoted by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor, about the public availability of information and about public scrutiny of that information. It would be a complete volte face by the Government to make information so readily available. That is why—he is right to do so—my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen has called so clearly for a public inquiry which will go properly into all the issues.

I return to the point about the transportation of hazardous waste. Some 30 per cent. of all hazardous waste imports come from the Netherlands, and another 50 per cent. come from Belgium, Switzerland and the United States, which are certainly not third-world countries requiring the assistance of our high technology to dispose of their products.

The Labour party believes that waste, including all forms of hazardous waste, should be dealt with as near as possible to the point at which it arises. The Government should therefore end the trade in toxic waste, allowing it only in the most exceptional circumstances, when we have the facilities to help with an environmental disaster elsewhere.

Mr. Ainger: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reason why there are massive imports of toxic waste into this country, with a significant increase in the 1980s and early 1990s, is that ReChem is not a high-technology company, but a low-technology company? It has a static bed furnace, not a rolling furnace, and it does not have after-burners. Capital investment at the plant has been far lower than is the case for its foreign competitors. That is why its prices are lower. In this wonderful free market, we end up with the world's waste.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and he ties together the two aspects. One is the international transport of toxic waste and the other is its disposal. It is a sad fact that we are behind other countries in Europe generally in relation to incineration. I made it my business last year to make a number of visits to find out a little bit about incineration. I found that, whereas Britain is gradually being dragged towards the level of European requirements, which will be tightened up and advanced in the coming years, other countries, such as Germany, already place internally far more stringent requirements, and their local authorities have the power to place even stricter requirements in the interests of the local community. Those authorities have greater subsidiarity and there is far greater confidence in the ability of elected representatives of local people to act on their behalf than is the case here.

Were such subsidiarity in place here, the elected representatives in Torfaen, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen, would have been able to deal with the issue properly and in the public eye rather than having to raise it in a motion and call for a public inquiry. It is a job which should be done simply and without such protest being necessary.

The point has been well made. We should stop Britain being what my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) described as the "dioxin dustbin" of the developed world. I ask the Minister to give us confirmation that Australia, Canada and other developed countries to which I have referred will be told to deal with their own toxic waste, not just in one application from Western Australia which has come under close public scrutiny by elected representatives in Gwent and in South Glamorgan, but generally as a matter of public policy. Will the Minister assure us that Britain intends to tell other developed countries, "Look after your own waste from now on"?

The Minister can also answer a number of requests that have properly been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen. He asked that the Government should respond on whether emergency plan regulations should be applied to ReChem. He asked for proper Government resourcing for Torfaen borough council to cope with the extra expenses of monitoring ReChem. He asked for greater clarification of the roles of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and of the National Rivers Authority in connection with monitoring ReChem. He asked for a commitment by the Government that no future incinerators will be built in residential areas—especially, we might add, in a valley. He asked that the Government allow direct public knowledge of why health and safety notices were served on ReChem, and he asked whether the company's commitment to £2·5 million was related to the notices.

My hon. Friend asked the Minister to sponsor a local health study in the Panteg area. He also asked him to give a commitment that the Government will not try to weaken anti-toxic waste import legislation during the British presidency of the EC. I make that point again in relation to the Prime Minister talking to himself during the coming months.

I hope that the Minister will respond positively to the specific requirements. He does not need a long, rambling discourse in which to do that. He can simply say whether he will accede to the reasonable list of modest proposals described by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen. Will the Minister say that the importation of toxic waste will be stopped except for emergencies and in the most unusual circumstances? Above all, will he give us the assurance we seek, that there will be a full and searching public inquiry into the operation of the plant at Pontypool?

11.48 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to put pressure on the Government on a matter which is of great importance to the people of Pontypool and of considerably wider importance. I am grateful, as are other hon. Members, to the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) for choosing the subject and for bringing us the last opportunity before the summer to raise all the issues that have been raised over the years, but which have not produced an adequate response from the public authorities.

The reason why the issue is still being debated after 20 years of its being a matter of concern to the people of Gwent is that they are not satisfied. The reality of environmental matters, generally and specifically, is that people are not normally concerned without good reason after such a long debate. It is not just the people of Monmouthshire who are concerned; it is their representatives, too.

Mr. Flynn: Gwent.

Mr. Hughes: What was Monmouthshire and is now Gwent.

The people of that part of the country and their representatives at all levels—local and county councillors, Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament—are concerned about what is happening at ReChem. I hope that the Minister will address the issues and respond clearly and succinctly to the remaining concerns, which I am sure he accepts are valid.

There are four questions to be answered. What are the environmental and health and safety implications of the operations currently taking place at the ReChem plant in Pontypool? What are the safety implications of the process of PCB incineration? What should be the procedure for answering those questions? And what is the Government's policy in relation to the importation of waste, which is what gives rise to the three preceding questions?

It is not doubted that PCBs are dangerous. In its own document, ReChem describes them as

"the most dangerous organic substances".

The substances, whose use began in the 1920s and continued until the 1960s, are generally accepted to be of the most dangerous order, as we know from scientific research.

Without doubt, PCBs have a deleterious effect on human and animal health. They can cause cancer in animals and damage enzymes in human livers. They can cause neurological disturbances and it is feared that babies ingesting PCBs through their mothers' milk can be harmed. As the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) said in his intervention about Cardigan bay, PCBs can affect mammals such as dolphins. They have affected such creatures not only in this country but elsewhere. There is no doubt about the severe harm to health that PCBs can cause.

PCBs are long lasting. Once they have entered the food chain, it is not easy to get rid of them. We know of only two methods of dealing with them—burial and

incineration. If they are buried, there is a danger that they will leak into the surrounding environment and it is therefore reasonable to consider incineration. The trouble with incineration is that it leaves a residue and one faces two risks in incinerating a substance as dangerous as PCBs: first, that the plant is defective and the process is improperly carried out and, secondly, that the process produces a residue that is left in the plant or the surrounding area or carried airborne further afield.

Mr. Ainger: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the reason for the recent increase in the export of PCBs from Sweden is that the Swedish Government have decided that the incineration of PCBs is too dangerous? They have decided to export their problem rather than to solve it and have given it to us. The Swedes have made a decision which is correct for them, but damaging internationally, and certainly to Wales, in the belief that this country will allow the PCBs to be burnt.

Mr. Hughes: I was aware of that. The policies of countries that give high priority to environmental health should inform not only the debate but the decisions of the Government. We are not talking about scare stories without substance but about industrial processes that are discovered, sooner or later, to have really harmful effects. In this case, we are concerned to ensure that the process is changed or discontinued before it can cause significant harm. We all know what effect the activities at Sellafield have had on the health of people in Cumbria. It is no good waiting until it is too late—until the health of workers at the plant and people living nearby and their children is affected.

What is the history of this debate? There have been inquiries, as the Minister knows. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) quoted from the report of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which was certainly concerned and which recommended that it should be Government policy that such a plant should never again be erected and operated in a residential area. The Government have not yet made a statement of policy accepting that recommendation and it would be extremely helpful if they did. Moreover, in its published report, HMIP pointed out that it had previously said that ReChem's incinerator design was inadequate. Perfectly good, credible, quasi-independent agencies have made critical comments and have suggested that something needs to be done.

The question of what needs to be done is the matter which most concerns the 15,000 people living within two miles of the plant, but what happens in Pontypool is extremely important if the Government are to show that they do not just have a policy in theory but apply it in practice.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that ReChem is spending £2·5 million on the plant following the investigation by HMIP and that an inquiry is currently taking place? There have been two interim reports and we are awaiting a final report. Perhaps it would be better to wait until we receive that report before taking any action.

Mr. Hughes: I want to link the hon. Gentleman's second point with the point made by the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans). ReChem is, indeed, spending money, as any responsible company should if there is public concern about its operations. Any inquiry—whether a private inquiry by an expert who publishes a report or a public inquiry—must include ReChem. The company must be a key element in any inquiry into what is happening. I do not criticise ReChem's response in terms of expenditure. One of the problems with the present policy, however, is that we need to make private processes transparent. If the environment is to be protected, we cannot have no-go areas where there are private companies. If the public sector is under scrutiny, the private sector must also be under scrutiny, especially as it is often the cause of environmental pollution—by its very nature, as it is responsible for most of the production in the country.

Statistics have been referred to. It is especially important to realise that the plant deals with about one quarter of the toxic waste imported into the United Kingdom. It is the only significant plant in Wales that deals with toxic waste. There are three ports of admission —Newport, Swansea and Holyhead—but only in Pontypool is there any significant processing, so here we have the test case by which to establish whether the present policy is correct.

The plant is of significant and continuing concern to the local borough and county councils who devote a lot of their resources to trying to monitor the plant and to do the job properly. I do not think that any criticism can be laid at their door.

What should the Government do? Their White Paper on the environment, published in September 1990, said that waste

"should be regarded as a tradeable commodity like any other."

The Government's policy was that toxic waste should not be imported into Britian from developed countries. That was stated clearly in the White Paper and the Prime Minister himself has stated it since.

As hon. Members have pointed out, the majority of toxic waste is coming here from developed, rather than undeveloped, countries. Some of them, in economic terms, are higher than us in the league table. If British Government policy is that there shall be no such imports from developed countries, the Minister must explain why imports from those countries have increased in the past two years. Indeed, 95 per cent. of waste imports now come from countries not far afield, some of them the most developed in Europe.

The most recent examples show that since the Basle convention, from which the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) quoted at over-great length, to no great effect, although that is a matter of judgment, came into existence—it was signed by the British Government in May of this year—little has changed. If it is the intention that there must be acceptance by the recipient country before waste is sent by the exporting country, to avoid the Karin B type of situation, no consideration should be given to the current application by Australia, as quoted in *The Independent on Sunday* 24 June of this year. I understand that that concerns a company associated with ReChem and that it would involve the importation of up to 1,000 tonnes of high-level toxic waste from a new source as the result of a bilateral agreement between Britain and Australia.

The process of decision-making is now all-important. It is extremely worrying to recall that when a transaction was entered into last year for the importation of German toxic waste into a site in southern England and questions were

[Mr. Hughes]

raised about how that could be justified, given the policy of the Government, a Department of the Environment spokesman said:

"There is no legal imposition for us to intervene in what is a perfectly commercial transaction."

It is not consistent to say that there shall be no imports from developed countries and go on to say that we shall not intervene when importation from a developed country, such as Germany, is undertaken by a British company. Government policy in this matter must be consistent, and we understood that it prohibited imports of waste from developed countries.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I have sympathy for much of what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I wish to explore the question of Government policy in the matter because I understand that policy, based on a statement made by the Minister of State, Department of the Environment, to be that the Government believe that all developed countries should become self-sufficient in the final disposal of waste. That is different from saying that there shall be none. It implies a transition.

Mr. Hughes: I have argued that it was unrealistic to say that we cannot import any from any country, when many countries do not have the facilities to deal with their own waste. I have argued that developed countries could be expected to have the facility, while developing countries could not, which must involve a phasing-out operation. But the Minister of State in the previous Administration, the then hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen, now Sir David Trippier, was reported by the *Daily Mail* in 1990 as having said:

"I am sick to death of hearing Britain described as the dirty man of Europe. Enough is enough. I see no reason at all why developed countries should not provide their own facilities."

If Government policy is that where developed countries have, or easily could have, facilities to deal with their own waste, we should make it clear that importation from those countries will not be authorised. As I say, I understand that ReChem-imported wastes come almost entirely from developed, rather than developing, countries.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In the context of the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the import of Australian toxic waste, he suggested that there had recently been a report in the press to the effect that a further application may be under consideration. Perhaps at the same time he will give credit for the answer given by the Minister of State, Department of the Environment on 10 June to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) when he said that he had decided not to agree to a request from Australia.

Mr. Hughes: The sequence of events involved a ministerial answer in June, with a later report at the end of June which suggested that the issue was still alive and had not yet been resolved. The Minister's answer did not say that no licence or permission would apply at any time to that application.

Mr. Michael: Will the hon. Gentleman concede the point I made earlier to the effect that the suggested importation in question had been a matter of great public debate and comment here and in Australia, whereas unfortunately such matters often happen without that degree of public knowledge and scrutiny?

Mr. Hughes: That is true. Fortunately, people are increasingly aware of these issues in other developed countries, and the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) was right to refer to the situation in Sweden, which addressed the issue and responded accordingly.

We must decide how to deal with the matter for the people of Pontypool and for ReChem. The inquiry commissioned by a professor at East Anglia university is nearing completion. That document, when produced, should be placed in the public domain. The whole issue of the ReChem plant, its future and the potential effects of what is happening there should not be of concern just to those who license the operation in Pontypool at the end of the year, but should influence the policy of the Government on licensing generally.

For that reason, it is important that the whole issue of PCB incineration—in the light of what has happened at Pontypool—with all the evidence and any reports that are published, should be pulled together and placed in the public domain. That would enable anyone with a legitimate interest to contribute to the debate. That should include local authorities, the industrial sector, potential perspective importers, environmental health agencies and elected representatives.

The people of Pontypool and the county of Gwent and others who are interested in the issue will not be satisfied if, as it were, a test case about whether it is possible any longer to incinerate PCBs safely in this country, is not scrutinised in a proper public forum. The whole issue must be handled correctly if we are to allay the fear that the health of people and animals will not be adequately protected.

I hope that the Government will say today that they do not rule out a public inquiry. They should also say that they will not grant a licence, not just until after the examination that is under way is completed but until after all those with a concern, having seen the report of that examination, have a chance to put their case so that the Government can respond. The Government must look favourably on the request for a public inquiry in the wider interest of the issue and be consistent in their policy by not allowing future imports of toxic wastes from countries classified as developed.

I hope that in the six months of the British presidency, leading up to the full implementation of the European market at the beginning of next year, they will be certain that under the new regime that will apply from 1 January 1993 the same tough position in relation to toxic waste in Britain to which the British Government are wedded will be applied Europewide by then as a result of their initiatives in the EC.

We are debating a matter of the greatest importance. I hope that, when replying to the debate, the Minister will give specific undertakings and commitments, particularly in relation to the type of inquiry for which the hon. Member for Torfaen asked.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The normal conventions of the House are not being followed, with the result that the rights and privileges of Back Benchers are under threat. Three subjects were selected for debate this morning. It is the normal convention for the Ministers to speak after the Front-Bench spokesmen for the Labour party and Liberal Democrats. As the Minister is not rising, it seems that there is little chance that the important motions tabled by

my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) and for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) will be discussed. Is not that proof that there is an organised filibuster on the Conservative Benches——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I have sat in the Chair most Fridays, when we have never managed to get through all our proceedings. Many hon. Members are still rising and it is my duty to call them.

Mr. George Howarth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You were not here for the earlier part of the debate. I rose on a point of order to point out to Madam Speaker that there were rumours—more than rumours; strong evidence—that the Government had organised today's proceedings to avoid bringing the Minister with responsibilities for Merseyside, the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), to the Dispatch Box to answer the motions tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) and myself. Had you been present throughout this morning's proceedings, you would have noted, first, that my hon. Friend the Member for Broadgreen and I have received the utmost co-operation—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask other hon. Members not to have a sedentary argument. I wish to listen to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth).

Mr. Howarth: You would have observed, first, that we have received the utmost co-operation from my hon. Friends from south Wales, who have taken a legitimate interest in the first motion. Secondly, you would have observed that the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) spoke and quoted at length but has now gone, having first asked the Minister's permission. He quoted extensively and——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I sat in the Chair earlier between 2 am and 5 am, when all sorts of rumours were circulating. I say to hon. Members on both sides that I sat here one Friday when an Opposition Member spoke for 81 minutes. There is no rule on the length of speeches on a Friday or on whether we should get to a second motion. It is entirely dependent on how many Members wish to speak and how long they speak for. As long as they stay in order, I am in the hands of the House. We must proceed.

Mr. Thomason: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a new point of order, otherwise I shall rule against it.

Mr. Thomason: It follows from that point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not a new one, then, is it?

12.13 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): It is a pleasure to congratulate the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) on seizing the opportunity to raise an issue that has exercised him and his predecessor for a long time. During my association, at a very menial level, with the Welsh Office and Welsh Members in the last Parliament, I came to recognise the hon. Member for Torfaen as a sincere constituency Member. I recognise the sincerity with which he raised the matter. I listened to his opening remarks with much care.

It must be frustrating that the hon. Gentleman's opportunity should have arrived before the survey that was initiated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has been completed. I recognise that the opportunity for such a debate cannot be allowed to pass. I have have been balloting for motions ever since I have been here, but have never come in the first three. It is difficult to know what one might do if the opportunity arose; there are so many matters that one might like to explore.

Mr. George Howarth: The hon. Member seems to be addressing his remarks to me, but my frustration stems from the deliberate attempts of Conservative Members to frustrate my hon. Friend the Member for Broadgreen and myself.

Mr. Shepherd: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's frustration. He has also been in the House quite a long time. I am glad that I am attending a conference on Commonwealth matters this afternoon at Great Windsor park, which enables me to be in London on a day when I would normally be in Hereford.

As I do not live far from the area concerned, and as I pass it regularly on the train, I have considerable sympathy with the points that the hon. Member for Torfaen has assiduously pursued since he has been in the House.

The demands and pleading of the hon. Member for Torfaen for a public inquiry are ahead of the game. If we had the results of the Secretary of State's survey to hand, it would form the foundation for a public inquiry and he would be absolutely right to say, "Right, chaps, let's have a public inquiry."

I was aware of the ReChem and Pontypool issue while I was associated, albeit in a menial capacity, with the Welsh Office. I have reviewed the steps that have been taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, and I think, with the wisdom of hindsight, that he has got it right. He has achieved a measured set of steps aimed at eventually getting at the truth, in such a way as not to cause unnecessary disturbance, while maintaining a balance between the interests involved.

I recognise that that is a point of frustration to the hon. Member for Torfaen, but it is correct to proceed on the basis of knowledge rather than surmise. Any inquiry initiated now would immediately have to adjourn for such information to be found. The history of the matter shows that there is not a firm foundation of fact, but there is the unease to which the hon. Member for Torfaen referred. The call for a public inquiry is premature but understandable.

The motion understandably refers to the cessation of the importation of toxic wastes into Wales. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), with whom I found myself in substantial agreement—it goes against the grain to agree with a Liberal, but I must accept that from time to time it will happen—put the argument very well. With his barristerial training, he is well equipped to do so.

Why are we dealing with this matter in a Welsh context? I am a Member of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. I sometimes wish to take part in proceedings in the House that do not relate only to England or Wales. I should have

[Mr. Shepherd]

the uninhibited freedom to participate, as many colleagues do, in matters pertaining to Scotland or Wales without being accused of filibustering or poking my nose into a matter that does not affect me. It does, because we are dealing with United Kingdom matters. Therefore, the motion should deal not with the import and disposal of toxic wastes in Wales, but with toxic wastes trade, cross-boundary movement and all the various other matters involved in the disposal of toxic wastes. We must consider the subject on a wider basis. We should say not merely that toxic wastes should not come into Wales——

Mr. Michael: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman had reason to be absent at certain points of the debate—perhaps for inspecting the kitchens or whatever—but I can assure him that these issues have been dealt with comprehensively. We are all waiting for a response from the Minister. We have asked him for answers. The hon. Gentleman is delaying that response. I suspect that that is what the Government want, but it is not what we want. We want to hear the answers.

Mr. Shepherd: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct that I had to deal with matters of refreshment, and I do not just mean drinking coffee. One of his colleagues had tabled a question about the Refreshment Department that needed attention, and I must take these opportunities when they arise.

I am rather sorry for the hon. Gentleman that he sees everything through clouds of suspicion. Although I was called away from the Chamber on essential business—I had to guess when I would be called—it is entirely right that I should be allowed to put my point on the matter.

Mr. Michael: I accept that. The hon. Gentleman told us what we should have been debating. My point was that during his absences in the Refreshment Department, we dealt with those issues. I invite him to join us in hearing the Minister's response. I am sure that we shall all want to comment on it.

Mr. Shepherd: I cannot say that I am particularly grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, because we are going over old ground. It bothers me that his hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) is getting more and more brassed off with him as he intervenes.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that many Conservative Members have stayed behind this Friday specifically to contribute to this debate before the Minister answers it? I am grateful for that opportunity. To be accused of filibustering before making the environmental points that I wish to make—an important subject that Opposition Members raise time and again—is disgraceful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) gets started again, I remind the House of the motion before us. Let us stick to it rather than make comments about what should or should not have been the motion this morning. It is clear what the motion is, and I intend to ensure that hon. Members debate it.

Mr. Shepherd: I will put myself at risk by saying that, if I were to vote against the motion, it would be because it was incorrectly worded, and therefore unacceptable. I am treading this narrow path carefully. I do not think that I can reasonably debate whether toxic waste should be disposed of in Wales without saying where and how it should be disposed of and how it should get there.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) raised that matter, so I hope that I am not out of order in saying that I would have preferred the motion to deal with the underlying questions that must be addressed. I am trying to be as helpful as I can.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) has left the Chamber. No doubt he will be back shortly.

Mr. Ainger: A call of nature.

Mr. Shepherd: I thank that hon. Gentleman for that. We all have to deal with these tiresome necessities.

The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent brushed on the underlying point of any inquiry that might flow from the results of the survey which is being conducted now. I do not intend to pre-empt the response of my hon. Friend the Minister and how he deals with the real questions raised on both sides of the House when I say that we must address not only how we get rid of what we have, bearing in mind that we have created these hazardous wastes as a consequence of our technological development, consumerism and expanded quality of life, but also how we stop the situation arising in future.

Substantial research is being conducted on chlorofluorocarbons—I do not think that I am out of order in mentioning that—and how we replace them, for example in aerosols. We must initiate the concept of a design and engineering audit in any product development programme, which relates to what happens to that product after it has completed its useful life. The product should be open to scrutiny at its launch by those who would reasonably ask what problems would arise when it was finished with.

PCBs came about as a transformer fluid. They performed a function. Nobody asked what we would do with the PCBs when the transformer was dead. That question must be asked. I want the Government to develop thinking of that nature in their dealings with other countries. It is one thing to say, "We shall put up barriers and deal only with our own toxic wastes," but quite another to say, "We shall export the stuff to developing countries and we can reasonably take back the wastes."

We must also ask what will cause Sweden and other countries that are content to pass the buck to us to rethink their policies and address the disposal of waste.

Mr. Ainger: Surely it is best immediately to stop importing waste from countries such as Sweden and make them address their problems rather than push those problems on to us.

Mr. Shepherd: Personally, I would have no hang-ups about that. It is one way of forcing the issue and the Government may wish to use it. On the other hand, is it not pre-empting the issue now? The matter still rests on the survey being done in the Pontypool area to get the basis of fact. As soon as we have that, we can say, "Fine, we cannot do this any more. We must stop. We can prevent third countries, developed or underdeveloped, from exporting waste into this country." But we must also recognise that, within the European Community, there must be a proper forum with a strong programme of determination behind

it to address how to deal with these questions within the Community. It does not become trade within the Community; it becomes just a movement of goods. There are no boundary restrictions. Those are the underlying issues.

I enormously respect the contribution of the hon. Member for Torfaen. I am disappointed, however, that he did not suggest how the problem might be solved. It is one thing to say, "Not in my back yard," although I realise that he has got it in his back yard, and I have to admit that, if a similar planning application were made in the Hereford area, I should scrutinise it vigorously, so we are all exposed to the NIMBY syndrome. But apart from saying that it should not happen, we must also say what should happen in its place.

As the Government read and review the findings of the survey, I suggest that they should regard this as a broader issue than just Wales. ReChem is the example, but the underlying principles are wider. I suggest that we ought to build in a pan-European or pan-Community approach to the problem and that we ought to stimulate the thought processes that would lead to the problem's being eliminated. The underlying point is that, apart from saying that for every problem there is a solution, we have to remember that for every solution there is also a problem.

12.29 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) kept on referring to the fact that there will not be time to debate his motion today. It ought to be pointed out that the Chair has, rightly, judged this to be a bogus request. It should be borne in mind that the hon. Gentleman's motion came second in the ballot and that it is appropriate for the House to concentrate on the first motion on the Order Paper. It puzzles me that the hon. Gentleman, who is Opposition spokesman for the environment, has failed to contribute to this important debate.

Mr. George Howarth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not an Opposition spokesman on anything.

Lady Olga Maitland: Then *The Times Guide to the House of Commons* must be wrong.

Reference was made earlier in the debate to something with which I agree: that we are the guardians of this Earth. It is important to place this topic in a wider perspective. Many hon. Members in the Chamber are Welsh. It is appropriate that they should identify the problems from a Welsh point of view. I have always regarded myself as a foreigner as I do not come from Wales, but this is a British problem and a British issue. We are all affected. We must not adopt a simplistic view and say that we should not produce goods that lead to the production of hazardous wastes. It is like putting one's head in the sand and trying to pretend that the problem does not exist.

Mr. Llew Smith: Does the hon. Lady accept that what I said was that Governments should not agree to goods being produced unless they have both the willingness and the capability to deal with them safely when they come to the end of their natural life?

Lady Olga Maitland: That is an unreliable view. We should accept that toxic wastes exist. They are the result of the products that have been created by man to serve mankind, from which we have received many benefits. Modern products have provided us with life-saving gadgets, television sets, radios, medicines, paints, adhesives, fireproof fabrics, cleaning products, garden and farm fertilisers—just to mention a few items whose residues are toxic. It would be unrealistic, however, to argue that we can do without those products.

Modern technology has helped us to get rid of toxic waste. In the past, we dealt with it in a cavalier way because we lacked the information to get rid of it safely. We take a different view today. We do not like farmers to dump unwanted pesticides on the local tip. We do not want packaged garden fertilisers rotting on the shelf long after their sell-by date. Public safety means treating the subject seriously.

I recognise how important it is to keep the production of waste to a minimum and to dispose of it in an environmentally acceptable way, which today's modern technology allows us to do. High temperature incineration has proved to be the most effective treatment. We must now ask ourselves what is the source of all that toxic waste. Opposition Members suggested that this country has been flooded with obnoxious waste from overseas, but that is not true.

The United Kingdom alone generates 2·4 million tonnes of hazardous waste. In the past year, Wales generated 76,000 tonnes. Contrary to the figures quoted by Labour Members, imported waste——

Mr. Ainger: The hon. Lady quotes figures for the amount of toxic waste generated in Britain. My hon. Friends the Members for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) and for Blaenau, Gwent (Mr. Smith) quoted the figures for PCBs, which is what the debate is really all about. It concerns not toxic waste in general but PCBs specificlly.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have the Order Paper before me, and I see no mention of PCBs in the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy). It refers only the import and disposal of toxic waste. Perhaps we may seek your clarification, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The motion does not make any specific mention of PCBs, although they may be implied. Perhaps we may continue.

Mr. Ainger: Perhaps the hon. Lady can give the figures she has for PCBs incinerated at the ReChem plant. What is the tonnage generated in the United Kingdom, and how much is imported?

Lady Olga Maitland: We should place PCBs in the overall context of all noxious waste. It is spurious to exclude one type or another, because all such waste presents a hazard that must be treated with equal respect.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I put to the hon. Lady the figures for imported toxic waste, which is a separate issue from the waste generated in this country. in 1989-90, we imported 33,000 tonnes. In 1990-91, we generated 44,000 tonnes of toxic waste. In the 12 months to last December, we imported 51,643 tonnes. By any definition, imports must be increasing.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, but I have different figures. Toxic waste imports through United Kingdom ports for disposal in Wales——

Mr. Simon Hughes: The total for the United Kingdom?

Lady Olga Maitland: I believe that my figures are different from those that the hon. Gentleman has, and we could go on debating them for ever and a day.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that total toxic waste imports have fallen substantially, from 80,000 tonnes in 1987-88 to 40,000 tonnes in 1990?

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for making a point that I was just about to make myself.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Lady has the same brief.

Lady Olga Maitland: We all have the same brief—it is just that you choose which figures you quote.

Mr. Michael: I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Lady was referring to me, rather than to you. The figures that I gave earlier show that over a decade, there has been a tenfold increase in toxic imports. The hon. Lady's figures are rather curious—but they seem to be the same figures that have been handed out to all Conservative Members.

Lady Olga Maitland: Your figures, as in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland", are getting curiouser and curiouser.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must be addressed correctly. The use of "you" and "your" are not permissible in the Chamber. The hon. Lady must refer to the "hon. Gentleman's figures" or to "the figures given by the hon. Member"—whichever is appropriate.

Lady Olga Maitland: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I stand corrected.

Of the 44,000 tonnes of waste imported into the United Kingdom as a whole, only 16 per cent. went to ReChem in Wales. If the Opposition do not want waste to be treated in Wales, where do they want it to go? Where will it be dumped? What will the Opposition do with noxious and hazardous waste? Will it go here, there, anywhere? Does dumping of Welsh hazardous waste elsewhere make it somehow better? Does treating Welsh waste elsewhere make it better? What alternatives do the Opposition offer for treatment of this waste?

It is important to bear in mind that this is a problem which affects us all. Environmental pollution is no respecter of boundaries whether in Wales, England or over the borders. In other words, a country should get rid of its own waste whenever possible.

Mr. Michael: I am sure that the hon. Lady meant her remarks to be rhetorical, but she has just given her own answer, which she would have heard earlier in the debate had she been listening.

Lady Olga Maitland: That is beyond comment.

Mr. Michael: It is just accurate.

Lady Olga Maitland: It is not at all accurate.

We have now got down to Murphy's law or the NIMBY factor. People do not want safe waste destruction plants in their backyard. The NIMBY factor makes for greater dangers.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the hon. Lady accept that an alternative site for the ReChem plant could be in her constituency? If planning application for such a plant were submitted would she support it with the enthusiasm with which she thinks we should accept the ReChem plant in our constituency?

Lady Olga Maitland: I have confidence in ReChem's safety programme and in the HMIP and its findings. If I did not, the problems would apply wherever the plant was situated. The hon. Gentleman is implying criticism of the HMIP. Does he think that it got it wrong? As far as I can see, it has got it right. There have been no instances of illnesses or destruction in the community, but I know that people have been concerned. Much of it is to do with fear of the unknown and lack of understanding of what is going on. Therefore, the independent inquiry being carried out by the university of East Anglia is appropriate.

The Murphy's law syndrome is based on a misunderstanding, on deliberate misinformation. ReChem has been under constant attack since 1980, but in all that time, its standards of safety have been in line with current knowledge and understanding. As I said, it has been working closely with HMIP. We have already heard that the company has spent £1 million on keeping in tune with current knowledge and understanding.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the hon. Lady accept that if the ReChem plant in Torfaen is as efficient and its technology as adequate as she implies, HMIP would not have come to the conclusion that the incinerator design is inadequate and unless it is improved, it is unlikely to receive approval under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Lady Olga Maitland: The hon. Gentleman seems to be forgetting that we have announced a £2·5 million project on updating equipment. That is surely better news than doing nothing at all. The hon. Gentleman is being unfairly critical, for political purposes.

Mr. Michael: Surely the fact that a company like ReChem, which is not particularly generous with its capital investment, will have to spend £2·5 million to try to get in line with current environmental policy is proof that, in the past, its environmental policies were appalling?

Lady Olga Maitland: Absolute nonsense. It is proof that it has been willing to co-operate with HMIP and to provide the best possible service for the community, and not just for Wales but for the country as a whole.

Mr. Michael: Will the hon. Lady explain how she can say that with such confidence, in view of the fact that, as has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen and myself, the salient point about the proposed investment is that information on the reasons for it, and on the way in which it will be directed, is not in the public arena? That is one reason why the inquiry is needed. The hon. Lady does not seem to understand the issue at stake.

Lady Olga Maitland: I think that the findings will come out in the report by the university of East Anglia. The Opposition have a dog-in-the-manger attitude, saying, "We do not want ReChem's plant to operate efficiently, or at all, in our area." I ask them what kind of alternatives they really want. Do they want countries such as those of eastern Europe where, without effective waste disposal systems, there are dying rivers, high rates of diseases, trees withering and children playing on untreated dangerous dumps? Why do they not go to eastern Europe, look at the

damage there and accept that we have fulfilled a moral responsibility in permitting effective incineration of hazardous waste for the good of all mankind?

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Lady answer a straightforward question? Does she support the import of toxic waste from developed countries into this country if those countries have the technological capacity to deal with that waste themselves? If she does not, she should support the argument that companies such as ReChem should not process imported wastes from developed countries.

Lady Olga Maitland: I support the import of hazardous waste from other countries until such time as they have their own plants to treat their waste.

Mr. Hughes: Even if those countries are developed?

Lady Olga Maitland: All developed countries do not necessarily have the mechanisms to deal effectively with hazardous waste.

Mr. Ainger: Is the hon. Lady not aware that Sweden, which has its own incinerator, decided that incineration was a not a safe way to dispose of PCBs, so it exported them to Pontypool? Is she not aware, also, that the 1,500 tonnes of waste from the St. Basile-le-Grand fire was destined for an incinerator at Swan Lake in Onatrio, but that the Quebec Government demanded earlier disposal of the PCBs, which is why there was an attempt to secure a contract with ReChem? Does the hon. Lady accept that although several developed countries already have incinerators, they still export waste to Pontypool because it is cheaper?

Lady Olga Maitland: I welcome the fact that Sweden decided to send its waste over here, because Sweden did not have the right facilities. ReChem is one of the few companies in the world which can deal with the high incineration of noxious wastes—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may laugh at that, but it is true.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that although much is being said today about massive imports of toxic wastes into this country, 95 per cent. of such waste treated is home produced?

Lady Olga Maitland: As I said earlier, that is true. What do the Opposition want to do? Do they want to export hazardous wastes elsewhere although we have an expert company in this country? The Opposition are carrying out excellent scaremongering tactics for their political ends. It is one thing to have a responsible concern for the environment, but it is another to start frightening people.

Mr. Michael: This is one of the most outrageous speeches that I have ever heard since I entered the House —and it is being made by a Member who seems not to understand the issues. Is the hon. Lady accusing her hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), all the elected representatives and all the community groups, of wanting simply to raise concerns for their own reasons? Clearly that is untrue, as anyone who has considered the issues knows. My hon. Friend introduced the debate because of the concern of people in his constituency, and his concern for them. I hope that the hon. Lady will acknowledge that fact.

Lady Olga Maitland: I do not consider that the Opposition have a monopoly of care and concern for the environment and for the treatment of hazardous waste. We all share their care and concern. Perhaps we take a more responsible attitude in ensuring that hazardous waste is dealt with properly and expertly.

Mr. Thomason: Does my hon. Friend agree that in terms of developing plant abroad and the spread of technology, ReChem should be congratulated on its joint venture in Italy to develop processing facilities there?

Lady Olga Maitland: I, too, congratulate ReChem on having the imagination to develop a joint project with the Italians. I understand that it is seeking to help other countries to develop their own incinerator plants. That means that even less hazardous waste will come into the United Kingdom.

Although ReChem has been so heavily criticised by the Opposition, it has recently been presented with three silver Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents health and safety awards. That hardly comes into tune with your own allegations that it is falling down on safety.

I move on to the next spurious line, where you are trying to suggest——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member may refer to the Opposition, to hon. Members or to hon. Gentlemen. "You" and "your" are not permissible words in the Chamber.

Lady Olga Maitland: I do apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I fear that it is taking me some time to get the hang of these conventions.

I move on to the arguments that the Opposition have been raising on PCBs. It strikes me that, again, they are scaremongering. It is true that PCBs are noxious materials. It is true also that they have been around since 1929. They have left good marks, as it were, as well as a residue. It is important to ensure that PCBs are handled properly. They can be disposed of only at a high incineration level.

Mr. Llew Smith: I accept the hon. Lady's argument that if we are to incinerate PCBs we must do so at the highest possible incineration level. Will she tell me whether ReChem can reach the destruction level which the European Commission is suggesting? Perhaps she can tell us what that level is.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am sure that the incineration levels which ReChem operates will appear in the report by the university of East Anglia.

Opposition Members give the impression that PCBs should be left untreated. Is that the alternative? That would mean indefinite storage, and that would present major problems. Included among them would be environmental contamination. I hardly believe that the Opposition would want that.

Mr. Llew Smith: We have a quaint tradition in south Wales. It is that when people pose questions we normally answer them. Will the hon. Lady follow that tradition and answer my question?

Lady Olga Maitland: I shall pass over that one.

Mr. Michael: That is in good Conservative tradition.

Lady Olga Maitland: Some Opposition arguments are good examples of scaremongering. Opposition Members

[Lady Olga Maitland]

referred to the Californian guidelines and suggested that various utensils at ReChem have been contaminated to a level that is 400 times over the limit. Reference was made to a kettle, a telephone, a sweat band and a door. If the guidelines are in such common use, why is it that they are not part of the reference material that will be considered by the university of East Anglia? The Opposition have selected guidelines that suit them.

A public inquiry is unnecessary. What possible purpose would it serve when a report is being compiled? Such inquiries are used to establish facts that are not already available, but on this issue the facts are available. The Opposition imply that there is a cover-up, but there is no evidence of that. Anyone can visit the ReChem establishment at any time, and the company has a free and relaxed relationship with the inspectorate of pollution. There is no question of the company's holding back.

We must retain a proper and responsible attitude to the disposal of hazardous waste. It is irresponsible to put our heads in the sand. Simply because we do not like noxious waste we cannot ignore it and it must be handled properly. ReChem can do that expertly with high incineration. It is irresponsible to try to knock ReChem. It provides a service not just for the people of Wales but for all the people of Britain.

I believe in looking after the interests of mankind. We have the benefits of the products that produce noxious waste but we must ensure that the waste is disposed of in a responsible manner. That is what is happening.

12.56 pm

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I am sure that many of us have experienced the problems of trying to get the facts about companies such as ReChem. The Minister and I are the only two people in the Chamber who served on the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs that examined ReChem. We were supplied with all the information that we asked for and we discovered that serious problems perceived by the community could not be addressed by the Committee. We felt it necessary to look for expert outside help and the Committee was split on whether to call for a public inquiry.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the recommendation in the Select Committee report for a survey was agreed by all its members? I do not see a minority report.

Mr. Howells: That is correct. The Minister will recall that there was a vigorous discussion about whether to issue a minority report and in the end a compromise was accepted.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Paragraph 16 of the reports says that the evidence so far gathered about environmental pollution caused by the ReChem incinerator does not prove that the plant is a serious public health risk, although there are grounds for concern. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that conclusion was unanimous?

Dr. Howell: That is correct. We all agreed to that report.

I shall try to put the matter in context. We have had flights of fantasy and comparisons with eastern Europe. Many of us in Wales are worried not simply about ReChem but about incinerators everywhere. We found that ReChem was by no means the worst offender in polluting and that many other companies performed rather less well. For example, hospital incinerators, with which serious problems still exist, are immune from the examination to which ReChem was subjected.

However, that does not mean that we should simply say that, compared to some hospital managements, ReChem has had a reasonably responsible attitude, so we should not investigate it further. I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) agree with that, because I should hope that as most hon. Members who have spoken in this debate represent Welsh constituencies, we would all be concerned about the health of people in Wales.

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, Wales has processed difficult materials. The smelter plants in the Swansea valley poison an entire environment. The coke ovens such as those in my constituency now cause serious environmental problems, as do many chemical plants. They blight people's lives and the days are long gone when local authorities should be allowed to grant planning permission with impunity. Although the applications may conform to the HMIP criteria on emissions, because of the stench and noise emitted from the plant and many other factors—even a community's fear about a plant—planning committees must look much more carefully than they have in the past before granting planning permission in those circumstances.

It was clear to the Select Committee and many other bodies that have examined ReChem that the company suffered from the old Welsh planning disease. It was allowed to set up in a totally unsuitable environment. That has happened time and time again. It happened in the Curm-Beddau plant in the Aberdare valley and in the Purolite plant in my constituency.

It has been said that no political party has a monopoly on care. No political party has a monopoly on good planning decisions either. I have had many battles with Labour-controlled authorities about appalling planning decisions. A few more will be conducted in this House over a famous Bill that is now under discussion——

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The barrage.

Dr. Howells: Yes, the barrage.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Monmouth and my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) have similar experiences to mine in representing constituents, in the maze that constitutes the environmental inspectorates. I tramped from office to office in an attempt to get some sense out of the authorities about the problems associated with the chemical plants in my constituency. I went through the same processes as my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen did in trying to get at the truth behind ReChem. I went to the HMIP, which told me that it was responsible for emissions as far as the factory gates, but, once they went beyond the factory fence, they were no longer its responsibility.

Mr. Thomason: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government's introduction of the Environmental Protection Agency will deal with many of the problems to which he has referred and will introduce a more unified approach to the difficulties?

Dr. Howells: Yes, it constituted almost two pages of the Conservative party manifesto, but we have still seen nothing come out of it. The hon. Gentleman will know that there has been an interesting and fierce interdepartmental row because the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is trying to steal part of the responsibility that is currently held by the Department of the Environment through the National Rivers Authority. I should like to see HMIP certificates issued with impunity, as that cannot be done at present.

As I am sure that the Minister, who was a member of the Committee, will agree that if anything came out of the examination, it was a sense of bewilderment at the incompetence of HMIP. There was such chaos that the poor man who headed HMIP at the time committed suicide. It is a dreadful state of affairs and it has taken the Government far too long to come to terms with it and to put it right.

When will the integrated policy take effect? At present it has not taken effect. If one wants to find out how to clean up ReChem, one goes first to HMIP. It says that it has certain responsibilities. One then goes to the National Rivers Authority, which says that it has responsibility for aqueous discharges and is very worried about them. One goes to the local authority environmental health department which says, "Sorry, we cannot do much about this because we do not have the funding. We do not have time to put people on to things like this." The environmental health departments have responsibility for ensuring that the general level of environmental health is secure. All too often, they are the most disappointing departments of all. They should be the motor department in ensuring that all environmental matters are brought together, but they are not. One then goes to the county council, but its ability to influence matters is even more limited than that of the district authorities.

Finally, one can turn up at the Minister's door, as I have done. One can write endless letters to the Minister. The Minister refers people back to the myriad agencies to which they have tramped in the past couple of months trying to find an answer. It is a maze and a disgrace.

I will not bother to address the nonsense spoken by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). She said that we were all on the level of some apparatchik in Warsaw. I have seen the results of the destruction in eastern Europe and it is not a matter which should be approached trivially or made fun of, or compared with the position in south Wales. We care very much for our constituents in south Wales and we will fight as hard as any other right hon. or hon. Members to ensure that the mess we have had to put up with over the years in which our fair country has been raped and continues to be raped by corporations that have not cared one iota about pollution will not happen again.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen on his speech and I hope that he continues with his valiant defence of his constituency.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's peroration, but I feared that if I did not move quickly, I should not get the point in. The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) talked about the liaison committee and the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) talked about his difficulties in getting answers. A key element is the company itself. Has the hon. Gentleman been able to address himself to the concept of the liaison committee, which appears not to be functioning? Similar liaison committees function in Fawley and Essex. The natures of the waste may not be identical, but one case may be used as leverage in another if one can discuss the matter openly and frankly.

Dr. Howells: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention because it is important. In my constituency I try to encourage the liaison committees even though there has been long and terrible hostility. Sometimes such committees work; sometimes they do not. At the last count, there were 15 action committees in my constituency and most of them were not involved in liaison committees. Where there is sufficient trust to build up a liaison relationship, such committees can be important and constructive in helping to resolve matters. They cannot always happen and that is why we are debating the issue in the House. A liaison committee has not happened because there is not sufficient trust. Perhaps as a result of the company's reluctance to indulge in open debate in the past, it will not take part in such a committee.

I made a rather flippant intervention in which I said that ReChem would sue a woodpile on the chance that there was a snake in it. ReChem is extremely litigious so it can be dangerous for ordinary people to try to debate the issue outside. I know that good work has been done by, for example, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) in environmental matters. I hope that he will not associate himself with what sounds like a series of apologies for ReChem. I hope that the messages which are even now travelling back and forth between civil servants and the Minister do not suggest to anyone watching our proceedings that the Welsh Office is seeking to provide some kind of statistical apology for ReChem.

We want the answers and we want what is happening to be in the open. The best way of ensuring that it is in the open is by a proper public inquiry. What on earth do the company or the Welsh Office have to lose by that? The Welsh people, at any rate, have a great deal to gain.

1.9 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) spoke eloquently of the concerns felt by many of his constituents, and my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) has said that his constituents are similarly concerned. We must not, however, allow our objectivity to be clouded by our emotions on this issue. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) for the way in which she expressed herself today.

If the hon. Member for Torfaen had opposed rather than supported or condoned the failure of Torfaen borough council to set up a liaison committee, many of the public's fears might have been allayed by now. We are dealing with a very dangerous substance indeed and, so far as scientific knowledge is aware, the best way of disposing of it is through properly controlled and monitored high-temperature incineration. That is what is happening at the ReChem plant and the efficiency of the plant in destroying the material is more than 99·9999 per cent.

Mr. Flynn: If the incinerator is working efficiently, how was it possible for "Newsnight" to discover on the tip used by ReChem capacitors that had been imperfectly burned and contained large quantities of PCBs and dioxins? There

[Mr. Flynn]

is only one firm in the whole of Britain that burns capacitors contaminated with PCBs. If its incinerator was working efficiently, how on earth could that happen?

Mr. Sweeney: The hon. Gentleman should view such specific fears in the context of the history of the plant at Pontypool. The plant was commissioned in 1974, and, as is often the case with plants dealing with dangerous chemicals——

Mr. Llew Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, if ReChem's destruction efficiency is 99·9999 per cent., that still does not bring it up to the levels that the European Commission will be proposing?

Mr. Sweeney: I do not know what the European Commission will be proposing. I only know that 99·9999 per cent. is a very high percentage indeed.

The plant was commissioned in 1974 and, as is normally the case with such plants, there were public concerns from the outset. In 1979, following allegations from residents about alleged atmospheric discharges Torfaen borough council commissioned the Porton Down chemical defence establishment to carry out an atmospheric pollution survey. That was done, and the results showed no particular cause for concern. In 1985, following similar allegations at the ReChem plant in Bonnybridge in Scotland, reports were published, for both Scotland and Wales, showing that nothing abnormal had been detected. Further work was commissioned from Professor Lawrence on the incidence of neural tube defect——

Mr. Ainger: I understand that the Bonnybridge plant, formerly run by ReChem, was closed down before a public inquiry could be held into the operations of the plant and the pollution that it has caused. The hon. Gentleman should not cite Bonnybridge as an example.

Mr. Sweeney: I referred to it because the inquiry showed that there was nothing abnormal at the plant.

In 1985, there were new demands for a public inquiry into the plant at Pontypool——

Mr. Ainger: I must interrupt the hon. Gentleman again because I am at a loss to understand his argument. He refers to an inquiry into Bonnybridge not finding anything. There was no inquiry. The plant closed because it was polluting the glems and valleys of Scotland.

Mr. Sweeney: I am not talking about a public inquiry but about a report that was presented in 1985.

In 1987, new flue gas technology was introduced at the ReChem plant and that resulted in a significant improvement in pollution control. In 1987, there was a Crown court case in which Torfaen borough took ReChem to court, and it was ruled that there was no case to answer on charges of smell and fume nuisance. Perhaps predictably, demands for a public inquiry continued to be made.

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman will recall my earlier remarks about the learned judge at the end of that case saying that, in his view, there could be a public inquiry.

Mr. Sweeney: There could still be a public inquiry, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) pointed out, such an inquiry would be premature now. It might be appropriate at the end of the year, if evidence appeared to justify an inquiry but this debate is taking place today.

Between 1989 and 1990, there was a special inquiry by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, and in August 1990 the Secretary of State for Wales commissioned an independent study by the university of East Anglia into PCB levels in the Panteg area of Pontypool. An improvement notice was served in May 1991 and further improvement notices were served in April of this year. When those notices have been complied with, the plant will be the safest and most efficient of its kind in Britain.

Mr. Flynn: Those who have been following the issue for years and have read all the reports will recognise the phrase that the hon. Gentleman just used, about it being the safest and most efficient plant. The phrase was used in 1975, 1979, 1981 and in 1987. It has always been claimed to be the safest. Will the hon. Gentleman reflect that his information about, and knowledge of, the plant does not even extend to pronouncing the name of the plant correctly? He keeps referring to it as "Recam." He might reconsider his speech and decide to finish it now.

Mr. Sweeney: I apologise for my poor Welsh pronunciation—*[Interruption.]* The motion is inappropriate and I shall oppose it.

1.19 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I shall try to confine my remarks to the issue, especially to the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988, which are relevant to the part of the motion on the importation of toxic waste into Wales for so-called disposal at ReChem in Pontypool.

The debate could be described as a curate's egg. Excellent speeches were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) and—unfortunately, he is not present to hear my compliment—the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans). The speeches of the hon. Members for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) were probably the worst that I have heard since becoming a Member a few months ago. The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West was deliberately filibustering on an issue that is important to Wales. The fact that he is now a member of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs made that even more appalling.

The major issue of the importation of toxic waste into Wales came to a head in 1989. The previous August, at St. Basile-le-Grand on the St. Lawrence seaway, 1,500 tonnes of PCBs that had been stored in a warehouse went up in smoke and, unfortunately, came down in a form of dioxin. The town had to be evacuated for up to three weeks; 3,200 people had to be evacuated; and an area of 14 sq km was covered in dioxins.

That prompted the Canadian Government to act. Unfortunately, the only incinerator in Canada, at Swan Lake, was chock-a-block with PCBs from North America generally. Therefore the Quebec Government, in an election year, decided to get rid of the PCBs that were stored in the warehouse.

At the time, I was a county councillor representing Pembroke Dock. There was a possibility of those 1,500 tonnes of PCBs, which were destined for ReChem, being

imported through Pembroke. We formed an action committee and believed that we had successfully persuaded the port operator and his customers not to sign any contract with the Quebec Government or ReChem.

The problem that we encountered in Pembroke Dock highlighted for us, and now for the whole country, the inadequacy of the transfrontier shipment regulations. A consigner will find a company—in our case, ReChem—that is willing to dispose of PCBs or other toxic waste. The company signs the form saying, "Yes, I am willing to accept a consignment of toxic waste" and the local disposal authority signs to show that it is willing to accept the shipment. Under the regulations, the only other authority that must be informed is the waste disposal authority at the port of import. The documents must travel with the shipment from, in this instance, Canada to Pontypool.

I discussed with the harbour master and general manager of Milford Haven port authority their fears and concerns about the beginning of the trade in the importation of toxic waste. I also had discussions with the fire brigade and the local district council in its capacity as the waste disposal authority. All expressed grave concern and believed that the facilities then available at the port were not suitable for handling toxic waste. However, under the regulations they could not oppose the importation. The harbour master could stop the shipment coming in only if the ship or its cargo would provide a safety hazard to shipping in the harbour. The waste disposal authority, South Pembrokeshire district council, could not object because it was merely on the route to the ultimate point of disposal at ReChem.

What staggered me was that only 12 months previously the same toxic product had caused the evacuation of a town of 3,200 people and had contaminated 14 sq km of land, yet there was not a requirement to inform the fire brigade, the police or the health authority that such a consignment would be passing through the pretty district of South Pembrokeshire. It was then to travel along the A477, meeting up with the A40 in the district of Carmarthen, yet neither the fire brigade nor the local police had to be informed. It would then have proceeded along the M4, passing through Llanelli. Again, the authorities there would not be aware of it. It would go on to Lliw valley, Swansea and all along the M4 to Pontypool. The only people who would have been aware that it was on its way would have been the waste authority in Pontypool, Torfaen district council and ReChem. What nonsense.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) told us how Cardiff city council discovered by mistake that PCBs were travelling through Cardiff and being held in a siding. Surely if we are concerned about transport safety—we all know from driving on our motorways that lorries catch fire and accidents happen—the Government should first insist that each of the 17 ports that my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen mentioned were importing toxic wastes and directing it down to Pontypool should inform district, health, police and fire brigade authorities on the route that at a certain time on a certain day PCBs will be travelling through their area, in case an accident happens or a fire breaks out. Surely that would be the first step that a sensible, reasonable Government would take.

Torfaen district council as a receiving waste authority could not inform Carmarthen district council, Dyfed Powys police, Dyfed fire brigade or any of the other relevant authorities on the route to Pontypool because of commercial confidentiality. Mr. David Thomas, who is responsible for environmental health, and therefore ultimately responsible in law for the transfrontier shipment regulations, was prevented from informing even his own members. He would have faced an injunction if he so much as told the chief constable of Dyfed Powys police or the chief fire officer of the Dyfed county council.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I was a county councillor for six years before coming to the House. To my knowledge the county councillor operating with the emergency services, whether the ambulance service or the fire brigade, and with the district council had to have emergency plans ready for every eventuality. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that perhaps he is creating fear where there should be none?

Mr. Ainger: No. I am suggesting that emergency plans should be made available. That is what the chief fire officer, the chief constable and health authority officials have told me. They cannot plan for something if they do not know that they will have to deal with it. PCBs are carried on our motorways and railways through areas where no emergency plans have been made to deal with an accident. Those areas have been given no opportunity to make plans. The reason is that the law does not require that information to be given to the relevant authorities. It may be slightly remiss of the regulations that they do not provide for that information to be given to the relevant authorities, but with common sense and good will the problem could be overcome—that is, if the final disposal authority informed all the other relevant authorities on the route to be taken by the waste that it would be coming through their areas on a certain day. They cannot do so, however, because of commercial confidentiality. ReChem says, "If you give prior notice that a shipment of PCBs is coming from Canada, Sweden, Germany or Italy it will give our competitors the chance to come in and undercut us." That argument was put to Mr. David Thomas.

Mr. Llew Smith: Does my hon. Friend accept that information that is refused to the general public in Britain about the incineration industry is readily available in the United States? If one goes to any library in the United States one can obtain that information from the computer. Unlike Britain, the United States has a freedom of information Act.

Mr. Ainger: I agree. That is another reason why we import PCBs from the United States. The freedom of information Act in the United States and all its other environmental controls mean that it is more expensive for American companies to dispose of PCBs in the United States than to ship them 3,000 miles and transport them by road into Pontypool. That is why there has been a significant increase in imports of PCBs.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I am perplexed by the hon. Gentleman's point about emergency plans. A county council is obliged to make plans to deal with emergencies. The hon. Gentleman would like specific details to be given about shipments, or lorry or train journeys, but is he suggesting that Gwent county council has no emergency plans to deal with any incident?

Mr. Ainger: I cannot comment on Gwent county council. I am referring to the transport of toxic waste from

[Mr. Ainger]

the ports to Pontypool and specifically to Dyfed county council. I am still a member of Dyfed county council's public protection committee. It certainly has no emergency plans to deal with a fire on a lorry that is carrying PCBs. I doubt whether Hereford county council, Gwent county council or any other county council has plans of that nature.

Mr. Thomason: The hon. Gentleman has laid considerable emphasis on the importation of toxic waste from the United States. Does he agree that in a written answer on 21 November 1991 the Minister gave a list of countries that export toxic waste to this country and that the United States did not appear on that list?

Mr. Ainger: I accept that in 1988 and 1989 some of the PCBs that were stored at St. Basile-le-Grand in Canada were of American origin.

Mr. Michael: An attempt is being made to distract my hon. Friend from making his point, but he is absolutely right to say that the relevant authorities do not have information about the transportation of toxic waste. I gave details earlier of an occasion when it became known to the environmental health officer in my constituency that a consignment was on its way to Torfaen via my constituency. That information came to the attention of the relevant officer only because the company concerned communicated it by accident.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) obtained information about an accident in his constituency involving nuclear material via a question about Gwent asked by an elected representative in the United States. My hon. Friend makes the point that if one does not have the relevant information, one cannot plan.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My understanding is that interventions are meant to be short, and not turn into speeches. A statement to that effect was made from the Chair earlier today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am most grateful for the hon. Gentleman's guidance, but I make the decisions. Had you finished, Mr. Michael?

Mr. Michael: I had, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that neither you nor I needed the hon. Gentleman's correction.

Mr. Ainger: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments.

My constituency has three large refineries and one power station—all covered by the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984. Perhaps the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) was referring to emergency plans of that kind, which local authorities and commercial interests—which are the refineries in our case—must develop by law. They include evacuation procedures, table-top exercises, and so on.

It is staggering that ReChem is importing and, for short periods, storing hundreds of tonnes of PCBs. I described the fire in Canada, in which 14,000 sq km of land was contaminated. After all this time, and despite the many complaints made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen and myself, the district council, and the good citizens of Torfaen and Pontypool, the Government do not even apply the CIMAH regulations to ReChem's plant. I hope that when the Minister replies, he will explain why that is so.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam was not in her place when I made my earlier comments, so I shall repeat them now that she is present. She made an absolutely appalling speech. She suggested that this side of the House —including the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—wanted the end of all incineration and to see ReChem swept from the face of Wales. No Opposition Member made such a statement.

We want proper pollution controls and a high-tech approach to inceration that maintains the correct temperature. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam may not have seen various documentaries and newsreels about ReChem, but I can tell her how the furnace there operates. It is a single chamber furnace. When the doors are opened, a forklift truck loaded with four 45-gallon barrels literally tips itself into the chamber of the furnace. As anyone who has ever used a coal fire will know, when one slings on a shovel of coal the temperature immediately drops. That is why Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is extremely concerned. That has come too late in my opinion. HMIP should have taken an interest from the word go, when PCBs first started being burned at ReChem.

Mr. Thomason: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, as part of the £2·5 million investment that ReChem is undertaking in this plant, it is installing a new system of loading the incinerator via air-locked doors and enclosing the de-ashing operation so that his criticisms will be a problem of the past? Does he welcome that?

Mr. Ainger: I welcome it as an improvement, but other experts have said that there is a need for a mobile bed as well. Furthermore, there should also be an afterburner so that gases pass through a certain temperature before going up the flue.

Having had a bludgeoning from the local populace and after HMIP had finally started to flex its muscles, ReChem is starting to do something. I welcome that, but it does not go far enough. That is where a public inquiry could bring expert scientific and engineering opinion to bear on the issue of the furnace and the flue, where the problem lies.

Mr. Llew Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that quite a number of learned people believe that part of the problem with ReChem's Pontypool plant is not the incinerator but the method and technology used in handling, for example, transformers before they go into it?

Mr. Ainger: I agree with my hon. Friend. We need the expert opinion, not just in the way suggested by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, to check after the event to see what pollution has been caused but about what is going on in a furnace from both the chemical and engineering point of view. That is why Conservative Members, particularly the hon. Member for Monmouth, although I did not quite catch his argument, should realise that monitoring is only the beginning. One can go much further and monitor certain things. Continuous monitoring, although difficult to achieve, is better than intermittent monitoring of flue gas emissions, because one can miss times when the temperature drops and dioxins come out.

There are various problems, but the answer is to have the right technology in the furnace and in the base of the flue to ensure that whenever PCBs are being burnt in the furnace, they are burnt at the correct temperature. Perhaps, once that investment has been made, and

technically the ReChem plant at Pontypool is not a potential hazard to its citizens, we shall start to see a realistic pricing for the incineration of PCBs and can decide whether a proper investment has been made. We may then see, purely from the commercial point of view, a reduction in the amount of imported PCBs. I think that that will take an awfully long time. Today, throughout the motorways and railways of Great Britain, crossing the channel on ferries, coming in from North America, hundreds of tonnes are travelling around the globe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Cantral, who has unfortunately left the Chamber, spoke about the dolphin that was washed up on the Cardigan bay coast. The only way that Ceridigion district council could dispose of that was to treat the body of the baby dolphin as toxic waste. It was so heavily contaminated that it could not be buried. That shows the problems, particularly of those animals—including, I suppose, us—that are at the end of the food chain of the effect of PCBs. I thoroughly appreciate the problems and fears of the people of Pontypool, knowing that there is a possibility of dioxin.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is no longer here, but I used to live in his constituency, where the Coalite plant has been spewing out dioxins into the atmosphere, both terrestrial and marine, in an appalling manner. My parents still live in that area, and some people there believe that they have developed chloracne and various other skin problems as a direct result of emissions from the plant. The debate is not just scaremongering, as some hon. Members have suggested. There is hard evidence about the effects of emissions, especially of dioxin, on human life.

The call for a public inquiry is extremely sensible. It would give an opportunity for the technical arguments about the plant, the furnace and the lower flue to be properly considered. However, the answer to the world's problems over the transportation of toxic waste would be for this country immediately to say, "Enough is enough. You, Sweden, may not consider your technology perfect, but it is only as good as ours. Clean up your own doorstep." We could say the same to Canada, Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal and Australia. We could tell them that they have the technology, or that they could buy it off the shelf, perhaps from ReChem. I understand that the company has already gone into partnership with Italians. Why does that not happen in Australia, Germany and everywhere else? Why do we not invest abroad? That may sound funny coming from the Labour party, but that is what ReChem should do, if it has the expertise. I hope, however, that the company does not try to export the type of plant which it currently operates at Pontypool because, as has already been said, it would not get away with that anywhere else.

1.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): We have had an important and wide-ranging debate. As the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) has just reminded us, there was an intervention from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). There have been some dubious points of order and there has been some bad temper. I was disappointed by the suggestion by the hon. Members for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) and for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) that we should truncate this important debate to allow other motions to be taken. I am pleased that my hon. Friends have not given way to Opposition pressure. This is an important matter for Wales, and it is right that we have had a full debate on it.

The substance of the concern was established by the two local Members of Parliament. The debate was introduced by the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) who was immediately followed and to a large extent echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), whose constituency is immediately adjacent to the ReChem plant. My hon. Friend's speech was perhaps more moderate and measured, but I was struck by the considerable agreement between him and the hon. Member for Torfaen, except on the question of a public inquiry. My hon. Friend argued that that was not yet necessary.

Wearing his other hat as a member of the European Parliament, the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) also has a constituency interest. There was also a substantial contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), and there were substantial speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) and for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney). We also heard from the hon. Members for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) and for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) —as usual, he spoke with great passion—and from the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who summarised his speech at the outset by saying that he would ask four questions. I hope that I shall be able to answer those questions in full.

It is important to make it clear that facilities in Wales have an important role to play in the waste disposal industry in this country. However, Wales is definitely not at the heart of the international disposal industry, as some people would have us believe. Wales should not be regarded as a dumping ground for other people's waste. It may surprise some people to learn that Wales is not even at the centre of the United Kingdom's trade in waste disposal. The simple facts are that since 1988, when detailed record keeping on the importation of hazardous waste began, the total hazardous waste disposed of in Wales was up to 11,000 tonnes per annum, whereas in the same period total United Kingdom imports were up to 51,000 tonnes. The total amount of waste imported into the United Kingdom may seem large, but the figures that I have mentioned represent only about 2 per cent. of special/hazardous waste arising here. Imported waste that is disposed of in Wales by ReChem at Pontypool is very much less than that. In fact, it is 0·5 per cent.

Mr. Murphy: I remind the Minister that paramount in our debate has been the emphasis put on PCBs. Is it not right that ReChem is by far the most significant processor of PCBs, and that it is PCBs which cause controversy?

Mr. Jones: The point about PCBs is well taken, and I hope that I shall be covering it fully in a moment.

It is also important to remember—it is a point that many conveniently overlook—that of the 90,000 tonnes of indigenous special/hazardous waste arising in Wales in 1990-91, only 22,500 tonnes is disposed of in Wales, so even taken with the 7,000 tonnes of hazardous waste imported for disposal in Wales in that year, the simple fact is that Wales is a considerable net exporter of hazardous waste and not the massive importer some would have us

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believe. The figures are not in any way kept secret as relevant details of special/hazardous waste arising in Wales and of hazardous waste imports are published annually by the Welsh Office in the "Environmental Digest for Wales".

The motion calls specifically for a ban on the importation of waste into Wales, but the hon. Member for Torfaen will realise, I am sure, that to ban waste from entering Wales unilaterally is both an impractical and unrealistic objective. How can we in Wales, as part of the United Kingdom, possibly introduce such a ban, and what would happen to those indigenous wastes if a similar ban was imposed at Offa's dyke by the Secretary of State for the Environment on waste being imported into England from Wales? Not only do we need them more than they need us but the concept is fatally flawed and, frankly, preposterous, as hon. Members will surely appreciate.

The question of waste movement and the commercial trade in the disposal of waste needs to be addressed not at a Wales level, as the specific terms of the motion implies, or even at a United Kingdom level, but internationally. The Government believe that the subject can be sensibly and adequately addressed on the international stage only in consultation with other Governments, and there are numerous positive developments which I shall cover in just a moment.

Dr. Kim Howells: The Minister is reading a most informative brief, but he is doing so at such speed that we simple country boys cannot understand it. Will you advise the hon. Gentleman to slow down, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. I am sure that the Minister heard what the hon. Member said.

Mr. Jones: I know that the hon. Gentleman is not as simple as he pretends.

Mr. Michael: I am sure that the Minister will take the opportunity to pause, draw breath and deliver his speech in a way that will enable us to understand it.

The Minister seemed to suggest that the matters that we are debating should be dealt with entirely at international level. Does he accept—this is a point that has been made seriously, as have many others—that there is a need to know about emergency procedures and environmental health issues? Will he take up the issue of providing information to relevant authorities, including the movement of PCBs, so that such matters can be dealt with properly by the appropriate authorities?

Mr. Jones: I shall come to that very matter.

I must proceed rather strongly because I have much important ground to cover. There are matters that I should place on the record in response to an extremely important debate. I recall that two Labour Members were rising in their places in seeking to be called to speak in the debate. At least three of my hon. Friends are in that position. Those hon. Members have not been called and I should like to allow them time to make their contributions. I must press on.

Mr. Michael *rose*——

Mr. Jones: I shall come to the matter that the hon. Gentleman raised.

Mr. Michael: The Minister is fully aware that Opposition Members were encouraged to be disciplined and brief, which they were, so that the debate could come to an end in good time and the Minister would have plenty of time to respond to it. It was even thought that another debate could take place. I hope that the Minister will not suggest that there is a constraint on him that arises because of the activities of Opposition Members. I think that he should have a word with the Government Whips and with Conservative Back-Bench Members if he has any complaint.

Mr. Jones: At the risk of——

Mr. Colin Shepherd: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not a little ripe that those remarks should come from the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), who speaks from the Opposition Front Bench and who spoke for 25 minutes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Was that a point of order?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was. It was a request for guidance from the Chair.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is right, it was not a point of order from Mr. Michael. I understood the hon. Gentleman to say that he had a point of order, but perhaps he had not.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: I do. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth to complain about the length of speeches when he indulged in a speech that lasted 25 minutes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is entirely in order, but whether the Government want to respond to it is another matter.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I am tempted to respond. The hon. Member for Torfaen spoke for more than half an hour and the hon. Members for Bleanau Gwent and for Pembroke each spoke for about 24 minutes. That certainly confounds the prediction that the debate would be concluded early. It would be wrong for me to give way again because, if I do, the debate will not be properly concluded.

Even though United Kingdom facilities are able to deal with imported waste sufficiently and we have an effective regulatory regime to control the movement and disposal of hazardous waste, the Government firmly believe that the international movement of waste for disposal should be minimised. In particular, we believe that all developed countries should become self-sufficient in the final disposal of waste and dispose of their own waste arisings.

We also think that in principle imports of such waste should continue in respect of developing countries which, for the foreseeable future, are not able to deal with such waste in a manner that is not detrimental to the environment. That position is reflected in international legislation, including an OECD decision recommendation of 1991 and the United Nations Environment Programme Basle convention.

Our position must be right because a total ban of the trade in hazardous waste, as proposed in the motion, would be ill-judged and irresponsible. It could lead to illegal or environmentally unsound dumping on land in the country of origin or at sea. That would be the worst of all crimes against the environment. The Government stance on this matter has been made clear on numerous occasions and there is reference to it in the environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance". My hon. Friend the

Under-Secretary of State for the Environment outlined the Government's policy to the House in response to the Adjournment debate by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 22 May.

The Government's position is underpinned by the international negotiations that are taking place in the European Community under the stewardship of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Government's deliberations need to be considered against the relevant international conventions and agreements. The Basle convention came into force on 5 May this year. The convention is a significant global advance in waste management and the Government fully support it. The United Kingdom signed the convention in 1989 and has pushed for the earliest possible implementation of its provisions within the European Community so that we can ratify it as quickly as possible. To implement the convention and to deal with other concerns about waste movements of all kinds, the European Commission has proposed a new regulation which will apply to all shipments within, into and out of the Community, with the exception of non-hazardous wastes moving for recovery. That will also deal with the question of imports of non-hazardous wastes, quantities of which have entered Wales for disposal in the past at sites in west Glamorgan and Clwyd.

The regulation is likely to lead to a ban on all imports of waste from developed countries outside the European Community and EFTA for disposal in the Community, as well as providing for more control over imports from the rest of the EC and EFTA. Waste would be accepted from developing countries only if they were able to persuade the Community that they were unable to acquire the necessary facilities of their own to allow them to dispose of wastes in an environmentally sound manner.

This draft regulation on the supervision and control of shipments within, into and out of the Community will enable the United Kingdom and other EC member states to ratify Basle. It will fully implement the main Basle control—the prior informed consent procedure. Despite considerable pressure to reach agreement at the Council of Ministers on 26 May, the regulation has not been agreed. The United Kingdom will make every effort to secure agreement under its presidency.

Mr. Murphy: This is an important issue, now that Britain has assumed the presidency of the Community. Will the new regulation allow for bilateral agreements between other developed countries? If it does, that is a serious loophole.

Mr. Jones: We do not wish to proceed to that and I shall shortly touch on the issue.

Currently, about 60 per cent. of United Kingdom imports of hazardous wastes come from the member states. Clearly, we believe that the rest of the Community should develop its own disposal capacity, in line with Community policy on this topic. Movements between member states should be minimised. The United Kingdom wants the regulations to give member states the power to refuse imports from others in the Community, enabling individual member states to move towards self-sufficiency in waste disposal.

The United Kingdom is not alone in that view. We are keen to see the principle adopted to apply to all methods of final disposal, including incineration. However, we are aware that the possibility of a total ban on imports is unacceptable to some member states that are currently unable to be self-sufficient. Negotiations are continuing.

As I have already said, the United Kingdom will make every effort under our presidency of the Community to reach agreement on the regulation. We can then proceed as quickly as possible to ratify the Basle convention, in company with the rest of the European Community. The current draft of the regulation would severely curtail the import of waste for disposal from outside the Community and EFTA. We do not propose to enter into agreements with developed countries outside those areas that would permit the disposal of their wastes in this country.

The hon. Member for Torfaen and others will be aware that the Government have already demonstrated that they are prepared to take a tough line with Governments of developed countries. We are not, nor will we be, anyone's pushovers.

When the Welsh Office was first approached in the course of the Australian Government's deliberations about whether to grant an export licence for PCB wastes, the Department's response in October 1991 drew attention to the OECD decision recommendations which require member countries to dispose of their wastes appropriately, as far as possible in their own territory. It also indicated that the Australian Government should take that factor into account in their assessment of whether to grant export permits.

Mr. Llew Smith: The Minister mentioned the response of the Welsh Office to the possible export of waste from Australia to Wales. Will he elaborate on the response of the Welsh Office when it was approached to support demands to prevent the import of toxic waste from Canada?

Mr. Jones: For the moment, I shall stay with the example of Australia.

In April 1992, the Australian Government, as a party to the Basle convention, requested a bilateral agreement under article 11 so that wastes could be exported from that country to the United Kingdom despite article 4.5, which requires parties not to send waste to non parties. The hon. Member will know from his correspondence with the Secretary of State on that matter that the Government rejected that request.

In answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, we dealt with the application from Australia in accordance with our policy, and that remains our policy for the consideration of further applications.

Three main authorities are responsible for regulating the ReChem plant—for ensuring that pollution control standards are properly met and enforced, as well as the application of appropriate safety standards. I assure the House that there is no shortage of effective regulation and monitoring in relation to the ReChem plant. There are a number of controls. First, the plant is licensed by Torfaen borough council, which has the duty, under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, to ensure that there is no danger to public health or the water supply as a result of ReChem's operations. The licence contains no fewer than 14 conditions covering the wastes which the company can handle, storage arrangements, general site management and local monitoring.

Secondly, the plant is registered with Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution which is charged with enforcing

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on the company the duty to use the best practical means to prevent emission into the atmosphere of noxious or offensive substances. Sampling of emissions undertaken by HMIP and ReChem have consistently shown that the plant is operating to current requirements. During 1991, HMIP undertook 20 inspection visits to the site and had six formal meetings with company staff. So far this year, HMIP has undertaken a further nine inspection visits and five meetings. I quote its figures to underline the degree of HMIP's oversight of ReChem's Pontypool plant; it is rigorous and sustained, and rightly so, given the materials that the plant is handling.

A third set of controls is enforced and monitored by the Health and Safety Executive, whose inspectors ensure that appropriate safety standards apply both for the protection of the work force and for local inhabitants. HSE inspectors have made seven visits to the ReChem site in the past 12 months. I understand that HSE's view is that the plant has a good safety record overall. Management is considered receptive to HSE advice and to have demonstrated a commitment to safety.

In addition to those controls, the liquid waste that ReChem disposes of to the sewer is subject to stringent conditions set in trade effluent agreements between the company and Welsh Water plc. I assure the House that levels of PCBs in the discharge from the Pontypool plant are frequently monitored by Welsh Water. But the monitoring of the trade effluent does not end here. The effluent from the Pontypool plant goes via the sewer to Welsh Water's Ponthir sewage works for treatment. The discharge from Ponthir into the River Usk is closely monitored by the National Rivers Authority. I understand that levels of PCBs in the discharge are consistently extremely low and well within the limits prescribed. As an additional precaution, the NRA regularly monitors for PCBs elsewhere in the river regime and the levels detected have been exceptionally small.

ReChem's operations are monitored and enforced by a number of separate organisations, each with distinct responsibilities for ensuring that the plant conforms with the regulatory requirements and that the environment and public health are protected. This already tough regime will get tougher when incineration processes, such as that operated by ReChem, become subject to the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in the autumn.

The 1990 Act really is a major step forward in the pollution controls operating in this country. Under the Act, the system of integrated pollution control is being progressively phased in for all major potential polluters. The key points are as follows. An operation of a prescribed process requires prior authorisation from HMIP to continue to operate. For the first time, a single authority will control the releases to all three environmental media —air, land and water—via a single authorisation for each process. That seems to be a one-step shop in the operation, which the hon. Member for Pontypridd sought.

All authorisations will be based on the application of best available techniques not entailing excessive costs—BATNEEC—to ensure that releases of prescribed substances are prevented or minimised and to render harmless other emissions. In the case of incineration processes, such as that at ReChem, that position will be supplemented by the concept of best practicable environmental option to minimise the pollution which may be released to the environment as a whole. All authorisations will be subject to review as technology and techniques improve or as our understanding of the environmental risk develops. Every authorisation issued by HMIP will have to be reviewed at least every four years.

The implementation of integrated pollution control brings an entirely new approach to pollution control, including an in-built dynamic towards higher environmental standards. That is not to imply in the least that the current regulatory basis is inadequate, but simply that integrated pollution control represents an important improvement which will place the pollution control system in the United Kingdom on a par with the best in western Europe.

In common with the integrated pollution control system, the current controls allow for the implementation of higher standards as technology develops. HMIP has been applying this approach over the years at the ReChem Plant and a range of improvements has been effected as a result. I can tell the hon. Member for Torfaen that in April this year, the inspectorate issued two improvement notices on the company under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. These require the installation of a third electrical precipitator to reduce further particulate emissions from the incinerator stack and improvements to the incinerator itself to provide additional safeguards against fugitive emissions resulting from the loading and de-ashing operations. These improvements have to be effected by May 1993 at the latest.

Contrary to what the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth suggested, HMIP has been quite open about its activities here. It issued a press release on the recent improvement notices and, as required, ensured that copies of the notices were placed on the public register. The company has also responded quickly and positively, and it announced in May its intention to invest £2·5 million in the plant to effect the improvements sought. But it is important to see this action by the pollution inspectorate in the correct light.

The latest improvements at the Pontypool plant are part of a continuing process of upgrading as regulatory standards improve with advances in technology. HMIP is simply requiring the company to apply the latest standards for pollution control, as it is doing at other industrial sites. I understand that HMIP considers that the improvements will enable ReChem International to meet the highest standards of pollution control applying to any chemical waste incinerator currently operating in the United Kingdom. It is obviously important that companies handling toxic materials are properly monitored and regulated. I hope that my description will help reassure the hon. Member for Torfaen that a comprehensive control system is in place.

I shall now refer to the public concerns about the operation of the ReChem plant. There is no doubt that local people, especially those who live in the immediate vicinity of the plant, have been concerned for a number of years. Their concerns have related to a number of different issues, and the Government and the regulatory authorities have taken action to respond to them.

In the mid-1980s there were persistent allegations that the ReChem plant was having harmful effects on public health locally. In response to these concerns, the then Secretary of State for Wales commissioned a review of congenital malformations occurring in Wales between

1974 and 1983, with particular reference to the district of Torfaen. The resulting reports, which were fully published, revealed no evidence of a threat to the health of people living in the vicinity of the ReChem plant. The key results where that for neutral tube defects as a whole, the Torfaen district actually had a consistently lower rate than the average for Wales. Although the Torfaen district was shown to have a higher-than-average incidence of polydactyly, there was no suggestion that this had increased since 1984 when the ReChem incinertor began operating.

In the early 1980s a local farmer also alleged that airborne emissions from the ReChem incinerator were affecting his animals. These claims were made at much the same time as similar allegations in relation to a former ReChem incinerator plant at Bonnybridge in Scotland. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will no doubt recall the intense public and media interest in the Bonnybridge allegations and the Pontypool plant was placed under similar public scrutiny as a result of the allegations made about animal health. However, on investigating the Gwent farmer's complaints, the Government's veterinary service found no evidence to link the cattle problems with air pollution: instead, specific animal disease conditions were confirmed. The separate inquiry set up on Scotland by the then Secretary of State for Scotland came to similar conclusions.

Again, concerns have been expressed about the possible contamination of foodstuffs in the area. Environmental monitoring undertaken by Torfaen borough council in 1989 found higher-than-background levels of PCBs in some duck eggs and grass samples taken from the vicinity. The Welsh Office subsequently arranged further sampling. Apart from broadly confirming the borough council's findings in respect of the duck eggs—and low levels of PCB contamination in some carrots—no other foodstuffs were found to be contaminated with PCBs.

The elevated levels of PCBs in duck eggs were also found in only one location, near to the ReChem plant. The reason for that has not yet been established, but the matter is being investigated further via the comprehensive study of PCB levels in the Pontypool area which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has commissioned. I shall say more about the study in a moment.

There is one important point that I should perhaps make clear at this stage: it is not unusual to detect the presence of PCBs in environmental monitoring programmes. Although their manufacture has long ceased, PCBs are widely present in the United Kingdom environment. One of the key questions in relation to the Pontypool area is whether the PCB concentrations in the local environment are particularly unusual and a real cause for concern.

Let me return to the question of local concerns. There have also been fears of a really major incident at the site, possibly leading to widespread contamination and even a need for evacuation of the whole area. Such an incident has not arisen in the 18 years during which the plant has been operating. There have been some—mainly minor—incidents at the site, all of which have been fully investigated by the relevant authorities. None has been found to have posed a particular hazard to the local people. High standards are applied on site to protect the work force, with the operating procedures being overseen and reviewed at regular intervals by the HSE.

Mr. Ainger: On the question of the danger to the general public from the operations of the site itself rather than from emissions from the stack, will the Minister explain why refineries at Milford Haven that have not damaged their neighbours or forced evacuations still have the CIMAH regulations applied to them? Why cannot the CIMAH regulations apply to the ReChem plant?

Mr. Jones: I am confident that all the proper regulations are being applied to the ReChem site, and that all the proper regulatory authorities are involved and are fulfilling their function there.

There have been several references to the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which concluded:

"the evidence so far gathered about environmental pollution caused by the ReChem incinerator does not prove that the plant is a serious public health risk."

Among other things, the Committee recommended that information on discharges from prescribed processes—that is, operations that could cause pollution of the environment—should be made more readily available to the public. A system for that has been put into place by the Environmental Protection Act 1990, some of the key elements of which I have already described. The Act increases the public's right to environmental information via public registers, helping to ensure that the standards industry adopts are open to public scrutiny.

The Select Committee also recommended that HMIP should be enabled to attract and retain good-quality staff. Again, that has happened. The overall staffing complement of HMIP has increased to about 360 in 1992-93 compared with 212 in 1990. The HMIP staff complement in Wales has also been increased and I understand that more recruitment is planned. That additional staffing underlines the Government's commitment to the highest standards of environmental protection.

The university of East Anglia study by Professor Roberts is under way and it is expected that the study will be concluded by early next year.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) pointed out that the timetable from now on is crucial. Can the Minister confirm that once the report is produced, it will be made public, that the licence will not be granted until after the report has been made public and that the decision whether there should be a public inquiry will be taken by the Government before the matter can be pre-empted by a later decision to grant a licence? It is vital, in the interests of open debate and accuracy of decision-making, that that should be the sequence of events.

Mr. Jones: My right hon. Friend has said that he will publicise the findings of the report, but that will probably occur early next year. They will not necessarily coincide with the new regulatory action under the EPA, but that will proceed in tandem with HMIP, and I am sure that all necessary points will be brought together under that study.

The call for a public inquiry is not new. There have been a number of calls for such an inquiry over the years. Most recently, the Welsh Office received from the hon. Member for Torfaen a petition signed by about 220 Pontypool residents calling for an end to traffic in toxic waste and for a public inquiry into ReChem's activities.

We believe that the need for any public or other form of inquiry or investigation can best be considered in the light of the current study's findings. At this stage, the

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Government's view is that a public inquiry would serve no useful purpose. Without the information that the university of East Anglia survey is gathering, any public inquiry now would probably, almost certainly, only go over the same ground as that covered by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs in 1989-90. That would hardly be sensible. Nor, I suggest, would it be sensible to pursue the call by the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent for a further inquiry by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs.

The Government are seeking to provide the facts via the most comprehensive research on PCB contamination ever commissioned in Wales. The university of East Anglia study must be completed first; then the need for any further studies can be considered properly and on the basis of scientific findings and conclusions.

Our policy towards the trade in waste is that the international movement of waste for disposal should be minimised and that all developed countries should become self-sufficient in the disposal of toxic waste. The Government are taking a leading role in persuading the international community to become self-sufficient in the handling of toxic waste by developing their own facilities.

We appreciate the local fears that have been expressed and we are keen to try to resolve them, so far as possible, via the university of East Anglia study. I give the assurance that we shall not hesitate to take any other action that might be considered appropriate in the light of the study to protect public health and the environment.

Mr. Ainger: I had to leave the Chamber momentarily and hope that I did not miss any important points made by the Minister about the transfrontier shipment regulations. I pointed out throughout my remarks that local authorities, at county and district level, and fire and police authorities were not being informed about the transportation of PCBs throughout the United Kingdom. Will the Minister address that issue?

Mr. Jones: I am afraid that, because of the constraints of time and my desire to allow other hon. Members to take part, I do not have the opportunity to dwell at length on that point. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

2.18 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): This is an important debate. I shall speak briefly because other hon. Members wish to speak.

I regret the absence of the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth). He was referred to as being an Opposition environment spokesman, but it would appear that he was sacked. I can understand why, given his hostility to Conservative Members who wanted to debate this important subject at length.

Mr. Ainger: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) claimed that my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) was sacked. That is not true, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley would like to withdraw that.

Mr. Evans: If the hon. Member for Knowsley, North was not sacked, I shall withdraw my comment. According to the *Sunday Times*, he was an environment spokesman for the Labour party and the hostility that he showed to our trying to debate the subject at length was regrettable.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) should not believe what he reads, not only in newspapers but other publications. The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) is not here to defend himself, but he resigned from Labour's Front Bench. It should not be improper for somebody to resign on a point of principle.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has withdrawn the word "sacked" and has clarified the position.

Mr. Michael *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), who is a Labour Front-Bench spokesman, may wish to clarify the position.

Mr. Michael: Further to those points of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The point has been made clear, but it might be worth emphasising that when comments about the integrity of a Member are to be made it is normal for the Member to be informed by the Member who is about to make those comments. I am confident that that has not happened, but it may have been an oversight by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Let us have no more assertions one way or the other. It has been a long day for everybody. Let us return to the motion, please.

Mr. Evans: If the hon. Gentleman resigned, I withdraw my allegation that he had been sacked. I am more than happy to do so.

The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) said that we should be more concerned about granting planning applications for chimney stacks and other things in residential areas. I absolutely agree with him. I believe that we have moved on in the past 20 years, and more thought is given to the siting of hospital stacks, factories and industrial units. I have complained about a chimney stack in my constituency and the local authority is monitoring its emissions.

The NIMBY factor must be addressed. We believe that hazardous toxic material must be incinerated, "but nowhere near me, please." ReChem has shown itself to be expert in the incineration of hazardous toxic waste.

Mr. Llew Smith: I ask the hon. Member a question that I posed to other hon. Members, but which remains unanswered. Would he welcome that expert firm, ReChem, to his constituency if it made a planning application?

Mr. Evans: I should be more than happy for ReChem to make an application to site one of its factories in my constituency, as long as it was in an appropriate place, which relates to what I said about planning permission being given in the light of environmental concerns. ReChem is a responsible firm with a good record on the incineration of hazardous toxic materials.

Much mention has been made of the need to get other European countries to dispose of their hazardous waste themselves. The Prime Minister, as President of the European Community, should try to encourage more

countries to do so. ReChem is consulting Italian companies to see what progress can be made. That deserves congratulation.

Obviously, there is much fear and ignorance, and this sort of issue catches the headlines. When I was living in Wales I used to watch HTV. It regularly broadcast people living near the ReChem plant making representations. They were worried for their safety and about the stories that they heard about ReChem.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) on his success in getting this debated in the Chamber today. It is useful that we are debating the matter.

As the hon. Gentleman said, this is not a new issue. It has been debated previously. An inquiry is under way and will be concluded in January 1993. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, we should wait for the report before any decision is taken about a public inquiry. Indeed, we have already had two interim reports. Moreover, it has always been said that if there were any cause for concern about the health and safety of people working in the plant or living near to it, a public inquiry would be held immediately. The Minister has not ruled out the possibility of a public inquiry, but we need to wait for the full report in January. Assurances have been given that we shall see what is said in the report and that a decision will then be made.

It is a strength rather than a weakness of the system that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is constantly monitoring ReChem and has been in consultation with the plant, and that £2·5 million is being invested there to ensure that the incineration will meet the standards enforced by the Government.

Most of the points that should be raised have been raised. As others wish to speak I shall conclude by saying that I look forward to the report. I ask hon. Members not to use this as an opportunity to scare people who live around the plant. The safety record of ReChem to date has given no cause for concern. The constant monitoring by HMIP and the self-monitoring by ReChem—it has spent more than £1 million on that—should reassure us that there are no problems at the factory in Torfaen and that we should await the report in 1993.

2.27 pm

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): First, I shall respond to a question asked by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) from a sedentary position when I intervened earlier. He asked whether I worked for ReChem. As the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) knows, I do not work for ReChem. I must confess, however, that I worked for and was for many years a colleague of the hon. Gentleman's predecessor, Mr. Leo Abse. In those circumstances, I well understand all the local anxieties that have been raised over many years about the operation of this particular plant.

There is a difficulty in that there have been many stories. First, there was the story about sheep being paralysed and falling over in fields. A Fleet street newspaper described it as "Mystery at Bullmore Farm". Upon investigation, no evidence was forthcoming to show that that had anything to do with the ReChem plant. Subsequently, great concern was generated by a story in *New Society*, claiming that the children of Pontypool should be described as the Cyclops children because of the number born with sight defects as a result of what was claimed to be pollution from the plant. Again, there has been no evidence for that.

I endorse many of the observations made in an articulate speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans). He made it clear that he was concerned on behalf of his electors, as I am on behalf of the electors of Brecon and Radnor which borders his constituency and is not far from the constituency of the hon. Member for Torfaen. We shall look at the Roberts report when it becomes available and will want to be reassured by it.

2.29 pm

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): In the limited time available, I want to make three points, if I can.

First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) on his presentation. He has done the duty of all of us, as representatives of our constituents, in speaking out on their behalf. We must all do that, but the House must take a wider view. It has to consider the interests of the country as a whole, the opportunities that may be available and the difficulties that may face the country as a whole.

Wales is a net exporter of waste. Wales was doing what Opposition Members——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Bills

TATTOOING (INSURANCE COVER) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Not moved.

CARRIAGE OF GOODS BY SEA BILL *[Lords]*

Considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

EUROPEAN UNION (PUBLIC INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 23 October.

South Birmingham Health Authority

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate a matter that is of great importance to my constituents in Northfield and to the people of South Birmingham as a whole.

The issue could hardly be more fundamental. It concerns the future of health services for the people of Birmingham as a whole. The present South Birmingham health authority was formed in 1991 as a merger of the old Central health authority and the old South Birmingham health authority. It covers about half the city and a population of more than 400,000.

Unfortunately, controversy over plans for health services in Birmingham has not been uncommon in recent years. In 1989, the regional health authority adopted a major hospital building programme for the city. It would have involved, and still plans to involve, the closure of about 20 hospitals and the centralisation of hospital services on about four mega-hospital sites. The cost is in the region of £500 million. The plan is called Building a Healthy Birmingham. It has been highly unpopular from the outset, for it involves closure of the general hospital. If that went ahead, Birmingham city centre would be left without a major general hospital. A campaign against its closure has been mounted by a local newspaper, the *Birmingham Evening Mail.* The campaign is supported by the city council.

In the South Birmingham area, the plan involves the concentration of hospital facilities on a new mega-hospital site, the current Queen Elizabeth hospital campus. If the plan went ahead, the new hospital would be inaccessible to many South Birmingham residents and would involve the downgrading of Selly Oak hospital, the main district general hospital to the south of the city.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my hon. Friend agree that women would be particularly adversely affected by those changes, as they would bring the closure of both the women's hospital and the Sorrento maternity hospital? The reasons for closing the Sorrento are called into question in a recent Select Committee report on maternity services—to which we still await a response from the Secretary of State for Health. However, she appeared to welcome that report in her recent speech on "Health of the Nation".

Mr. Burden: One problem with the Building a Healthy Birmingham plan is not the proposals it contains but the project that it might delay. Although it is surrounded by controversy, a number of changes ought to be made—such as the early renovation and rebuilding of the children's hospital and the renovation of the elderly services M block at Selly Oak hospital—which was condemned as long ago as 1987.

Perhaps the biggest objection is the plan's lack of accountability. Decisions originated behind closed doors and consultation—in so far as it took place at all—was cursory. When the health authority seemed to respond to consultations on points made by the people of Birmingham, any changes made were reversed a few months' later.

In the midst of all that, we are told that South Birmingham health authority is facing a major financial crisis. Precise information is difficult to obtain, but according to the latest RHA figures that I have, it is dealing with an inherited deficit of £4 million and a recurring deficit of £6·5 million a year.

Decisions appear to be handed down from on high, little information is given to the public, and major question marks remain over the financial and managerial competence of West Midlands regional health authority, headed by Sir James Ackers. The first news of that crisis filtered out in early March.

We know that £15 million was given to South Birmingham health authority to see it through its initial problems. The form that money took is still the subject of debate. The RHA is clear that that £15 million was a loan, made with the Government's knowledge. When I raised the issue with the Under-Secretary of State for Health, he replied in a written answer on 22 May that RHAs have no powers to grant loans to district health authorities. We have no clear answer to what that £15 million was all about. I hope that we will receive one today.

Dr. Lynne Jones: In a letter to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), the Minister for Health stated that the £15 million was a loan. There seems to be some confusion in the Department.

Mr. Burden: I hope that the Under-Secretary will take the opportunity to clear up that controversy today.

A report on the financial crisis facing South Birmingham health authority was commissioned from KPMG Peat Marwick, but it has not yet been made available to Members of Parliament or to the people of Birmingham. In advance of that happening, they are asked to accept hospital closures. The royal orthopaedic hospital at "The Woodlands" and at its other site in Broad street is scheduled for closure, and so is Birmingham accident hospital in the city centre. Both services are to be transferred to the general hospital which, according to the RHA's plan, is itself marked for closure in a few years' time.

There are question marks over the financial wisdom of those plans. More than £2 million has been spent on the accident hospital in recent years, to see it through the next decade. We do not know what will happen to that money. In the case of "The Woodlands", thousands of pounds have been raised by the people of Birmingham to provide a magnetic resonance imaging scanner. It would cost £250,000 to move that installation to the general hospital.

Consultants have questioned the clinical wisdom of the plans. They think that inadequate theatre provision at the general hospital development will undermine services. They warn of cross-infection, and that regional specialties also will be undermined.

The plans have been questioned by health service professionals. They are also deeply unpopular with the people of Birmingham, who are afraid that, as with the Building a Healthy Birmingham plan as a whole, they will be faced with decisions handed down from on high and will not be listened to. The evidence is already there. Even though the hospital closure plans are, we are told, only at the proposal stage, bed closures are already being called for by hospital managers, over 400 jobs are due to be lost from the acute sector in one year, beds will close in the royal orthopaedic hospital and managers are telling staff

that there will be an increased throughput of private patients to boost income. What clearer example could there be of the effect of the Government's health reforms? Beds are closing and private patients are increasing. Why is it that the Government always deny what the Opposition have said all the way through—that the health service reforms are a way to bring creeping privatisation into the health service?

Outside the acute sector, there is also a major impact on care. Services to the elderly and the mentally ill are both affected by the financial crisis. In the children's sector, the cottage unit that provides much-needed respite care for the families of sick children is scheduled for closure two days a week as a result of the financial crisis. The fear is that, once again, the changes that people in Birmingham want to see will have to take second place to the financial stringencies being imposed from on high by the regional health authority. In other words, the renovation of my block at Selly Oak will be put back once again and people will have to wait still further and longer for the children's hospital to be rebuilt.

Perhaps the worst thing of all is that the South Birmingham health authority, while making these changes, does not seem to know what the impact of them will be. I quote from a financial strategy for 1992 published a month ago which says:

"It will be necessary for the Authority as purchaser to make a judgment in due course about the impact of the proposals on service to the resident population."

Here we have a plan to close hospitals and to shift services around before the health authority even begins to know what the effect on patients will be.

We should not be forced to accept this and I have four proposals to make. First, the people of Birmingham have put up with this kind of thing for quite long enough. On Tuesday of this week, the Birmingham city council called for a full inquiry into the way that the West Midlands regional health authority is being run. I endorse that call and I hope that the Minister will give it his blessing as well. That inquiry should be independent, and it should look in detailed and broad terms at the way that West Midlands regional health authority is being run.

We have seen a catalogue of disasters through the Build a Healthy Birmingham plan in all its incarnations over the past few years to the privatisation of the regional health authority's management services division, QA Business Services. When it was run by the region, it made a profit but after privatisation, it went bust within 18 months. Surely it is time for a proper look at what is going on in the health authority.

Secondly, I should like the Minister to confirm that he agrees that the hospital closures and other proposed cuts should not go ahead until all the facts of the financial crisis in Birmingham are made publicly available. That should include publication of the KCMG Peat Marwick report into the financial crisis. When those facts are made fully available, there should be time for real consultation to take place. We do not want the panic response that we have seen already from health service managers.

Thirdly, the full facts of the loan—if indeed it was a loan—given to South Birmingham health authority in February or March this year should be made available. People in Birmingham have a right to know how that £15 million came to be given, and what the terms of repayment, if any, there are.

Fourthly, will the Minister accept that the South Birmingham health authority example is the most clear proof that there could be of where the Government's approach to health care is leading us? It is to an accountant's paradise where those who suffer are all too often the patients and the staff. That is the kind of health service in which power is increasingly centralised, decisions are made behind closed doors and ordinary people—the people for whom the health service was set up—are excluded from real decision-making.

I ask the Minister to accept that there must be a review of what is happening. Surely health authorities must be made more accountable to the public whom they are supposed to serve, and surely the hon. Gentleman will accept that, in the case of Birmingham, no amount of accounting wizardry, leading only to deficit, further deficit and financial crisis, can remove the need to put right the chronic underfunding which has existed for many years in the Birmingham health service. That has to be put right if the people of Birmingham are to receive the standard of health care that they deserve in the acute sector, the community sector and other sectors.

2.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on securing a debate on this important issue. I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to his remarks about the financial situation of South Birmingham health authority, although I am not surprised that he has concentrated his attention on the financial difficulties that the authority faces rather than on its considerable achievements. Those difficulties should be put in context.

In 1991-92, the allocation made to the new South Birmingham health authority increased by 10·5 per cent. in 1991-92 and by a further 9 per cent. in 1992-93. Both those increases are above the prevailing rate of inflation and, together with the commitment of the authority's staff, they have allowed the district to deliver continually improving services to the people of South Birmingham.

Dr. Lynne Jones: If there has been such an increase in expenditure, surely the Minister will share our concern at the effect of budgets on services. The chair of the health authority assured the people of Birmingham in May that the crisis would not cause any diminution in services. Yet there has been a ban on new psychology referrals, physiotherapy classes at the accident hospital have been closed, there have been ward closures, and mental health and dental health services have been reduced. Residents from a geriatric hospital have been moved to another geriatric hospital instead of to the purpose-built nursing home to which it was intended that they should go.

Surely the Minister appreciates the concern in Birmingham over the financial mismanagement that has led to all that, and the fact that we still do not know what caused it. We want to get to the bottom of the affair, and I support the demand by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) for an inquiry.

Mr. Sackville: I can tell the hon. Lady only that the allocations to South Birmingham have been considerable compared with those to other districts. She will know that activity levels of treatment and operations have continued on an upward trend—in recent years there has been an

[Mr. Sackville]

increase of about 17 per cent. for in-patients and of about 65 per cent. for day cases. Waiting lists in the region as a whole have continued to fall. In terms of the money allocated to the district that is a good record.

There has also been considerable capital investment in the district and much more is planned over the next decade, as has already been said. The Building a Healthy Birmingham strategy, which will cost about £500 million over 10 years, includes a number of major projects in the district centred on the Queen Elizabeth and Selly Oak hospitals. The benefits are already apparent. In 1991 a new cardiac unit was opened at the Queen Elizabeth hospital, costing £2 million, and early this year the Queen Elizabeth psychiatric hospital, which cost £13 million, received its first patients.

There have also been a number of developments in the community sector. The new Greet health centre was opened in February 1992. It was built and equipped at a cost of £1 million. The centre, with all its modern facilities, will provide for the specific needs of the local community. There has been a complete refurbishment of the Yardley Wood health centre, which now provides modern community health facilities for its 10,500 patients.

Despite these achievements and the record level of funding, it is well known that South Birmingham has had serious financial difficulties. For the benefit of hon. Members, and to dispel some of the misconceptions surrounding the situation in South Birmingham, I shall outline the problem and the action that has been taken to resolve it.

South Birmingham overspent its budget in 1990-91, and this led to unacceptable delays in paying suppliers' bills. Unfortunately, due to problems in the production of the authority's accounts and some failings in financial reporting, the extent of the overspend was not recognised until very late. As a result, the authority found itself well into the 1991-92 financial year faced with the legacy of the previous year's overspending and continuing overspending in the current year. Various figures have been quoted about the size of the financial problem. It is now clear that at the end of 1991-92 the district was faced with a cumulative deficit of £10·5 million and a continuing overspend of £5·4 million.

With a deficit of that size discovered late in the year, it would have been entirely unrealistic to expect the authority to identify and institute savings measures to balance the budget immediately. That would have required emergency reductions in the services which is exactly what we have sought to avoid, and severe delays in payments to suppliers. To avoid that, the regional health authority made a temporary addition to the district's cash limit. In health authority jargon, that is known as brokerage. It was sufficient to allow the authority to maintain services and to pay bills on time. The arrangement was in line with accepted NHS practice whereby surplus funds in one authority are effectively transferred to another that has cash-flow problems so as to make the best use of the total resources available to the NHS. The transaction is reversed later.

In respect of South Birmingham and, indeed, other authorities where similar transfers took place, the arrangement was open and above board. The arrangement did not resolve the underlying problem as it was designed only to give the district time to identify the root cause of the difficulty and to determine a strategy to remove it.

At the same time, the RHA commissioned two reports, the first to be produced by the independent firm of accountants, KPMG Peat Marwick, to review the factors that had created the problems and the deficiencies in financial management and reporting that had delayed senior management action.

The second report was to be produced by the DHA. It was called upon to produce a strategy for delivering a more efficient pattern of services that would allow the authority to restore a financially balanced position.

The KPMG Peat Marwick report will be considered by the RHA on 16 July, It was commissioned by the RHA and it will decide whether it should be made public. It is a management document which goes into considerable technical detail and I am grateful for the opportunity to outline the main conclusions and some of the action that has already been taken in response to them by the district and regional health authorities.

The South Birmingham health authority was created on 1 April 1991 from the merger of the former South and Central Birmingham health authorities. Both former districts had experienced financial difficulties in recent years, with which the respective authorities had been grappling. It is clear from the KPMG report that more attention should have been paid to managing the merger and ensuring that both authorities had in place proper procedures to integrate their systems. This has been recognised by the region and it is being taken into account in considering proposed future mergers.

The merger only exacerbated a problem that was already there. The report points to weaknesses in financial reporting and monitoring in South Birmingham which led to the district running a deficit for some time. That had resulted in the full extent of the problem not being recognised until late in the year. The report stresses the importance of authorities planning for a balanced financial position without having to resort to short-term measures, and having in place systems to monitor that.

Hon. Members may recall that in recent years the NHS management executive has made it a priority of health authorities to eliminate underlying financial deficits. An authority cannot run from year to year living beyond its means. Sooner or later the problem will become unmanageable and the authority will be faced with short-term cuts or ceasing to pay bills. It is far better to plan for a balance and to monitor carefully so that potential overspends can be identified and the authority can respond quickly.

Dr. Lynne Jones: If that has not been the case in the past—and it has been identified as a problem—does not that demonstrate mismanagement in South Birmingham health authority? Is there to be any accountability for that mismanagement?

Mr. Sackville: The Government have made it clear that from a technical point of view the merger was badly managed in terms of computer systems and accounting. If the hon. Lady is asking for heads to roll that is another matter. We have no evidence of any necessity for that.

There have been attempts to blame the financial problems—and we heard some more today—of South Birmingham on the reforms. That is preposterous. The

KPMG report shows that within the district there was a failure to appreciate the complexities of the new NHS financial management regime, but that represents a management failing, not a failure of the reforms. Throughout the country hospitals and health authorities have grasped the opportunities presented by the new system without any loss of basic financial control. The problems in South Brimingham, unfortunate as they are, would have had to be faced regardless of the reforms.

In terms of the future, the main issue of concern for the people of Birmingham is what caused the problem and what impact the recovery plan will have on their hospitals and the quality of service that they have come to expect. Perhaps I can reassure hon. Members. A plan for resolving the problems in South Birmingham was put to the authority and agreed by it on 17 June. The breathing space given by the short-term financial support last year allowed the authority to produce a considered plan which, although stimulated by the overspending problem, is designed to bring real long-term benefits to the people of South Birmingham and is consistent with the Building a Healthy Birmingham strategy.

Dr. Lynne Jones: The Minister will appreciate that these matters are of great significance to the people of Birmingham. Does he think that the plan to close the accident hospital by the early part of 1993 and to transfer services to the general hospital, which the health authority says will require the spending of £6·5 million to facilitate the transfer, is feasible? Is not it yet another example of mismanagement and lack of planning foresight? Because of the loss of planned beds there is a real fear in Birmingham that in the event of a major incident such as the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings or a major coach or car crash, there would not be sufficient accident places to admit the victims.

Mr. Sackville: I remind the hon. Lady that we are discussing the bringing forward of long-term plans which will take all those factors into account. As she knows, the plan centres on removing the significant duplication of services between the five major hospitals in the district—Selly Oak, Queen Elizabeth, Birmingham general, the royal orthopaedic and Birmingham accident.

In that way, it is proposed that the overspending will be removed not by cutting services but by removing the costs of duplication and providing services more efficiently in the short and long term. It proposes that services currently provided by the royal orthopaedic and Birmingham accident hospitals will be transferred to the general hospital and that most of the acute medicine and general surgery provided by the general hospital should move to Selly Oak and the Queen Elizabeth. That will offer benefits by bringing together divided specialties under one roof and in premises that are more suitable and less expensive to run and maintain. The key message for the people of Birmingham is that there is no intention to reduce services in either quality or quantity—the plan proposes to close buildings, not services.

Anyone who knows Birmingham's hospitals will agree that it is high time for the excellent services that they provide to be housed in an estate of the best modern standards, located in the right places to meet the needs of today's populations. The health service cannot go on performing heroics in Victorian buildings scattered across cities, especially when those buildings are in a patchy physical condition and expensive to run.

Unfortunately, as with most plans involving the rationalisation of services, that will result in the closure of some much-loved local hospitals. However, it is well known that many of the existing, single specialty hospitals in Birmingham are old and expensive to run. Many are also at the end of their useful life in relation to providing modern health care. All proposals to build new hospitals or close existing ones will be carefully considered within the Department of Health before approval is given and that will take into account the outcome of local consultation on individual proposals. I understand that formal consultation on the proposals to close the Birmingham accident hospital and the royal orthopaedic hospital has now begun. The health authority will consider the comments at the next meeting on 21 October.

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at one minute past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 13 July 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

London Zoo

1. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what dealings he has had with the Zoological Society of London concerning the proposed closure of the London zoo.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Robert Key): My right hon. and learned Friend and I have discussed with the Zoological Society of London the consequences of the society's decision to close London zoo. We confirmed that no more Government money can be given to the zoo. However, we remain willing to relieve the society of some of its obligations as leaseholders of the Regent's park site.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my hon. Friend agree that when the zoo's lease comes to an end in two years' time, future plans must be based on a conservation theme which takes into account the interests of the community? Does he also agree that the donation of £1 million by the Emir of Kuwait was a life-saving gift, which has given the zoo time to plan for its immediate future?

Mr. Key: Yes, the gift from Kuwait was extremely welcome. I gather that the report in the press about that money originated from a fellow of the Zoological Society and has nothing to do with the Government of Kuwait.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has powers to grant a lease only to the Zoological Society of London, so any new lease to the society would be for its activities within the terms of its charter. Many options are currently being pursued by various parties and we look forward to hearing of any sound proposals which may be put to us about the new lease.

Mr. Hardy: As a member of the council of the society for the past few months, may I ask whether the Minister appreciates that all other capital city zoos, with a major significant interest in conservation, depend upon and receive public funds? Unless that central, public funding is provided and guaranteed, London zoo will inevitably close, even despite generous gestures from Britain or abroad. Will the Minister reconsider such a guarantee, especially as the Government appeared to enter into obligations as a result of the decisions reached at Rio?

Mr. Key: The position on the renewal of the lease is absolutely clear and we have made a commitment. The important work on conservation is funded separately, through the Universities Funding Council, and I understand that that work will continue as part of London university's programme. That work is not at issue. Of course I recognise the importance of the work done at the zoo, particularly the scientific work, but the zoo's council has had to face up to the reality of a fall in the number of people who wish to visit the zoo.

Mr. Bowden: Is my hon. Friend aware that for 160 years countless thousands of animals have had to live a miserable existence in that zoo—the equivalent of life imprisonment? Is it not time to shut not only London zoo, but every other zoo?

Mr. Key: I recognise the great strength of feeling on this issue, but if my hon. Friend, like me, has visited zoos from time to time I am sure that he realises that there is a great difference between the zoos of today and those of 20 years ago or, indeed, the Victorian era.

I recognise the important work that is done in zoos to preserve species. Much of the breeding in zoos has led to the survival of species which would otherwise be extinct. It is right, of course, that people no longer wish to see great animals in small cages in city centre zoos. However, we recognise the importance of London zoo; that is why it is the only one to have received funds, and substantial ones at that.

Minority Languages

2. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to extend the use of and support for minority British languages.

Mr. Key: The Broadcasting Act 1990 makes provision for ensuring that Welsh speakers continue to have access to a substantial proportion of radio and television programmes in Welsh. The Act also provides for the financing of television programmes in Scottish Gaelic, and I understand that there are plans for a large increase in the number of hours of such television programmes to be broadcast next year in Scotland. My right hon. Friends and I see no need to bring forward further proposals in this area.

As for the arts, the national arts councils and the regional arts boards support many projects in minority languages.

Mr. Flynn: Will the Government build on their creditable record in that area by fully recognising the immense cultural value of those beautiful languages, which contain the inherited experience, wit and wisdom of hundreds of generations of British people? By doing that and recognising the great value of those living treasures, the Minister might be thanked in the words, "Breith Buidheachas", "Diolch gnfawr iawn", or "Dea's Mure gut is Padraig".

Mr. Key: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Richards: Is my hon. Friend aware that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Welsh Office, has been described by the former president of Plaid Cymru, the former Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, now Lord Elis Thomas of Nant Conwy, as having done more for the Welsh language than anyone else this century?

Mr. Key: Yes, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Government's commitment is clear, not least through the introduction of the Welsh Language Bill.

Mr. Corbett: The Minister will be aware of the initiative in Northern Ireland schools, with Government support, to foster the teaching and expand the use of Gaelic in Northern Ireland. Will he now undertake to see what his Department can do to assist that process on television and radio programmes in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. It is primarily a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but a few pilot programmes are now being shown on television in Northern Ireland. I understand that the BBC is considering its position and Ulster Television undertook to provide some Irish programming as part of its franchise bid.

Mr. Butcher: Is good English now a minority language? If my hon. Friend sees the preservation of the English language as part of his job to preserve our cultural heritage, will he have a word with those who hire and fire media personnel in television and radio so that they, too, may be imbued with the same conviction and spirit?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend hits on an important issue. The importance of dialect in the English language is close to my heart. I may be the only Member of Parliament—certainly the only Member of this House—who was required to sing a song in his local dialect the day after election to this House.

Tourism, London

3. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the promotion of tourism in Greater London.

Mr. Key: London is one of this country's most important destinations for both domestic and overseas visitors. It is the role of the tourism industry, with support from the English tourist board and the London tourist board, to work to maximise the capital's visitor potential. The British Tourist Authority features London strongly in its overseas promotion.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Minister recognise that London's important position as a tourist centre is increasingly threatened by foreign competition and the inadequate infrastructure in London, especially the inadequate level and performance of public transport? What will he and his colleagues do to rectify that position so that London does not continue to lose out to other European cities in today's highly competitive tourist market?

Mr. Key: I was delighted to note that the new chairman of the London tourist board, whom I congratulate on his appointment, had made that one of his priorities—as, indeed, it is one of mine. To illustrate the good faith involved, I should add that I have already discussed with my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London a number of the problems facing the capital, particularly those connected with tourism and including those affecting the constituency of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford). I await my hon. Friend's advice before proceeding to a meeting with Greenwich borough council.

Mr. Jessel: With regard to the promotion of tourism in Greater London and in the rest of the United Kingdom, will Her Majesty's Government resist the ridiculous proposal from Brussels to abolish British national tourist offices in countries such as the United States and Japan and replace them with European tourist offices? That is blatantly inconsistent with the principle of subsidiarity.

Mr. Key: I am glad to be able to reassure my hon. Friend that I know of no such proposals. It is true that the European Community seeks to increase its competence in such matters; the subject was debated vigorously at a recent Council of Ministers meeting in Luxembourg, which I attended. I believe that the Community has a role to play in speaking about tourism issues—after all, by the year 2000 tourism will be one of the greatest industries in Europe—but it is also important to recognise that those who run the industry and individual businesses, whether stately homes or bed-and-breakfast establishments, will determine the future of tourism.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister is being dangerously complacent in the face of a significant fall in the number of tourists visiting Britain, which has hit London especially badly. Those are the facts.

Perhaps the majority of tourists are attracted to Britain because of its arts and heritage. What arts and heritage policies will the Minister introduce? Will he actually repair the holes in the roof of the Tate gallery and other great buildings? Will he perhaps provide the money for the completion of the Globe theatre, and give some money to west end theatres so that their great fabric may be restored? Will he do anything at all? Does he not understand what France, Berlin and Barcelona are doing? When will the Government introduce decent policies, and attract some tourists?

Mr. Key: Heaven forbid that we should pursue the policies which are current in some of those places. The hon. Gentleman's figures are entirely wrong. Only last month, I was delighted to be able to comment on the increase in the number of tourists visiting this country from overseas in the first quarter of the year: that was most encouraging, and a significant reversal of last year's trends.

Of course it is appropriate to repair our heritage. One of the great advantages of the new Department of National Heritage is our ability to take an overall view of the problems as they confront us. We can tie the importance of tourism to that of leisure, and the importance of broadcasting to that of sport and heritage. Before, we had to carry out what might be described as a piecemeal operation.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the substantial increase in investment in London Regional Transport—£3,500 million over the next three years—will give a considerable boost to tourism? Is that not very much better than the peanuts spent by the late and unlamented Greater London council?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I well remember the years during which the GLC cut its capital expenditure dramatically in order to subsidise fares. The move took very few people off the roads, and caused mayhem for regular travellers.

Theatres, Cumbria

4. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what official visits he has paid to theatres in the county of Cumbria in the last two months.

Mr. Key: Unfortunately, none. But I will be happy to consider invitations to theatres in Cumbria as part of any future visit that I make to the region.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the Minister agree that the Blue Box theatre in Keswick in my constituency is now one of the finest theatres in the United Kingdom? Would he be prepared to approach representatives of the sports and arts councils, to ask them to look sympathetically on the application for a grant of £500,000 to build a new theatre to replace the old one, on the side of Lake Derwentwater?

Mr. Key: I shall be delighted to draw the hon. Gentleman's concern to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. I know that the Blue Box theatre has made an application for a grant of £500,000. The theatre is undoubtedly a much-enjoyed as well as a high-quality theatre; its only problem is that, if it moves again, it will fall down—hence the need for a new theatre. I am glad that the Department of the Environment has agreed that the theatre can be replaced, and I very much hope that the scheme will be successful and swiftly implemented, so that we can ensure that it is accessible to the vast majority of those in the north-west who wish to visit it—including the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Sport

5. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what initiatives his Department is taking to increase participation and to raise standards in sport.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. David Mellor): It is an overall aim of our policy for sport to encourage participation and raise standards. The Sports Council works with local authorities, sports governing bodies and others to promote a wide range of sporting activities at local level. The council also supports a range of initiatives to enable participants to raise their performance level.

Mr. Hawkins: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the backing that the Government are rightly giving the Manchester Olympic bid is especially welcomed in the north-west, particularly in my constituency of Blackpool, South? Not only will it encourage greater participation, and the highest standards in sport—standards so well personified by Mr. Nigel Mansell, who achieved a splendid victory yesterday—but when it succeeds, it will greatly boost the hotel trade in the region, and in my constituency in particular.

Mr. Mellor: I am glad that my hon. Friend mentioned Nigel Mansell, whose great achievements the House has recognised. He is, of course, a great racing driver, but the extraordinary success of the engineering industry in the United Kingdom in producing so many of the cars which have transformed formula 1 racing is also most impressive.

We stand 100 per cent. behind Manchester's bid. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will be going to Barcelona next week, as will a number of other Ministers, to ensure that it is made clear to the International Olympic Committee that the British Government fully support Manchester and will make sure, if it is successful, that the Olympics are run superbly well.

Ms. Hoey: Does the Secretary of State agree that the role of the voluntary sector, and particularly of unpaid sports coaches and school teachers in their spare time, in improving participation in sport is important? Does he share the concern that many voluntary sports clubs feel about the level of funding, and especially the burden of the business rate? Will he join me in the delegation going to see the Treastury about corporation tax and will he give his full support to exemption from corporation tax for the British Olympic Association so as to ensure that the money raised by voluntary effort for the Olympics can be spent on that and not given back to the Government?

Mr. Mellor: I probably have enough problems without adding to them, so I will leave the hon. Lady to make her own representations. There has been a substantial increase in Government support for sport—up nearly 30 per cent. to the Sports Council in real terms in the lifetime of this Government.

I am well aware of the hon. Lady's point, and it is particularly true when it comes to ensuring excellence among young people. I am sure that she will welcome the champion coaching scheme which last year enabled more than 6,000 children to benefit from quality after-school coaching and which came about because of the extra grant that the Government gave the Sports Council. Sports sponsorship, too, increasingly recognises the need to get in behind young people and to breed the champions of the future. That sort of idea is more alive in Britain today than ever before.

Industrial Heritage Year

6. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans the Government are making for Industrial Heritage Year 1993.

Mr. Mellor: The English tourist board, which receives funding from my Department, has designated 1993 as Industrial Heritage Year, as a means of more widely promoting the tourism potential of our industrial heritage.

I have agreed to become patron of the year.

Mr. Page: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. He may be aware that more than 100 years ago my constituency was the centre of paper production in this country, but that very little of that remains today. Will he and the Department work through next year with English Heritage, with local authorities and with private bodies to encourage such schemes so as to preserve our industrial heritage for future generations?

Mr. Mellor: Yes, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The idea of Industrial Heritage Year, besides nurturing the industries of the future, is to ensure that there are reminders of the great industries of the past—reminders in the form of a partnership, with significant assistance from English Heritage, with Government funding, and with many local interests, resulting in a genuine commitment which goes wider than merely public bodies. That will ensure that vital parts of our industrial heritage are preserved.

Mr. Sheldon: Does the Minister agree that Industrial Heritage Year must be rather more than just a means of attracting tourists? Does he agree that it can show the richness of our past industries, making that more relevant to what is happening today and ensuring that people understand that what happened in the past can be achieved again—if the necessary assistance is forthcoming.

Mr. Mellor: It is certainly very important that Industrial Heritage Year should stand on its own merits and not just be related to tourism, although that is an important aspect. We should all have the opportunity to go and see the sort of conditions in which people used to work. In my former, similar job I had the chance to go to a museum dedicated to showing the sort of conditions in which people used to manufacture needles. It is extremely salutary for those of us who sometimes complain about our lot to see the sort of conditions that people had to endure then. That is particularly relevant to young people.

Mr. Adley: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the national railway museum, on the committee of which I have the honour to serve, is the jewel in the crown of industrial archaeology in this country? Will he therefore take an early opportunity to visit the museum? Will he explain why the arena of railway preservation, which was previously under the auspices of the Minister with responsibility for the arts appears to have been transferred to the Department of Transport? Has that to do with transport policy?

Mr. Mellor: I was unaware that that part of my empire had slipped away. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing it to my attention. Both the museum and my hon. Friend are valued parts of our national heritage.

Sport

7. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on his responsibilities for sport.

Mr. Mellor: The Government's priorities for sport were set out in the policy document "Sport and Active Recreation", published in December 1991.

Mr. Pendry: Does the Secretary of State accept that he has made a good start with association football, especially by relaxing the all-seater stadium requirements for third and fourth division clubs, following the Taylor report? Does he accept that some clubs in the higher divisions are running into real problems in meeting the Taylor timetable? That applies especially to clubs submitting plans for modern stadiums or adapting their existing grounds and finding great problems at local and Department of the Environment level. Will he urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to look sympathetically at those cases, or will he extend the timetable beyond August 1994?

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He knows that before announcing a decision on the Taylor report I consulted widely in the House, especially with the members of the all-party parliamentary football group. That all-party group shows what can be achieved when partisanship is laid on one side and we are able genuinely to co-operate. I appreciate that we set a tough timetable, but I did not think that it was right, especially in the light of the tremendous efforts made by some clubs to comply, to allow the timetable to slip. The additional funds from the sale of television rights to the premier league should allow much more work to be done. Football Trust moneys will continue to be available to the new first division. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's real concern that clubs sometimes feel hard done by when they are put under pressure by the wider community to improve facilities and then, when they have proposals to do so, planning authorities raise all kinds of objections. That should be taken seriously, and I would welcome a meeting with the all-party group to discuss it.

Sir Anthony Grant: Does my right hon. and learned Friend appreciate that the sport really needs a better standard of behaviour, better manners and better etiquette? In that context, will be study carefully the splendid example set by the Parliamentary Golfing Society?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend has certainly scored a hole in one with that. It is very unfortunate, as I had to say during the recent European championships, that a small minority of fans in England of our national game let everyone else down. That is untypical of the behaviour of fans generally. I have been to many different sporting events, both before and after being appointed to this job, and it is clear to me that most British sports fans behave impeccably, are well informed, enjoy the game and do not in any sense behave badly.

Ms. Eagle: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that part of his responsibility is to ensure that people have equal access and equal opportunities in sport? I speak from experience as a chess player and a cricketer. However, I was a very bad cricketer because I was never allowed to play in mixed teams. Does he agree that improving access to sporting opportunities, especially for girls and young women, is an important part of his responsibility if we are to regain a place of excellence in sporting achievements?

Mr. Mellor: I agree with the hon. Lady. She will be glad to know that, since 1987, it has been a condition of all Sports Council grants to mixed sports organisations that the recipients provide equal opportunities for men and women. I shall widen the issue a little by saying that I am also concerned about access to sport by disabled people. I am sure that the House will know that, as well as supporting the main Olympics in Spain, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will be going to the Paralympics in Spain as a way of showing our endorsement and encouragement of the tremendous achievement of disabled athletes.

Tennis

8. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans the Government have to encourage excellence in tennis proficiency in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Promoting excellence is a Government priority for sport. The Sports Council, which my Department funds, supports a range of performance and excellence initiatives which benefit tennis along with other sports.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend agree that Wimbledon is the greatest tennis tournament in the world and that Jeremy Bates ran his little legs off this year, to come within one match point of getting into the quarter finals? However, where are the champions? In recent memory, we have had only three, and they have all been ladies—Angela Mortimer, Ann Jones and Virginia Wade. What are we doing to encourage champions, because Champions like Nigel Mansell are good for British commerce, trade and industry?

Mr. Key: Jeremy Bates did a magnificent job, but let us not forget Chris Wilkinson or Mark Petchey, or Miles Maclagan, who became the first Briton in 18 years to reach the semi-finals of the boys' juniors. In the ladies' singles, Shirli-Ann Siddall, who is only 17, won in her debut game at Wimbledon and, as a result, climbed 200 places in the world rankings in four weeks. Wimbledon last year provided £12 million for the Lawn Tennis Association, which was 56 per cent. of its income. The LTA is spending that income wisely—for example, with its Rover juniors tennis initiative. There are now 70 young people aged between 10 and 14 on that scheme and from September a further 90 aged between 10 and 16 will be on it. There are also seven boys and four girls at the LTA's school at Bisham Abbey.

Sport

9. **Mr. John Carlisle:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he will discuss with the chairman of the Sports Council the future funding of sport.

Mr. Mellor: The funding of sport is one of many issues which I have already discussed with the chairman of the Sports Council, and I look forward to continuing to meet him regularly.

Mr. Carlisle: As a former Chief Secretary, will my right hon. and learned Friend consider marking his term of office by becoming the one Minister with responsibility for sport who asked less of the British taxpayer than his predecessors? On that basis, when can we expect money from the national lottery, and is my right hon. and learned Friend encouraging more business participation in sport? Furthermore, will he consider asking some of those sportsmen and sportswomen at the top of their sport, who have made enormous sums from prize money and wages, to give something back to help those at the grassroots, from when they came?

Mr. Mellor: There is a great deal in what my hon. Friend says. Relevant to the last question is the fact that Cliff Richard has been doing a tremendous amount of work, with his own resources, to encourage youngsters to play excellent tennis. I should like to see more people doing such things. We reckon that private sector sponsorship now provides £200 million of resources a year to sport. Government money should be used to tease out more private sector commitment. My hon. Friend will be aware that we have been able to get more business sponsorship of the arts by an incentive scheme whereby some Government money goes to those organisations that raise business sponsorship. I am delighted to say that we shall be announcing shortly a £3 million business sponsorship scheme for sport, which is designed to get even more private sector money into sport.

Mr. Bennett: When the Minister has a word with the Sports Council, will he consider the problems faced by people organising fell racing and orienteering events in the north of England because both North West Water and the Forestry Commission seem to be increasing, or imposing for the first time, charges for the use of their land? That causes considerable concern, particularly as there is a danger that it will push fell racing back on to public rights of way—where there can be no charges—which will increase the problems of erosion.

Mr. Mellor: I confess that that is not an issue with which I am familiar, not being much into fell racing myself, as will be obvious. However, I appreciate that it is an important sport for a number of people, and if the hon. Gentleman will be kind enough to write to me about it, I shall look into what he says.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) is no small champion himself when he looks for champions? Does he agree also that sport in schools is not getting the support that it deserves and that many children are missing out? Does he accept the recommendation of the previous Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts that teachers who coach sport after school hours should be paid for so doing?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend knows that we have been expanding the after-school coaching scheme. I shall not become involved in industrial relations negotiations about whether people should be paid. It is important that sport should be recognised within the national curriculum. As my hon. Friend knows, it is recognised now for children up to 14, and by 1995 it will be recognised for children up to 16. That will be important and necessary in producing champions and ensuring that everyone reaches a certain level of fitness and enjoys participation in sport.

Eastern European Art

10. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on his request to the United Kingdom art trade to co-operate in the event of any objects, including icons, from Czechoslovakia, other eastern European countries or the Commonwealth of Independent States appearing at auction houses in Britain.

Mr. Key: In response to our request to members of the United Kingdom art trade to co-operate should any items be offered for sale which would appear to have come from eastern Europe, we were asked to obtain further details, including photographs, of any particular items which might have been stolen in order to assist in identification. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been asked to write to our embassies in eastern Europe requesting that approaches should be made to the relevant authorities for this information and responses are awaited.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it not poignantly ironic that, having survived 40 years of communism in Czechoslovakia and 70 years of Stalinsim in Russia, many of the most beautiful carvings and icons are in greater danger than ever before? Is the Minister aware that distinguished colleagues of his who are members of the parliamentary all-party heritage group found ourselves locked up in a rural church in

Bohemia, having been suspected of pilfering? We then discovered that this was all about valuable items that find their way to the London and Frankfurt art markets.

Mr. Key: I was aware of that, and I wish to add something to the hon. Gentleman's point. He is right. Last night, having returned from Silverstone, I sat down to watch the "Europe Express" programme on Channel 4, which dealt with precisely the problem to which he referred. Reference was made to the problem in Bulgaria, where I understand there is a new generation of grave robbers who are assisted by magnetic metal detectors. This is a most serious issue. It is the consequence of open borders, and we shall do all that we can to prevent looting. I understand that about 20,000 Czechoslovakian pictures and icons have been stolen from churches. I am sorry about the inconvenience that was experienced by the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, but I am sure that he will recognise that it was a good thing that the problem was recognised by the authorities. We shall do all that we can to assist at this end as, I know, will the United Kingdom art market.

Mr. Cormack: Having been locked in the said church with the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), I add my plea to his. Would my hon. Friend like to consider setting up an international art loss register rather like the national register that has been set up by the United Kingdom?

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his suggestion. I should be glad to hear more about the expedition of which he was a member. There may be lessons to be learnt by many countries in the European Community.

Royal Collection

11. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many of the items listed by Queen Victoria as state property remain in public ownership; and where are the others.

Mr. Mellor: I understand that there are no grounds for believing that any of the items listed have left the royal collection.

Mr. Cohen: I am pleased that the Minister acknowledges that there is a list, as put forward by Suzy Menkes, the eminent writer on the royal family. Will he assure the House that the jewels are the property of the state? Is it not about time that we had a new inventory? If not, what is to stop royalty—after all, they have a reputation for rapacity—making off with, for example, the Crown jewels?

Mr. Mellor: Or offering them to the hon. Gentleman for evening wear. I am sorry to disappoint him, but there is no reason to think that the jewels are state property——

Mr. Cohen: Yes, they are.

Mr. Mellor: Absolutely not.

Mr. Cohen: They are.

Mr. Mellor: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should be answering the question, not asking it. The electorate will have a view on that. There is no reason to think that the jewels are state property; they are royal property. The hon. Gentleman has made a mistake.

National Lottery

13. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimates he has made of the proceeds from the reintroduction of a national lottery.

Mr. Mellor: It is too early to say. We intend that it should be a great success, raising hundreds of millions of pounds for good causes.

Mr. Bottomley: I welcome that answer, which appears to downgrade the idea that there might be £1 billion a year for good causes, £1 billion for prizes and £1 billion for costs. Would not a realistic estimate of the amount available help to diminish some of the wild exaggerations that have been behind some of the calls for support for the national lottery?

Mr. Mellor: It is because I have no wish to add to that exaggeration that as yet I have no wish to put a figure on the lottery. If it has the right statutory backing—which I hope and believe the House should give it—and if it is properly run, it will have the scope not only to provide a great deal of interest and innocent amusement for a whole range of people but to raise a large amount to benefit causes that would never benefit to such a degree through conventional public expenditure. That will be good. I hope that when we introduce the necessary Bill it will have the support of the whole House.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Global Climate Observation System

27. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will enable British representatives to put forward specific expenditure proposals for the new elements of the proposed global climate observation system to the World Meteorological Organisation meeting next year; and whether they will be met by additions to the science budget.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): The joint scientific and technical committee for the global climate observing system has been charged by its international parent bodies with making specific costed proposals. We, like other Government Departments, look forward to considering those detailed proposals and discussing them at the intergovernmental co-ordinating committee planned for next spring.

Dr. Moonie: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that reply. Will he confirm that he recognises the importance of such international collaboration projects, the need for a commitment forward planning where more than one Government is involved and the need for the money to be found outwith his existing budget?

Mr. Waldegrave: Before answering the hon. Gentleman, I wish to say how unfamiliar it is during questions on science to face an Opposition without the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), who has made a great contribution to these matters.

We recognise the importance of the issues. The Meteorological Office is a major contributor on world climate issues. Its former director, Sir John Houghton, is the director of the technical group. On the question of money, we shall have to wait until we know what is requested before we can say how we shall finance the proposal.

Market Testing

28. **Mr. Sproat:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will issue a progress report on the moves to contract out and market test central Government services.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our discussions with Departments continue to make progress. As promised in the White Paper "Competing for Quality", I look forward to publishing later this year the targets set by Departments and agencies for testing new areas of activity in the market, to see whether alternative sources give better service and value for money for the customer and the taxpayer.

Mr. Sproat: As the objective of the policy is to improve the quality of public services by the Government buying them in through either the public or the private sector—whichever does it better—will my right hon. Friend make absolutely certain that all Government Departments set the most demanding targets to ensure real competitive benefits?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right about the policy's objectives. I am glad to say that there appears to be increasing cross-party support for it. In an important speech, Jeremy Beecham—who is a distinguished Labour local authority leader, although he has made other criticisms of the Government—said that the purchase-supplier split has

"caused a re-examination of performance, with general beneficial results."

He is right, which is why central Government will pursue the same policy that has been successfully pursued in local government.

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister encourage his colleagues to apply the same criteria to spending by the royal family?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman expects a reply to that slightly frivolous question.

Scientific Research

29. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the change in Government spending on scientific research since 1979.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): The science budget was £324·5 million in 1979-80 and is £1,050 million in 1992-93. That represents an increase of 25 per cent. in real terms since 1979 after making appropriate adjustments for changes in funding responsibilities during the period.

Mr. Marshall: I welcome the fact that the Government spend a greater percentage of gross domestic product on civil research than is spent in Japan or in the United States. Is my right hon. Friend happy that the quality of the research is adequate as well?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend draws attention to the important point that we should look at the ouput from the investment in science and technology just as much as we look at the financial and other inputs into it. The academic output of British science—the quality to which my hon. Friend refers—appears to be in good health. During the 1980s, Britain remained second only to the United States in the number of papers published and in the number of citations of those papers.

Citizens Charter

30. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what improvements have taken place in public services as a result of the implementation of the citizens charter.

Mr. Waldegrave: I will give the House three recent examples out of many. Comparative tables of school performance will be published for the first time this autumn. Guaranteed admission times for hip and knee replacements and cataract operations will be reduced to 18 months from 1 April 1993. British Rail is publishing monthly performance figures—line by line—for the first time.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the patients charter is working well in Bolton where the health authority succeeded in abolishing the two-year waiting list before the charter deadline? Is not today's announcement of a trust status application from Bolton general hospital further good news for patients in Bolton?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is good news. Bolton health authority has had a good record of achieving its charter standards. It beat the target of having no waiting for more than two years by some months and it has in place the named nurse system for patient care. I confirm what my hon. Friend says. The seeking of trust status will help to carry that further forward.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the Minister comment on the fact that parents are increasingly finding it difficult to find dentists who are prepared to take children on to their books, not only because of the fees situation but generally as a result of payment methods? That is especially so when children have particular problems with their teeth, given that the payments bear no relationship to the treatment needed. Will the right hon. Gentleman intervene with his colleagues at the Department of Health to see whether there is a way to sort out that problem?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The new dental contracts for the first time specifically removed the incentive to do more filling and were concerned with the whole dental care of the patient. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and hon. Members of all parties are well aware of the background to the dispute. I imagine that no one wants a completely open-ended commitment regardless of the recommendations of the Doctors and Dentists Remuneration Review Body.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the patients charter is to be extended to general practitioners and that that will lead to an improvement in the health service on offer to patients, which patients will welcome?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. It is the objective of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to carry the charter principles forward into primary care, which is very sensible. The great majority of contacts between patients and the national health service take place in the primary care format. I know that many GPs—the committee of general practitioners—have welcomed those steps and the offer of discussion with my right hon. Friend.

Dr. Marek: It is important for the charter that any moves to contract out and market test central Government services are open to public scrutiny and it is especially important that the Comptroller and Auditor General should have complete access to examine any value-for-money proposals that the Government have. Does the Chancellor agree?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am aware of the suggestion made by some of the civil service unions for an umpire of the level playing field in this matter. The Comptroller and Auditor General has access to the accounts after the event and, if any contracting out did not show good value for money, he would doubtless have something to say about it.

Research and Development

31. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the level of private sector research and development in Britain.

Mr. Waldegrave: The latest information is that the level of private sector research and development was some £8·1 billion in the United Kingdom in 1990, up about 13 per cent. in real terms since 1985.

Mr. Coombs: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the independent scoreboard of research and development data, which is so often quoted by the Opposition, has recorded an increase in business research and development for 1990-91? Is that not an excellent record of performance, bearing in mind the difficult economic circumstances of the past two years?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. It was an encouraging indicator that, despite the first year of recession, private sector firms have not cut research, if we are to believe the independent scoreboard. I hope that that shows that there has been an underlying sea change in the attitude of our industrial firms to the importance of R and D for the long term.

Dr. Bray: Does the Minister agree that, when comparing like with like among those firms—apart from the pharmaceutical industry—there is a major lag between spending by British companies and that of their industrial competitors overseas? Does the Minister see any chance of closing that gap if we fail to provide the incentives to firms to increase their industrial research and development that are provided in other countries, particularly the United States?

Mr. Waldegrave: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the picture is mixed. Some of the leading firms in Britain do better than their counterparts. For example, GEC at 7·2 per cent. is lower than Siemens at 10·8 per cent., but higher than Philips at 6·8 per cent. As one would expect, the percentage for Glaxo is very high. It is not a universal picture. However, it is encouraging that British firms have been increasing their position and, to some extent, catching up with their rivals abroad, as they need to do.

Mr. Dykes: Is my right hon. Friend now confident that the United Kingdom is getting its fair share of the very sizeable research contracts in the EEC system, particularly, for example, in high definition television?

Mr. Waldegrave: We get almost our just return from the EC expenditure on research and development—and perhaps a little bit better than that. It will be one of our objectives during our presidency to ensure that the quality of assessment and management of that increasingly large programme is improved further. It is very important, and of increasing importance, particularly in the near-to-industry area of research in this country.

32. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what initiatives he proposes to take to encourage a switch from military to civilian research and development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert Jackson: The defence research and development programme is directed to the future equipment needs of the armed forces. The interface between military and civil R and D is an issue in which I shall take a close interest—for example, in the context of the Government's White Paper on science and technology.

Mr. Barnes: Does the Minister accept that Britain's high level of investment in military rather than civilian research and development means that this country has often lacked a competitive edge? Will he have a word with the Secretary of State for Defence to ensure that major defence establishments such as Farnborough begin to move into civilian research and development, away from military research and development, to give us that competitive edge?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman should not overlook the substantial contribution made by the defence industries, for example, to the balance of payments. Those firms make an important contribution to the economy. With regard to the hon. Gentleman's point about Farnborough and other institutions within the Ministry of Defence research framework, the establishment of the Defence Research Agency has provided an opportunity to review the position and we will consider it again in the White Paper. The DRA will be able to consider the possibilities for diversification in the way suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does not the Defence Research Agency already carry out work for non-governmental customers? Is not there much scope in that regard?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The DRA has inherited a wide-ranging and complex set of businesses and there are many sites. It is considering what it has been given and I am sure that it will take advantage of the opportunities such as those to which my hon. Friend referred.

Service Standards

33. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to ensure that none of the service standards specified in the charters published to date are relaxed or withdrawn during the lifetime of this Parliament.

Mr. Robert Jackson: In the 19 follow-up charters published to date, we have, for the first time, clear standards which tell customers the level of service that they can expect. Those standards will be regularly reviewed so that we get a continuous improvement in the quality of public services within a tax bill that the nation can afford.

Mr. Bayley: Does the process of continual review allow the Government to abandon or water down any commitments in the charters that they find difficult to meet? The Library's reference sheet on charters mentions the Department of Employment charter to establish minimum wages and protect them through regulation—a wages inspectorate charter. Will that remain unchanged throughout the lifetime of this Parliament?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman asks two questions, one about the review process for charters and their targets and standards, and the other about the policy of the Department of Employment, and that is obviously a matter for it. On the review process for charters, there will be an annual review, if not more frequently, of the targets, standards and performance indicators that have been set for the different branches of the public service under the citizens charter. Government Departments will, of course, be in the lead in their sectors, but the charter unit and the Office of Public Service and Science, which is headed by my right hon. Friend, will obviously play an important part in that.

Mr. Bowis: Will my hon. Friend ensure that he monitors not only national charters but local government charters to ensure that they are not just words but actions that are carried out and that, where they are inadequate, as is often the case, they are strengthened?

Mr. Jackson: In the case of services that are delivered by local authorities, obviously a different attitude to review has to be followed. In short, ultimate responsibility for enforcing the standards that are set in local government charters has to lie with the local electorate. We have to recognise that fact. However, there is a central Government role, which is limited to ensuring, first, that citizens have the information that they need about the performance of local authorities and, secondly, that, wherever possible, citizens and local authorities are able to take advantage of choice between competing providers of services.

Mrs. Mahon: On charters, will the Minister begin to redress the disgraceful exclusion of the homeless from citizens' rights by adopting CHAR's citizens charter for the homeless?

Mr. Jackson: We are obviously very interested in any suggestions for improving and extending the quality and range of our charter effort. I will certainly look at what the hon. Lady has said.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the wide differences in the performance of local authorities, the Audit Commission's initiative to have comparative performance indicators for local authorities should enable local authorities to improve the service that they deliver?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is what I meant when I said that one of the roles of central Government can be to ensure that information is available so that citizens can make appropriate judgments about the performance of local authorities. The Audit Commission's initiative is very welcome. It stems from Government legislation, and it will have an important effect on the quality and circumstances of local government services.

Intestacy

35. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the income and expenditure of the benevolent fund which specifically relates to intestacy proceeds.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund was set up to provide income to be used for charitable and benevolent purposes primarily in the county palatine. The income from the fund is applied to such purposes.

Mr. Cohen: At the previous Duchy of Lancaster questions, the Chancellor told me that all—all—the proceeds from repossessions on intestacy, rather than going to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, went to the benevolent fund. It is in *Hansard.* He said "all". I ask the right hon. Gentleman to look at that. That does not accord with the duchy's own accounts. After interest, it still amounts to a substantial little earner for the privy purse. The Chancellor may quibble over the figures, but will he seriously look at the issue and stop unjust repossessions in the duchy?

Mr. Waldegrave: I made the matter clear——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: To me.

Mr. Waldegrave: I made the matter clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who perhaps knows rather more about such matters. I distinctly remember saying that the costs of the magistracy were taken from them—nothing from the bona vacantia payments goes to the privy purse. Eventually, the hon. Gentleman may understand that point.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the envious attitude of Londonders towards the excellent charities in Lancashire which accrue from that ancient custom and law is much to be deplored? Will he ensure that the likes of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), who do not care two hoots for Lancashire and know little about it, do not plunder the funds, many of which go to my constituency?

Mr. Waldegrave: I take it that the only rational outcome, if there is one, of the questioning of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) will be that Lancashire will lose the funds and they will go to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That may be what the hon. Gentleman wants, but I cannot believe that it would be popular in the county palatine, where many good causes are financed by the fund. The hon. Gentleman, in

his desire to attack the royal family on the matter, still does not understand that none of the moneys go to the privy purse.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister not accept that there is considerable concern about the affair in the county of Lancashire—both the county palatine and the shire county? Will he undertake to publish in full what the income is and what payments have been made of it so that the people of Lancashire know exactly what is happening with the fund?

Mr. Waldegrave: The concern stems from the fact that hon. Gentlemen, principally the hon. Member for Leyton, have managed so to confuse themselves that they may have confused the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who may like to know that the accounts are placed in the Library every year, where he can read them.

Economic Summit and CSCE

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement about the economic summit in Munich and the summit of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe in Helsinki last week. I represented the United Kingdom at the economic summit, with my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Foreign Secretary also attended the Helsinki summit.

The economic summit met against the background of a world economy that is still sluggish. The difficulty of achieving non-inflationary growth was uppermost in our discussions. We would all like to see faster growth. Recovery has been slower in coming than anyone anticipated but the conclusions, which are in the Library of the House, record both our desire for stronger sustainable growth and our view that it can be achieved only through sound monetary and fiscal policies. Unless we get inflation down and keep it down there will be no lasting growth.

The single biggest contribution that can be made to recovery throughout the world is a GATT settlement. A settlement would give a sharp non-inflationary boost to the world economy. The OECD has concluded that it would be equivalent to a $195 billion gain in annual incomes. More than $90 billion of that would accrue to developing and former communist countries. It would boost the economic transformation of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, encourage developing countries to persevere with their reforms, and check protectionism in world trade.

A GATT settlement is essential, and I make no apology for having put it high on the agenda at Munich and insisting that it was discussed in detail. In the light of this year's reform of the common agricultural policy, the remaining gap between the European Commmunity and the United States on the crucial agricultural issues is a small one. I believe that it can be bridged and the communiqué contains a firm commitment to a result this year.

At the economic summit last year I pledged to attend the Rio conference and urged others to do the same. On my return, I suggested an eight-point follow-up action plan. That plan, which is set out in the conclusions, was accepted by the G7.

We also had a meeting with President Yeltsin, days after Russia had reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund. The imminence of the Munich meeting undoubtedly helped to clinch that agreement. It opens the way for the IMF to release the first $1 billion credit tranche. That, in turn, opens the way to a debt-rescheduling agreement. I was able to announce that the United Kingdom is ready to make available $500 million of export credit cover for the former Soviet Union.

Russia faces massive difficulties. Inflation is running at well over 150 per cent., the fiscal deficit is rising and will be well over 10 per cent. of GDP for the rest of this year, and the pace of reform has slowed down in several areas. Translating reforms on paper into reforms in operation is proving difficult. President Yeltsin assured us of his determination to put renewed impetus behind the reform programme. With the IMF programme in place it will be easier to monitor progress and to propose remedies, but none of us should underestimate the huge nature of his task: it is literally unparalleled and we all have a stake in his success.

The United Kingdom has urged for some time that the Munich summit should take an initiative on the safety of nuclear power stations in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe. Members of the Community pledged themselves at Lisbon to provide significant resources. The G7 agreed on an action programme and to create a fund to supplement existing bilateral efforts to ensure a co-ordinated and targeted approach.

The political declaration adopted at Munich underlines, in respect of the former Soviet Union, the general theme of help for self-help. It calls for a resolution of the northern territories dispute. The declaration also calls for the indefinite extension of the non-proliferation treaty at the 1995 extension conference and underlines the need, in the face of the growing demands on them, to strengthen both the United Nations and the CSCE.

The CSCE played a crucial role in the 1970s, setting human rights standards which the communist world could not ignore. The role of the CSCE in monitoring human rights, especially minority rights, remains. The CSCE must also take on new roles as well. At last week's meeting we agreed a number of new roles for the CSCE covering: the earlier warning of political conflicts; the need for a new mechanism to improve the peaceful settlement of disputes; the establishment of a high commissioner for national minorities; and the CSCE role in peacekeeping.

No mechanisms can provide solutions if people are not willing to use them. It will take more than one or two conferences to resolve many of the ethnic conflicts that were frozen under communist rule and which are now coming aggressively to life again. But progress was made at that meeting, for example, on the issue of troop withdrawal from the Baltic states and on the handling of Yugoslavia.

The overall priority in Yugoslavia is to try to get the parties to negotiate. In that task, Lord Carrington's efforts are of crucial importance, and were underlined and endorsed at the Helsinki meeting. In the short term, our priority is the provision of humanitarian relief to Sarajevo and beyond. Britain already has 300 medical personnel as part of the UN force in Croatia. We have so far flown 28 humanitarian flights to Sarajevo. HMS Avenger will take part in an operation to monitor sanctions, jointly agreed at Helsinki by NATO and the Western European Union. The feasibility of establishing a land corridor to Sarajevo under UN auspices is being explored. If such an operation were feasible, Britain would be prepared to consider providing air cover for it. We would not supply ground troops.

Everyone who has seen the recent news reports has been shocked and moved by the suffering children in Sarajevo. At the end of last week, we told the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that we stood ready to evacuate children from Sarajevo to the United Kingdom for medical treatment, or to send medical teams to Yugoslavia to provide treatment on the spot.

If it is possible to treat the children on the spot, near to their families, with people around them who speak their language and in relatively familiar surroundings, that is obviously the best way. We have told the International Red Cross that we are willing to fly out medical personnel at very short notice if needed. I hope to meet the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in London later this week to see what further action is needed.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement on the Munich and Helsinki summits. The G7 communiqué recognises that

"Too many people are out of work . . . The potential strength of people, factories and resources is not being fully employed . . . unemployment creates great hardship",

and that the world would

"gain greatly from stronger, sustainable non-inflationary growth".

Since that is all self-evident, will the Prime Minister tell us why absolutely no positive measures for economic expansion were proposed or adopted at the Munich summit? Can he tell us why, yet again, there were no concrete proposals for the co-ordinated growth policies which are now so obviously necessary if the world economy is not to sink into prolonged stagnation?

After two full years of recession in Britain, is it not clear that the policies which the Prime Minister follows suppress rather than eradicate inflation and are preventing growth rather than achieving non-inflationary growth? Is it not equally plain that the continuation of those policies will perpetuate recession and unemployment?

At the G7 summit, the Prime Minister, with the other leaders, recognised the need for more investment in training in infrastructure and in research and development. Will the Prime Minister explain how the commitments that he made at Munich are consistent with the statement by the Secretary of State for Employment last week that resources for training and enterprise councils are to be cut? Will he also tell the House how his commitments at Munich can be reconciled with persistent reduction in the real value of research and development funding and with the neglect of infrastructure by the Conservative Government in Britain?

On the issue of Russia and the other states of the former Soviet Union, is the Prime Minister aware that the value of the aid offered to the former Soviet Union is minuscule by comparison with the enormous benefits which are in prospect for everyone as a result of the end of the cold war? While recognising that it is necessary to act to prevent realisation of the threat of hyper-inflation in Russia and the other states of the former Soviet Union, does the Prime Minister agree that the hurdles which have been placed in the way of the Russian Government's receiving assistance from the west are so large that they will effectively prevent the necessary assistance from being given? Does the Prime Minister recognise that, if strong and stable support is not provided to the former Soviet Union, a terrible political, economic and environmental price could be paid, not only by the people of those states but by the wider world?

With regard to the hideous problems of what was Yugoslavia, on which the Prime Minister spent quite a deal of his statement, I welcome his announcement that medical aid and medical treatment will be available in Britain for children from Sarajevo who cannot be treated in their own area. While everyone must want the most substantial humanitarian aid programme to be sustained and delivered to the wretched people of the republics, and while the most intense sanctions are justified, the Prime Minister and his colleagues have been right to counsel severe caution in relation to military intervention. Will he be sure to continue that approach and to insist that any action which proves necessary is undertaken only under the auspices of the United Nations?

When the Prime Minister reflects on the ineffectual results of the Munich summit, does he not think that it would now be sensible to suspend G7 meetings until the leaders of seven of the strongest economies in the world are willing to take action which is significant enough to live up to the splendour of the summit occasions? Does the Prime Minister not recognise that there can scarcely have been a summit at which the results for the world fell so far short of the needs of the world, and that the paralysis of policy is a source of potentially dangerous disappointment and disillusionment for all who seek answers from the leaders of democracies?

As one who continues to believe in the great potential of co-ordinated and co-operative action by the leading democracies, may I record my regret at having to speak of the Munich summit in such negative terms, and my even greater sadness that the occasion earned only that response?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for some of the right hon. Gentleman's observations, and I will deal with the points that he raised.

I share the right hon. Gentleman's view that at the Munich summit there were some successes and some disappointments. In some areas, I should have liked to see stronger progress—not least on the Uruguay round, in respect of which I made it clear to my fellow heads of government that I believed that we could have made more progress. For many of the reasons implicit in what the right hon. Gentleman has said, it would have been desirable if we had done so.

However, there was progress at the summit: there was progresss in the programme to develop safety in the field of nuclear power, in carrying forward the agreement at Rio, in helping the lower and middle income countries with their debt, and in pushing ahead yet further the Trinidad terms. There was progress also, of course, in the meeting with President Yeltsin. I refer not least to his remarkable statement on debt-equity swaps, which may open up great possibilities both for Russia and for business enterprises with the former Soviet Union. Although there were areas in which the G7 summit might have achieved more, it is unreasonable to say that it achieved nothing. The meeting was well worth while—not least because, if people meet to discuss and examine problems, they will all find themselves in a better position to deal with those problems in the future.

On the subject of aid to the former Soviet Union, $1 billion is being dispensed immediately under the IMF agreement, but a total of $18 billion is available through the G24. What has been agreed, and wholly accepted by the Russian Government, is that that ought to be dispensed against progress on the reform packages. Had we dispensed aid and assistance without reform, we should have dispensed a great deal already—and it would have achieved little, if anything at all. The right hon. Gentleman was right to talk about the dangers of hyper-inflation, which are real and explicitly recognised by Prime Minister Gaidar and President Yeltsin.

We did discuss unemployment and the only way in which it will come down. Non-inflationary growth is the key to providing lasting job opportunities. That is true in relation to the growth of employment and the improvement of training opportunities. Throughout the G7 there was a commitment to policies to free innovation and enterprise to create employment opportunities. That is the only way in which we can satisfactorily proceed.

On Yugoslavia, I am grateful for what the right hon. Gentleman said about the aid offered to children. I also believe that he is entirely right to be cautious about military involvement on the ground in Yugoslavia. I assure him that that is the Government's position. The conflict is unlike any that we have seen in recent years and it is not one that is likely to be resolved readily by external troops on the ground. In any event, were there to be intervention, the right hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that it should be done under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): In relation to the Bosnian horror, will my hon. Friend accept that his great caution about getting involved in Balkan entanglements is wholly to be commended? Will he also recognise, however, that one way or another—through air cover, naval operations or the United Nations—we seem to be starting to become entangled in that area? Does he agree that, as things unfold, it is vital for us to distinguish clearly the objectives of international involvement as between humanitarian operations, even if they involve force; and prtotecting the integrity of the Bosnian state, which is a quite different objective? Finally, does he agree that, having settled those clear and limited objectives, it is vital to ensure maximum co-ordination among the powers and the minimum of individual flamboyant gestures, which merely create difficulties and lack of co-ordination in Bosnia?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. In particular, I do not think that flamboyant gestures are of help at this time. There is a need for care, caution and co-ordination, and I promise my right hon. Friend that we have those objectives in mind.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): When the Prime Minister was arguing at those rather unproductive conferences for non-inflationary growth, did he hear floating to him across the seas the siren voices of those in his own party who believe that we should devalue sterling and never mind the inflationary consequences? Did it occur to him that the countries with which he was dealing have not suffered recession so long and so deeply as we have, and that the policies which gave us that earlier and deeper recession were supported by those now calling on him to devalue—the massive Lawson credit boom and the failure to invest in key areas in the supply side of the economy?

The Prime Minister: The internal political situation in the United Kingdom did not feature high in our discussions while we were looking more generally at the problems of the world economy. The right hon. Gentleman will know that I believe that the exchange rate mechanism is an anti-inflationary discipline, and I believe that it is the right one. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out our position with admirable clarity last Friday.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and the United Kingdom initiative on Yugoslavia, particularly the proposal to help the children in that tragedy.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who have been calling for instability of exchange rates and, therefore, higher inflation, are the very people who, several years ago, were very much against our joining the exchange rate mechanism at a more propitious moment when some of today's problems would not have arisen?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that I can add to what I said to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). No one expected that an anti-inflationary policy would be easy in every respect; it never has been, and it is not now. It is absolutely imperative, however, that we do not duck the necessity of bringing inflation down to a level below that of our competitors—as low as we can get, to nil if possible—and seek to keep it there. It is from that basis that we shall be best able to secure sustainable growth, not in the short term but in the long term.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Does the Prime Minister recognise that although we support humanitarian measures and note his caution about military involvement, he must answer a specific question before the House goes into recess at the end of the week? Will he assure the House that there will be no military involvement in Yugoslavia —by land, sea or air forces, or bases under our control —without the consent of the House of Commons? A long history shows that it is easy to get into conflict but difficult to get out of it, and memories of similar conflicts go back a long way. Will he give the House a specific assurance that British troops and bases will not be involved until the House has heard the case for it from the responsible Minister and has had an opportunity to register its feelings?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we already have 300 personnel in Bosnia and I made it clear a moment ago that we have no plans to put further personnel there. However, I cannot be certain precisely what will happen during the recess and I would be unwise to give a blanket assurance to the right hon. Gentleman. I cannot do so because I simply do not know what events will occur. I am extremely cautious about further involvement in Yugoslavia for the reasons which the Leader of the Opposition set out and which I fully endorse. Nevertheless, I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman a banket assurance about what may happen in future circumstances which are not yet known.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's remarks about the Uruguay round and the general agreement on tarrifs and trade. When my right hon. Friend made his economic appraisal and judgment at the Munich meeting, did he conclude that German interest rates are at an appropriate level? If so, and as our interest rate policy can now be characterised as "Waiting for Helmut", when does he expect those interest rates to fall?

The Prime Minister: That is predominantly a matter for the Bundesbank and the Germans, not for me. I remind my right hon. Friend that, since we have become members of the exchange rate mechanism, the United Kingdom has cut its rates nine times while the Germans have raised theirs four times.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): The House will welcome paragraphs 37, 38 and 39 of the Helsinki communiqué, dealing with security and co-operation in the Mediterranean. We would welcome the creation of such a body in addition to the conference on security and

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

co-operation in Europe as we know it today. Does the Prime Minister agree that difficulties would arise in relation to the peace process in the middle east and United Nations involvement in Cyprus if a new body were created in the middle east where, according to the communiqué, the problems are entirely different?

The Prime Minister: I think that we can carry on with both. I see no particular difficulty in doing that. As the hon. Gentleman mentions Cyprus, I should say that I hope to see President Vassiliou of Cyprus later this evening and the United Nations-sponsored talks between the separate parties in Cyprus will continue in New York later this week. Some progress has been made, but there is clearly some way to go. The prospects for moving towards a settlement in Cyprus are better today than they have been for some time.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the decision to concentrate on the GATT negotiations during our presidency is of great importance and to be widely welcomed? If no further progress can be achieved, however, does it not bring into question the very existence of the common agricultural policy as a means of support for farmers?

Does my right hon. Friend also accept that no easy fix can be gained by devaluing sterling within the exchange rate mechanism and that to do so might bring about a financial accident?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's second point. Throughout the years, we have seen that currency devaluations—in this country or elsewhere—lead only to short-term gains which are rapidly eaten up. We then find ourselves in a less competitive position. I therefore agree entirely on the importance of maintaining the value of the currency. On my hon. Friend's earlier point, we must continue to do all that we can to reach a GATT settlement as speedily as possible. The agreement that has been reached on the common agricultural policy will help us towards reaching a GATT settlement, and the expectation that one will be reached this year is well founded. I believe that the United Kingdom could reach a settlement within a single day, so close are we to a settlement, others find themselves less readily able to agree to a settlement, but I have no doubt that, with the right political instruction, the negotiators could swiftly reach a settlement of the Uruguay round.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Surely the Prime Minister recognises that the current world economic problem is not inflation but deflation. In the Munich declaration, he committed himself to policies to assist growth and employment. If there is to be any relationship between ends and means, he must do something about the exceptionally high real rates of interest. which are now squeezing the life out of British industry, and also about the exchange rate, which simply is not competitive. Why does the right hon. Gentleman not recognise those facts? Why does he not do something to assist the British economy, and to arrest the process which is plunging us into ever deeper recession?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman is right about the exchange rate not being competitive, I fail to see why our exports are running at record levels. As for his earlier point about inflation and deflation, he will know that on more than one occasion since the second world war Governments have reflated at precisely the wrong moment, and recreated exactly the problems that they were seeking to solve. We are not prepared to do that again.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), I welcome the accent that my right hon. Friend has placed on the importance of GATT. He mentioned the narrow gap between GATT and the common agricultural policy. Can he give an idea of any initiatives that he hopes to launch to bring about the political directions that he mentioned when replying to my hon. Friend?

The Prime Minister: The GATT negotiations for the European Community are conducted by the Commission. We currently hold the presidency of the European Council, and I assure my hon. Friend that we shall press the Commission to reach an agreement within Europe, and to negotiate on the essential difficulties which remain with the Americans as speedily as possible.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): To follow the question asked by the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), as there must have been some discussion at the G7 summit about the prevailing level of interest rates in western Europe, and as the Prime Minister must have made some observations about it to the German Chancellor, would the right hon. Gentleman care to confide in the House about those observations? Does he accept that the position of sterling within the exchange rate mechanism is the only restriction on our policy of reducing the real level of interest rates?

The Prime Minister: When we remained outside the exchange rate mechanism, our interest rates went up to 15 per cent. and stayed at that level for some time. Since we joined the mechanism, our interest rates have fallen by a third—from 15 per cent. to 10 per cent.—while German interest rates have risen. The interest rate differential with Germany is now about ½ per cent.—the lowest for more than a decade. As for long-term interest rates, which are so critical for investment, the gap between the United Kingdom and Germany on 10-year rates has more than halved since we joined the exchange rate mechanism. As I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), the United Kingdom has cut its interest rate nine times while Germany has raised its rate four times.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): During the discussions, did my right hon. Friend raise the issue of the present trade barriers against eastern Europe?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I did. I also said, particularly to my European colleagues, that I wanted the association agreements to be extended, and that I wanted association agreements with eastern Europe to be in operation before being individually ratified by all our European partners. That would be a great help to eastern Europe. Eastern Europe in the wider sense of G7 also figured significantly in our discussions.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): How much do these summits cost? This is the first time that summits have merged into one another. They gallivant around the world

three or four times a year; now they are running from Munich to Helsinki and back again. We are seeing what is being described as a range of summits.

The Prime Minister said during the election campaign, "Elect a Tory Government and everything in the garden will be rosy." Now he says that our exports are high. If our interest rates have come down and Germany's have gone up, why is our rate of exchange against the German mark down to DM 2·85 today? Before the general election, it was well over DM 2·90.

Instead of gallivanting around the world, it is high time that the Prime Minister did something about this country. He should cut interest rates by two percentage points and get out of the exchange rate mechanism.

The Prime Minister: I do not think, after careful consideration, that I will take the hon. Gentleman's advice on the subject——

Mr. Skinner: I do not expect you to.

The Prime Minister: Then the hon. Gentleman will not be disappointed. He will be pleased to know that the costs of the Munich summit were largely paid by the German Government.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the Uruguay round of the GATT negotiations began as long ago as the last British presidency, and that on that occasion there was an active role for our presidency in bringing the French in line with Community policy? Can he therefore say what initiatives he will take, as he intends to make this a high priority of the British presidency? Will he, for instance, hold a Council or a special series of Councils to reach agreement among Community countries?

The Prime Minister: I would certainly not exclude any of those options, but in the first instance it may be better to proceed by bilateral discussion with our European partners rather than by collective discussion. I assure my right hon. Friend that we shall take part in those discussions so as to put the European Community in a position to conclude the negotiations as speedily as possible.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Has the Prime Minister seen the comment which seems to have been made by a member of the Bundesbank to the effect that countries which find themselves in difficulty with German interest rates should consider devaluing their currencies? In the light of the meeting of the Bundesbank this Thursday, which may result in a further increase in German interest rates, what will the Prime Minister do to ensure that our interest rates eventually come down to a more sensible level?

The Prime Minister: I have not seen that comment, if it was made, but in any event, any decision on that is not for a German official to make.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will my right hon. Friend explain to the Opposition and to the House the relationship between lower inflation and higher employment?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend invites me to point out, there is a clear relationship between low inflation, encouraging investment and the creation of jobs, and higher employment. Until we get that very low level of inflation, we shall not have the competitiveness and the job creation that we all want.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The Prime Minister will be aware of my parliamentary question to him for reply last week about the important recent communiqué of the Cairns group Ministers in regard to the Uruguay round. While I appreciate that he could not reply then, will he now make a statement specifically on the outcome of the G7 summit in terms of what the Cairns group Ministers are seeking?

The Prime Minister: The Cairns group was represented at the G7 summit by the Prime Minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney. I have no doubt that he will report back to the group. There are no real difficulties for the Cairns group in the conclusions of the summit or in the position taken on the GATT round. There is little of difficulty for the Cairns group in the present proposals for GATT; I believe that it could sign up to them speedily. There are some small difficulties, but they could be readily resolved.

The substantive difficulty holding up the GATT round is the agricultural difficulty between the European Community and the United States—essentially on internal support and external subsidies. Those are not the only issues at stake, but they are the two key issues. Once they are unlocked and agreement reached on them, the rest of the GATT round will fall speedily into place.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Does my right hon. Friend recall that when this country was last in a comparable state of recession, in 1981, we got out of the problem and set off a period of sustained growth by reducing interest rates, which we were able to do because the pound sterling was floating? Although it floated down at the time, almost to $1·50, it floated up again shortly afterwards and nobody talked about devaluation. Should we not now do the same as it is absolutely clear that the justification for the exchange rate mechanism is political and not economic?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that I cannot share all my hon. Friend's views, although I know the force with which he holds them. Quite apart from the fact that the exchange rate mechanism is at the centre of our anti-inflationary strategy, there is a real risk that if we left the exchange rate mechanism the net result would be that interest rates would rise rather than fall. That would not be remotely helpful to the British economy. It would therefore not be right to leave the exchange rate mechanism and float sterling. It is right to maintain the exchange rate that we have because it will deliver the low inflation that for some years my hon. Friend and all my right hon. and hon. Friends have continually wished to see. We are making great progress on inflation and I have no intention of throwing it away.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Was there any debate in G7 about the damaging effect on industry and employment of the rather manic pursuit of price stability and zero inflation by some European leaders, especially the Prime Minister himself? Does he agree that, with little prospect of wage increases, no prospect of house price increases, and the threat of unemployment, Essex man will not be too enthusiastic about price stability?

The Prime Minister: I seem to remember that remarks about Essex man just a few months ago proved spectacularly inaccurate. The right hon. Gentleman spoke about manic pursuit of low inflation. I would rather pursue low inflation than let inflation rip, with the consequences that we have seen before.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on the quiet role that he played at both international conferences? It is necessary for that to be recorded. Does he recall that, before the Helsinki conference, the first of the parliamentary CSCE assemblies, meeting in Budapest, had 277 members representing 51 nations? Will he ensure that Britain plays a leading role in the establishment of that assembly so that Parliament may have a considerable say and the CSCE is not left just to officials or heads of Government?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I will certainly take on board my hon. Friend's points. Some valuable progress was made at the CSCE summit, especially the agreement that for the first time disputes within states can be addressed. That is a step forward. The decision to have a high commissioner for minorities, to monitor the treatment of minorities and to sound the alarm when things get worse, is a further useful innovation. The fact that the CSCE can now mandate peacekeeping activities will help to bring stability when political negotiations fail. Those are all moves forward, and they all came from the meeting at Helsinki.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): In terms of the humanitarian and peacekeeping initiatives in the former republic of Yugoslavia, will Her Majesty's Government impress upon those involved the urgent need to protect the interests of soldiers taken prisoner in the conflicts? I wrote to the Prime Minister only last week urging him to intercede in the dreadful case of three Croatian soldiers who were sentenced to death by Serbian military authorities after the most appalling torture had been inflicted upon them. It is right to protect children, but soldiers taken prisoner should surely be entitled to certain basic rights.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair and good point. I promise to take it up and to raise the matters that he brings to our attention with the Red Cross and the United Nations. There should be no doubt among the combatants that the Geneva conventions apply.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in discussing defence with our allies, he continued to emphasise the enormous importance that this country places on the NATO alliance? Will he reassure me that, if there is closer co-operation on defence matters at European level, our commitment to NATO will not diminish?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can certainly give my hon. Friend that commitment. Of course, there was a NATO meeting on Friday as well as other meetings. There is no doubt that NATO has provided the defence of Europe for nearly 50 years and will continue to do so. All our experience shows that it would be damaging to European defence to undermine NATO, and the American pillar of NATO in particular. We have no intention of doing so, although we believe that it is right for European nations to take a greater proportionate share of the collective defence of Europe.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): In respect of the ERM and the fixed exchange rate, is not the Prime Minister comparable with the driver of a moderately powered motor car driving up a hill which turns out to be rather steeper and longer than he thought, but who nevertheless refuses on principle to change down a gear? Would not the result be embarrassing to the driver, dangerous and embarrassing to the passengers, and dangerous to the other traffic on the road, and would not such a driver fail his driving test?

The Prime Minister: That is a very ingenious comparison, but I am afraid that I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. My response must be the same as that which I gave to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). There have been too many instances where Governments—I make no party point—have changed their policy at the wrong moment and sought reinflation at a moment when they should not have done so. We are making genuine progress on inflation, in both the headline and the underlying levels of inflation. We shall not change our policies—not out of stubbornness, but out of conviction.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend accept from me, as president of the Guild of Experienced Motorists, that far more accidents are caused by drivers chopping and changing in panic from the course on which they are proceeding? With regard to the GATT negotiations, will my right hon. Friend ensure that in the case of protectionism and interest rates he and all Ministers spell out to little Englanders that there is no solution in isolation from the rest of the world, and that we would suffer from such a policy more than anyone else?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right, and particularly so on his last point.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does the Prime Minister not draw a distinction between military action—that is to say, air cover—for the purposes of protecting humanitarian supplies flying into Sarajevo, and military action for the purposes of intervening with a view to resolving the dispute? Does he agree that in the case of the former there is no need to refer the matter to Parliament, but that there would have to be a parliamentary debate on the second option?

The Prime Minister: In what I said earlier I clearly drew that distinction between the desirability of air cover, which we shall provide in the circumstances that I have set out, and the desirability of intervening on the ground. I have said that it is not our policy to produce troops, and that I do not anticipate that we shall do so. However, I cannot be certain what events will occur. There is no sign of an agenda that will mean that we have troops involved. Indeed, I have expressly said that it is not our policy to use troops. However, I do not think that it would be wise for any Prime Minister to give the blanket assurance sought by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn).

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): My right hon. Friend mentioned discussions in Munich on the debt situation both of middle-income countries and of those which come under the Trinidad terms, which he proposed in a former

information. Will he give the House more information about the success of the policy on middle-income countries, which looks promising, and far more seriously on what progress is being made on the Trinidad terms, which are far more critical in view of their effect on the lives of impoverished countries?

The Prime Minister: Agreement was made that the Paris club would look at dealing with the debts of a number of lower-middle-income countries. I will let my hon. Friend have a note of which countries are involved. They will have to be dealt with by the Paris club on a case by case basis, but there was agreement that some progress can now be made. The summit welcomed the start that we had made on implementation of the Trinidad terms. Thus far, seven countries have benefited from 50 per cent. debt reduction and there will be more to follow.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What did the Prime Minister mean in terms of practical help to Scottish Nuclear and others with twinning arrangements when he spoke about supplementary help to nuclear power stations in the Soviet Union and Bulgaria? In the corridors of Munich, did the Prime Minister have an opportunity to ask Mr. Kohl how it is that, for six whole months, the Bundeskriminalamt has sat on vital evidence about Lockerbie? Is not some explanation due from the German police as to whether that was sheer incompetence or wilfulness?

The Prime Minister: I had no discussions on the latter point. On the former point, about nuclear power stations, we agreed a programme of action covering operational safety improvements, technical improvements to plants based on safety assessments, and an improvement to regulatory regimes. The programme that we had in mind is also designed to improve longer-term safety by examining the scope of replacing less safe plants through alternative energy. It is a massive programme, and the amount of money committed to it is likely to be $680 million to $700 million. That will be partly paid for with bilateral contributions, the sum total of which is not yet certain. The balance will be met out of the multilateral fund. The purpose of having the multilateral fund is to be able to cover those areas which are missed in the individual bilateral agreements made between the Russians or other countries, as the case may be, and the donor countries.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): If the Germans are prepared to be bad Europeans by screwing up all the other European economies through their cavalier attitude to the exchange rate mechanism, why should we be good Europeans and remain members of that mechanism? To put it another way, in this particular, if my right hon. Friend had evidence that being at the heart of Europe was to tear the heart out of the United Kingdom economy, what would he do about it?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend sets up a premise with which I am unable to agree. We are in the exchange rate mechanism because the Government judge that it is where we should be, in the interests of a counter-inflationary strategy for the United Kingdom. That is why we are there. Nobody compelled us to go there. We took a judgment. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister of the day and I, as the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, took the judgment that it was right to enter the ERM to bring down inflation and maintain the stability of our exchange rate.

My hon. Friend mentioned Germany. It is noteworthy that the Germans have maintained currency stability for a long time and, as a result, have produced an extremely powerful economy. I do not accept that the deutschmark is forever the benchmark of the exchange rate mechanism. That benchmark is the strongest currency in the mechanism, and we are determined that sterling will become an extremely strong currency. We cannot do that by cutting and running from the policy when it is beginning to succeed.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The Prime Minister has referred to the managing of potential conflicts and the issuing of early warnings of such conflicts. Are there not already enough early warnings about possible imminent conflicts in other territories, such as Kosovo and Macedonia? How differently does the right hon. Gentleman think that we shall handle those matters from the way in which we have mishandled the Bosnian conflict?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that there have been early warning systems in quite the way now envisaged in the CSCE proposals. There are particular difficulties with a conflict which arises within what was a single country —the former Yugoslavia. Conflicts which arise between countries are obviously much more easily dealt with through external assistance. The proposals that we have set up will not solve or hold back every conflict, but they are certainly an advance and well worth developing.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): As one of Parliament's representatives at the new CSCE Assembly, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether is is aware that at its recent meeting the CSCE was unanimous in its view that the strongest possible pressure should be brought to bear on all the warring elements in Yugoslavia, just short of direct military intervention?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that point to my attention. Under the proposals, the CSCE will have the ability to mandate a range of peacekeeping activities in future, from monitoring to full-scale forces.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): At the G7 meeting, did the Prime Minister bear in mind that what caused our recession was the huge hike in interest rates? Does he understand that present real rates of interest—adjusted for inflation—are twice as high as when we joined the exchange rate mechanism? It is those high rates which are prolonging the recession, and we shall never get out of it while we have them. Will the right hon. Gentleman please consider using interest rates for the purpose of our domestic economy instead of for the arid dogma of the exchange rate mechanism?

The Prime Minister: We have to look at the interests of our domestic economy in the round, in both the medium and the long term, rather than in the short term only. That is precisely what the Government's policy does.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his proposals for a citizens' Europe designed to avoid ethnic conflicts in Europe in future? Can he give us further clarification

[Mr. David Atkinson]

about the proposed CSCE peacekeeping role as a last resort when all else fails? Does he mean peacemaking? If so, which organisation would do it—NATO, the WEU or the United Nations?

The Prime Minister: I would not draw a distinction between those bodies. The CSCE will have an enabling role and it could approach each or all of the organisations that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does the Prime Minister agree that in relation to Yugoslavia, it is important always to be a stage or two ahead of the game? While we are rightly concerned with the problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina, should we not also be concerned about the problems of ethnic minorities in other areas of the former Yugoslavia? Did the CSCE address itself in any way to the problems of the ethnic minorities within Croatia, especially those who live in eastern Slovenia and Krajina? What is the Government's policy towards those parts of the country that we have now recognised?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes some important points, with which I agree. We intend to support Lord Carrington's proposals for autonomy. We are concerned about the minorities in almost all the component parts of the republic of the former Yugoslavia. On the point about keeping ahead of the game and determining policy, the hon. Gentleman may care to know that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be visiting all the republics within the next few days.

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): What steps, if any, were taken at the G7 meeting to take forward the important environmental agreements reached at Rio?

The Prime Minister: Immediately after the Rio conference, I wrote to all the G7 heads of Government with an eight-point plan to follow up the agreements reached at Rio. That plan was endorsed at the Munich summit and will now be carried forward. Therefore, within the member states of the G7, a further momentum has been given to the agreements reached at Rio.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Prime Minister aware that, despite what he has said, there is bound to be a great deal of concern about any further escalation of British involvement in what used to be Yugoslavia? However, people accept—I certainly do—that what is now being done in terms of humanitarian supplies is right. I am sure that it has the approval of the vast majority of people in this country.

In what circumstances will the House be recalled if there is an escalation of British involvement? In these few days before the House rises, it is important for the right hon. Gentleman to promise that the House will be recalled, should the event that I have described materialise.

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the way in which matters are developing in Yugoslavia; the position is worrying. We have watched the developments over a number of weeks. There can be no certainty that there will be no further flashpoints in other parts of the republics of the former Yugoslavia. However, as I have said, I do not envisage that, as a result of those flashpoints, British troops will be involved on the ground. If and when such a circumstance arises, I shall consider what action is appropriate.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): During the G7 conference in Munich, was my right hon. Friend involved at any stage in discussions about the remarkable disparity in interest rates between the United States of America and the four European members of G7? If so, was it observed that if the United States—which is still, unfortunately, in recession—had persisted with the western European and British policy of high levels of real interest rates, it would now be in slump?

The Prime Minister: Those points were not discussed in the precise form suggested by my hon. Friend. It is true that interest rates are lower in the United States, although not so low as we might think from the discount rate and the rates at which people can borrow for business purposes. We must also take account of the size of the United States fiscal deficit and other aspects of its economy. It is equally true that, as the Americans have repeatedly reduced their interest rates over the past few years, that has not produced the kick start to the economy that many people expected.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): From what the Prime Minister has said so far, can we deduce that he is setting his face against any reduction in interest rates because he believes that, at this stage in the war against inflation, we need a futile gesture such as the sacrifice of a further million jobs to ad to the million already lost since we joined the exchange rate mechanism? Is not the right hon. Gentleman showing all the prejudices of his predecessor, but none of her flexibility?

The Prime Minister: I know that my right hon. Friend will welcome the hon. Gentleman's tribute to her flexibility, which was not evident from him when she stood at the Dispatch Box. The hon. Gentleman should not misstate the Government's position on interest rates. We have reduced interest rates by five percentage points over the past two years. When it is appropriate, we shall reduce interest rates, but it must be when it is appropriate and when we can sustain the exchange value of sterling and still reduce interest rates. That must be the key part of the decision that we have to make. When it is appropriate, we shall, of course, reduce interest rates.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must move on.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. As hon. Members know, I take points of order after Standing Order No. 20 applications.

Royal London Hospital (Redundancies)

4.25 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the announcement of £4 million cuts involving up to 600 redundancies at the Royal London hospital trust."

It is a specific matter affecting the reduction of hospital services in the borough of Tower Hamlets. Six hundred jobs, including those of doctors, nurses and ancillary staff, are to go—about 12 per cent. of those employed at the Royal London hospital.

The matter is important both to those who work in the health service and to the community they serve. It comes on top of the decisions made only last month to close the accident and emergency department at the Mile End hospital and to reduce and rationalise other hospital services in the borough.

In Tower Hamlets, with our above average health needs, we are not over-provided with health services; we are seriously under-provided. The cuts will only lengthen the long waiting lists which now exist.

Last Friday's announcement was made without first informing, let alone consulting, either the health authority or the community health council. The immediate cause of the problem is that the Royal London hospital has been unable to sell £4 million-worth of its much needed services and now, one third of the way through the current financial year, has to make emergency cuts to balance the books.

Short-term financial pressures, not a serious study of the needs of the people of Tower Hamlets, have dictated the decisions. It is urgent, therefore, that the Government now provide extra funds to prevent large and unplanned cuts in hospital services, not only at the Royal London hospital, but elsewhere in London, at least until the Tomlinson report has been completed and until sensible decisions based on its findings have been taken.

Madam Speaker: I have listened carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman has said. As he knows, I have to give my decision without giving any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20. I therefore cannot submit the application to the House.

Points of Order

4.29 pm

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw your attention to item 21 on page 1258 of today's Order Paper? The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) seeks to insert my name as a member of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs and to delete the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey).

Standing Order No. 104 requires

"Any Member intending to propose that certain Members be members of a select committee, or be discharged from a select committee, shall give notice of the names of Members whom he intends so to propose, shall endeavour to ascertain previously whether each such Member will give his attendance on the committee, and shall endeavour to give notice of any Member whom he proposes to be discharged from the committee."

I received no such notice, and I am certain that my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun was not told by the hon. Member for Tayside, North that he intended to have him discharged from the Committee. However, I received a rather charming letter from the hon. Member for Tayside, North after the event, which opens with the words

"Dear Norman,

I have transgressed."

That has great appeal to me because I am a Scottish Presbyterian and those who have transgressed add up to the sum total of humanity.

The hon. Gentleman went on to appeal at the end of his letter

"Please forgive me."

I am afraid that forgiveness is not within my gift or that of any of us in the House—and I can assure you of that, Madam Speaker, as a Scottish Presbyterian.

I hope that you will use this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to at least reiterate the fact that hon. Members should act with good manners towards each other and should not seek to add or delete names on the Order Paper without fulfilling the conditions of Standing Order No. 104.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am quite capable of dealing with a Standing Order between two Scottish Members. May I hear from the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker)?

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) is wrong in one respect. I wrote to him before I took any action. Unfortunately, one did not know the names until Thursday morning. I wrote to the hon. Gentleman before I went to the Table Office to table my amendments very late on Thursday evening. I have also spoken to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), the other Member involved. In fact, I spent all of Saturday with him.

I tabled the amendments on the Order Paper because I believe that there are aspects of selection, election and the election of the Speaker which must be addressed. I thought that that was the opportunity for the House to address those matters, and that was the vehicle that I used to get those matters addressed.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) for giving me notice of his point of order. He has done his homework and he knows that Standing Order No. 104 requires an hon. Member to

"endeavour to ascertain"

whether any hon. Member whom he intends to propose for a Select Committee

"will give his attendance on the committee",

and that should be done before notice is tabled of a proposed nomination.

I ask the hon. Member for Tayside, North whether he took steps, before he tabled his amendments, to consult the hon. Members for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), whom he wishes to be omitted from the Committee? Did the hon. Member for Tayside, North consult those two hon. Members? Did he get a clear indication from them before he tabled the amendment? That is the question that should be answered. Is the answer yes or no?

Mr. Bill Walker: The answer clearly is that yes, I have discussed the matter with both hon. Members. No, I did not discuss in detail what I planned to do, because I did not have the time to do so and very few Scottish Members, other than those on the First Scottish Standing Committee, were here on Thursday.

Madam Speaker: This can be touched upon in general debate later. However, this is not simply a matter of common courtesy, although I am very keen to uphold common courtesy in the House. This is a matter of upholding our Standing Orders, and that I intend to do. Therefore, I rule that I am not able to select the two amendments, and that is the end of the matter.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. There may have been another transgression, this time on the part of the Leader of the House. As a matter of common courtesy, last Thursday I telephoned the office of the Leader of the House to express an interest that, in business questions, he would make an announcement about European Standing Committee B, chaired by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill), and the Libyan order. At column 473, he announced the business of 13 to 16 July, and said:

"The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet on Wednesday"—

and *Hansard* states "21 October". It was not at all clear. Indeed, from recollection, I think that he said "on Wednesday",

"to consider European Community Document No. 5894/92 concerning relations with Libya."

He went on to say:

"It may also be for the convenience of the House to know that the provisional business for the first week after the summer Adjournment will be as follows:"—[*Official Report*, 9 July 1992; Vol. 211, c. 473.]

He then listed that business. We might be forgiven for thinking that the Libyan order, which was originally arranged for tomorrow, was going to be held on Wednesday.

The urgency is this: the Scottish police were incandescent with anger when they discovered what has happened in the courts in New York on the Pan Am wilful atrocity——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now discussing the merits and demerits, which I cannot listen to. He has put his point of order to me. The Leader of the House provides information for the House, and it is of course for the Chairmen of Committees to determine the time of their sittings. The hon. Gentleman has been very explicit in his point of order, and I am sure that it has been taken on board by the Leader of the House.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. There can be nothing further to that point of order, because I am now dealing with it. The Leader of the House has heard what the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has had to say, and I cannot allow a debate on a point of order.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): At a later stage in our proceedings today, we shall discuss departmental Select Committees, and set out on the Order Paper are the names that have been put forward on behalf of the Committee of Selection. You will remember, Madam Speaker, that when those Committees were set up and approved by the House in June 1979, they were meant to oversee and to inquire into the work of the various Departments; hence the reason why they came into existence and will be re-established in this Parliament.

Would it therefore be right for Ministers, under any kind of instruction, to decide who should be on those Committees? Cabinet Ministers' own Departments will be scrutinised by the proposed Select Committees. I therefore ask you to rule on whether, in the circumstances, that would be right in what is recognised as a free vote. Labour Members were not whipped on the issue, and Conservative Members, I understand, have not been whipped, but I understand that Ministers have been asked to support the motions from the Committee of Selection.

Madam Speaker: The whipping of various parties in the House is nothing whatsoever to do with the Chair. The hon. Gentleman knows that very well. I have no idea what the whipping is tonight or whether it exists or not. That is not my business. I am present anyway, irrespective of whether hon. Members are present. I shall be here for that business. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's point of order, it is a matter entirely for the House and for every individual Member of the House, whether a Minister, Back Bencher or whatever, to make up his or her mind. Of course, hon. Members are free to go into the Division Lobbies on the matter.

Mr. Bill Walker *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Is this a separate point of order?

Mr. Walker: May I ask you, Madam Speaker, to use your influence? You will understand the compressed time scale involved from the time when the orders were published, to the time when hon. Members may table amendments, and today. I ask you to use your influence in matters as contentious as membership of Select Committees and ensure that more time is given so that hon. Members can fulfil the necessity—I accept your ruling—to consult others involved.

Madam Speaker: Yes, I quite understand that there needs to be a period of consultation, and I have noted the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am a member of European Standing

Committee B. Two weeks ago, we received our usual notification by letter from No. 10 Downing street, stating that, on Wednesday, we would discuss Libyan sanctions. It seems as though the situation has changed, and there has been no proper explanation. Could you advise us where we go from here?

Dr. Godman: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. May I be allowed to explain that there is informal notification of meetings of European Standing Committees A and B? My hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) is right. We were given the usual informal notice that, as members of Standing Committee B, we would meet this week to discuss relations with Libya. To put it bluntly the matter has been put on the back burner. The Government do not want the debate, because a Minister would have to come to the meeting and be cross-examined by the members of the Committee. Something curious is going on here.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman and the House know, an informal notice is a means of notification. It is informal until there has been formal notification of the matter.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. It seems curious that, when the Leader of the House announced the business for this week he apparently—according to *Hansard*—mentioned the business for Wednesday 21 October in the announcement of this week's business. He subsequently made a second statement about the business including that for the week of Wednesday 21 October. It seems an odd way to announce things. I wonder whether, when the Leader of the House made that statement he said "Wednesday" or "Wednesday 21 October".

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Mr. Marlow. Is it further to that point of order?

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): It is further to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and your ruling. Supposing——

Madam Speaker: Order. If I have given a ruling, I do not take points of order retrospectively. I have given a ruling, and I understood that the Leader of the House wished to speak. He may well be able to clear the matter up for us.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Clearly, in the light of the points that have been made, it is sensible that I should say a word further to the point of order. In response to an informal request from an hon. Member, I carefully checked the words that I had in front of me, which, indeed, referred to Wednesday 21 October. I have no reason to doubt that I used those words, as recorded in *Hansard*. Obviously, I am sorry if it has given rise to some confusion among hon. Members; that is the last purpose that I had in mind.

Mr. Marlow: On a new point of order, Madam Speaker. Just supposing that members of the Government, who also happened to be Members of Parliament and of this honourable House, all voted one way this evening, or assuming that members of the Government, who also happen to be members of this House, were disproportionately present this evening when the voting took place, would you look upon that as a coincidence or something else?

Madam Speaker: I would look upon it as the sort of fairy story that I used to have read to me when I first joined my political party.

BILL PRESENTED

PRIVATE SECURITY (REGISTRATION)

Mr. Bruce George, supported by Mr. Robert Allason, Mr. David Atkinson, Mr. Menzies Campbell, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Ken Maginnis, Ms. Glenda Jackson, Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Mr. John Home Robertson, Sir Keith Speed, and Mr. Ken Livingstone presented a Bill to provide for the establishment of a Private Security Registration Council and to give that Council powers and functions for the regulation of firms offering private security services and of persons employed as private security agents; to require the registration of such firms and persons with the Council; to impose requirements upon such firms and persons; to make provision for training of persons employed as private security agents; to make provision for compensation to be paid in respect of inadequately insured death or injury arising from the activities of such firms and persons; to define offences and specify penalties; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 13 November and to be printed. [Bill 58.]

Sittings of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Patnick.]

4.43 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I hope that I can give some idea of the spirit in which I approach the debate by saying that I hope—subject, of course, slightly to the will of the House—to conform in my speech today with the recommendation in the report of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House that both Government and Opposition Front-Bench speeches should, if possible, be confined to 20 minutes. I shall do my best to restrict myself to that ration.

The purpose of today's debate is to provide an opportunity for the House to express its views on the report from the Committee so excellently chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). He brought to that task the experience acquired through many years of service in the House, including not only senior ministerial office but, not least, a time as Chief Whip. I remember that time clearly, because I was then probably the most junior Government Whip. I learned a great deal from my right hon. Friend. He now joins that select band whose name becomes so firmly associated with a report that almost no one can remember its formal title. Indeed, if all goes as he would wish, there may even be pressure to erect a statute to him in some part of the building. *[Interruption.]* I am not making a commitment this afternoon.

The previous debate on 2 March gave the previous House an early opportunity to express its views on the report. In replying on that occasion, my predecessor, to whom I also pay tribute for his initiative in proposing the appointment of the Committee and his input to it, said that there would need to be further detailed consideration of the recommendations. But he also underlined his view that the opinion of the new House would also have to be taken into account before any firm decisions were made about how the issue should be taken forward. I believe that he was right to express that view.

After all, this Parliament is barely three months old. There have been many changes in its membership. New Members are still coming to grips with the premises, the customs and the existing procedures. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale said in opening the earlier debate:

"when considering altering parliamentary procedure, it is important to seek to do it on the basis of concensus".—[*Official Report*, 2 March 1992; Vol. 205, c. 74.]

That is an important point. The proposals in the report are more far-reaching than is realised in some quarters. I shall develop that point later. However, I make no apology for maintaining the view that the new House of Commons should have the chance to have a wide-ranging discussion before we attempt to table substantive motions.

It is all the more important that the new House should discuss the matter because, as my predecessor said in his evidence to the Committee and in his speech in the previous debate, changes will not work without the co-operation of the House as a whole. If they are to work in practice, it is essential that the whole House understands what is involved in operating on the basis proposed by the report and that we can be sure that there is support throughout the House for making the changes work. However, we can draw some encouragement—perhaps a lot of encouragement—from the fact that the report of the Committee was unanimous.

Before I turn to specific recommendations, it may be helpful to give a brief over-view of the report. The recommendations go far wider than merely reducing the hours that the House sits. In an attempt to find a reduction in hours which could be delivered, the Committee has made recommendations affecting the timing and handling of Government business as well as Private Members' business.

The most important of the Committee's recommendations could be crisply listed as follows: to sit on Wednesday from 10.30 am without interruptions, to take Private Members' business other than Private Members' Bills until 2.30 pm; to take 10 Fridays a session as non-sitting days, to provide much-needed extra time for MPs' constituency duties; to finish at 7 pm on the Thursdays before the non-sitting Fridays; to take only non-controversial business—a point which raises difficult issues—after 7 pm on all other Thursdays; to restrict fairly considerably the circumstances in which the House would sit beyond 10 pm on any day, even on Government business; and to provide for the automatic timetabling of all Government Bills.

It may be helpful if I indicate how I hope to proceed. I propose in the next few minutes to set out, I hope in reasonable detail, the Government's thoughts on the recommendations in the report. I will then, as I hope I need hardly say, pay close attention to the views expressed in the debate, with a view to identifying a basis for agreement, which can then be discussed through the usual channels, with the aim of being in a position to table some substantive resolutions at an early stage after the House resumes in the autumn. I should, however, emphasise that many of the recommendations would involve complex Standing Order amendments which may not be easy to frame.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Is the Leader of the House sure that he interpreted the report correctly when he said that it proposed the timetabling of all Bills? Surely the proposal was for timetabling Bills other than those taken on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Newton: My understanding is that the report envisaged timetabling of Government Bills generally. If the right hon. Gentleman, who is experienced in such matters, takes a different view, undoubtedly he will elaborate it during the debate.

The House may appreciate my next point, which is partly directed at those who examine our proceedings from outside. It seems important to view the report and the matters with which it deals not simply as a question of shorter sitting or working hours. There is far more to it than the prospect of earlier rising, some morning sittings, or what in some quarters might be seen as Fridays off. The proposals in the report need to be seen in the context of the overall demands made on Members of Parliament.

A Member's time is not spent solely in the Chamber, in Committee or at Westminster—important though those aspects of the role are. As the report makes clear, one significant change in the pressure on the average Member has occurred in what is expected of him or her in constituency work and duties. We are talking about the

balance between different aspects of the job, rather than seeking to make it entail less work overall, and it is important that we should emphasise that in our discussions.

The report draws attention to the principle of balance between Government, Opposition and Back Benchers. I emphasise in particular, as does the report, that the Government of the day, whatever their colour, should have a reasonable expectation of getting their reasonable business. That means that they must have sufficient time, or procedures must be so arranged, for them to implement the commitments on which they are elected, and their programme as set out in the Queen's Speech each Session.

But that—this is no less important—must be balanced by the right of the House, groups in it, Members and, in particular, of the Opposition to have a proper opportunity to scrutinise and, where they wish, to oppose Government business, especially legislation.

Our procedures rest on a balance between those considerations. It is a delicate balance, in which the use of time and the scope for delay have sometimes been seen as the Opposition's main weapons. It follows that that change must be carefully balanced if we are to maintain the basic democratic values which our procedures exist to protect.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): It is not merely the main weapon. Often, as the right hon. Gentleman knows very well, it is the only weapon of the Opposition. Is that not a charter for the castration of the Opposition?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is very familiar with the procedures and techniques of the House. He is expressing a view about one of the propositions underlying the report. I note that, and shall be interested to find out whether it is followed by other hon. Members from either side of the House.

Thus the Government's basic approach to the report is that, if the legitimate need of the elected Government to progress and have enacted their legislative programme and to secure their other essential business is accepted, and appropriately reflected in the procedures of the House, the Government would be more than happy for the working practices of the House to become more civilised—I suppose that that is one way to describe it—in terms of hours of work, and in other ways.

The central equation cannot be ignored, however, and the House needs to go into that with its eyes open and to appreciate the implications. If there is to be less time, proceedings will have to be more structured, debate may be less open-ended and the scope for obstruction could become more limited—which picks up the point that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) just raised.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is not the biggest obstacle to changing the hours in this place, perhaps to 9 to 5, the fact that more than 200 Members of Parliament—who happen mainly to be Tory Members—have moonlighting jobs, making money in the boardrooms and the law courts? They cannot afford Parliament regularly to start at 9 in the morning because they want to be able to come here when it suits them, when they have finished in the City or the law courts, and to vote at 7 or 10 o'clock. That is the basic problem. It is not a question of merely playing around at the edges. The real problem is stopping moonlighting. Then we could get some regular hours.

Mr. Newton: It will not surprise the House to know that I do not readily accept the hon. Gentleman's interpretation of the reasons for our existing procedures. Incidentally, it is also important to recognise, although it is not universally the case in all Parliaments which might be compared with this one, that members of the Executive—Ministers—are also Members of Parliament, it is an important feature of the way in which our Parliament and our democracy work, and has some relationship to the issue that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) raised.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Some of us are getting heartily sick of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) constantly talking such rubbish. Most Conservative Members work just as hard as he does—[HON. MEMBERS: "Harder."] Most of us work harder in one respect at least, because most of us are members of Committees. I am on five Committees, whereas the hon. Member for Bolsover refuses to serve on them.

Mr. Skinner: I was on one last week.

Mr. Harris: That must have been an exception. In general, the hon. Member for Bolsover refuses to serve on Committees, which is where much of the work of the House is done.

Mr. Skinner: That is not true.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that it was clear from the response to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) that many hon. Members, certainly on the Conservative side of the House, have some sympathy with his arguments. My aim in responding to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was to seek—so far without avail—to keep the temperature down in the interests of rational discussion of the proposals.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I shall give way to the hon. Member.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Janet Fookes): Order. I am not clear to whom the Leader of the House was giving way, as an hon. Gentleman rose from each side.

Mr. Newton: I intended to give way to the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett).

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Surely my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) raised an important matter. Many Members of the House, principally those on the Conservative Benches, have outside employment, and that is one reason why there is so much opposition to morning sittings. Will the Leader of the House give his view on the widespread use of outside employment by Members of Parliament?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to my remarks in response to the hon. Member for Bolsover a few moments ago. It is by no means the case that Members on one side of the House alone combine a range of different roles, both in respect of their position as Members of Parliament and in other ways. By and large, those different responsibilities interact in a way that benefits the House and the service that Parliament provides.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that today is significant because the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has graced us with his

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

presence, even though it is out of prime television time? Does my right hon. Friend think that the hon. Gentleman's constituents might be interested to note that, whereas most of us are prepared to work in Select and Standing Committees and to spend time researching our contributions to them, all that the hon. Member for Bolsover looks forward to is £30,000 a year for a nine-to-five job?

Mr. Newton: As I said, one of my hopes is to try to keep the temperature down in the debate, although that hope looks a little forlorn. I hope that my hon. Friend will understand if I do not follow him. Nevertheless, I note his remarks carefully.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I appreciate the desire of the Leader of the House to keep the temperature low. If we were designing Hours for the House, starting afresh in a modern parliamentary democracy, which is what we are supposed to be, is it conceivable that we would come up with the antiquated, anachronistic and ridiculous hours that we now sit?

Mr. Newton: It is difficult for me to say. I plead the basic proposition that I sought to make in response to his hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), who is sitting beside the hon. Gentleman. Experience from various quarters such as local government, business, trade union activities and being a teacher —whatever it may be—is a considerable help to Members when they perform their duties in the House, as constituency Members of Parliament and in other ways. It would not be sensible if the continuation of that experience were cut off as soon as people became Members of the House. Our proceedings would be the loser if we went down that path.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Newton: I shall, but one of the reasons why I wryly referred to my aim of keeping my speech to 20 minutes is being revealed—that interventions make it singularly difficult to keep speeches to the length that hon. Members would wish.

Mr. Flynn: The Leader of the House has said that hon. Members on both sides of the House have outside interests. It is worth putting on record the fact that in the last Parliament, 14 per cent. of Labour Members had outside paid interests, whereas 85 per cent. of eligible Conservative Members had such interests. Does the Leader of the House agree that the situation would be clarified if hon. Members were to declare not only their interests but also the amounts of money received?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that what the hon. Gentleman has just said adds hugely to our debate. I am tempted to observe that it merely confirms my view that Conservative Members are of exceptional value.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Not to us.

Mr. Newton: I accept that they are not of exceptional value to the Labour Chief Whip, but they are of exceptional value in the role that they play in the House. In saying so, I do not seek in any way to diminish the important contribution that the hon. Gentleman and many others play, with their particular types of expertise drawn from outside.

One of the keys to the balance that the Committee sought to establish is the automatic timetabling of Government legislation. I stress the word "timetabling" as it is important that this should be seen not as a guillotine —which is how we have traditionally thought of such a device—but rather as an attempt to agree, in a prescribed way, a systematic scheduling of the stages of a Bill to ensure organised debate and effective scrutiny. That might or might not mean less time overall being spent on any particular measure than is spent at present, but it could be expected—at least in the minds of those who made the proposal—to be more productive time. In particular, it could be expected to ensure that all parts of a Bill were examined in Committee in a way that our existing procedures have not always managed to achieve.

If the House is serious about reforming sitting hours, it must recognise that this proposal is an essential element in the balance of the whole report, and therefore crucial to an overall package of change.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): With regard to automatic timetabling and the proposed change in hours, as well as other matters, can my right hon. Friend give the House an undertaking that consideration of the ratification of the Maastricht treaty will not influence the timing of the Government's recommendations? If it is proposed that there should be automatic timetabling, will that be subject to a vote in the House? If not, the Maastricht treaty might be timetabled automatically, without the House being able to express a view on it.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend may wish to develop that point in the course of the debate. Clearly, he may regard this as a reason for having reservations about the proposal. Indeed, for all I know, his reservations may well go wider than the measure to which he has referred. My purpose today is to describe the approach that the Government bring to the report, without seeking to pre-empt points about timing or about the detailed discussions that would have to take place to overcome some of the reservations that are being expressed in interventions.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I urge the Leader of the House to avoid the trap that he seems to be setting for himself, or—to put it another way—the threat that he is issuing to the House. He seems to be saying that, if there can be no agreement on automatic timetabling, there can be no other changes—in other words, that this package must stand or fall as a whole. The nature of the report and of the changes makes it clear that that is not the case. In saying so, I express a personal view. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I am in favour of the timetabling of legislation. However, I should not like him to suggest that no changes could be made unless there were agreement on automatic timetabling, insisted upon by the Government.

Mr. Newton: If there is any misunderstanding about that, I should like to clear it up. I do not want to put words in to the mouths of the report's authors, but I think that it is fair to say that the report, including all its recommendations—for example, those about hours, non-sitting days and the handling of business on Thursdays—sees this as a balanced package between timetabling and the proposals as a whole. That is not the

same as saying that, if it were not possible to make progress on timetabling—some reservations have already been stated very clearly—nothing at all could be done. Clearly, however, one's view of the balance of the report as a whole would be affected.

Mr. Shore: In relation to this point and the point about the Maastricht treaty, paragraph 69 of the report says explicitly:

> "Existing practice would continue in respect of bills taken in committee of the whole House."

That is an acknowledgement of the importance of Bills that are taken on the Floor of the House, which generally —at least, often—are constitutional measures.

Mr. Newton: I acknowledge the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes.

I recognise that the issue with which we are dealing is a controversial one, although, in the light of what has taken place in the last few minutes, it is hardly necessary to say so. Clearly, there has been growing support for a different approach to timetabling—scheduling, if that word is preferred—in recent years. Some might say—at least one hon. Member has implied this already—that such an approach could make things much easier for the Government. Whether or not that proves to be the case, there will certainly be some who see it as constituting good grounds for caution, as has been amply demonstrated in the past few minutes. However, it would certainly make things better for the House if that were what hon. Members wanted and if the House were prepared to make it work.

As the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has said, in his memorandum to the Committee he expressed his personal support—I emphasise that it was personal support—for the automatic timetabling of all Government Bills. In the debate of 2 March, the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), who was a distinguished member of the Jopling Committee and whom I am glad to see in his place, was broadly supportive, but clearly he recognised the dilemma on which we have been touching during the last few minutes, while the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) was supportive with some reservations. The Liberal Democrats too, in their memorandum to the Committee, favoured the proposal. As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said in the earlier debate, we must face up to this issue.

We have some reservations about the alternative mechanisms proposed in the report for deciding the timetable of a Bill, but if the general proposal for automatic timetabling were to find favour with the House, the details could be considered further, with a good deal of discussion through the usual channels, before substantive motions were tabled. Clearly this is a difficult and sensitive issue.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): If there were to be timetabling of a kind acceptable to the Opposition of the day, it could be detrimental to the Government, as Standing Committees could then discuss issues which, because of the traps set by Ministers, would not be reached. I say so as one who has been on both sides of these arguments. If there were timetables, and if we were able to discuss and vote on the controversial issues, that would be a benefit, rather than a detriment, to the House.

Mr. Newton: The whole House will listen with respect to the views of the right hon. Gentleman, who has a great deal of experience, not least as a Minister piloting Bills through the House. Perhaps it is not proper for me to say so, but he may himself have employed some of the devices that he associates with current Ministers. In any case, he illustrates the fact that this is by no means a simple or clear-cut issue. There is a balance to be considered, and it is very important that we get the detail right—something that I do not suggest I can do in a sentence or two this afternoon.

I turn now to the other recommendations in the report, which can be conveniently grouped in four categories—those dealing with the parliamentary week; those concerned with procedures on Bills; a group of three dealing with subordinate legislation; and a fourth group of a more miscellaneous character.

Taking the first group in the context that I have already emphasised—that is to say, a balanced package—I have no difficulty in expressing support for the principle of a 10 o'clock finish as the norm. I do, however, doubt that it would be right for this to be achieved by the rigidity of a formal resolution or Standing Order, and I must, in particular, make clear to the House our reservations about the Committee's specific recommendation that suspension of the 10 o'clock rule be restricted to primary legislation taken as first Order of the Day. That would leave the way open for that first business to be talked out until 10 pm and any other business on the Order Paper scheduled for, say, 7 pm, would fall. That would plainly be very difficult for the Government to accept.

If the House is to rise at 10 pm, it should normally be accepted that the business scheduled for the day, agreed through the usual channels and announced to the House, should be completed by 10 pm on that day. It follows that, in our view, the Government should retain the right to ask the House to continue after 10 pm with Government business entered into before 10 pm. Having said that, I sense that the point to which the report attached most importance in this regard was to bring an end to the practice of scheduling completely new business to start after 10 pm. We can certainly accept that aim, when taken with the report's proposal for automatic referral of affirmative statutory instruments to a Standing Committee, which should in itself serve to make much of the business currently done after 10 pm unnecessary other than in exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The right hon. Gentleman just said that affirmative statutory instruments would be considered in a Standing Committee. At the moment, such Committees meet on Wednesday morning in the main, and the report also proposes that the House should sit on Wednesday mornings. Does that mean that those serving on Committees dealing with the merits of statutory instruments would be denied the opportunity to be in the Chamber?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman raises just the type of point that we should, sensibly, consider in the debate. Perhaps his point underlines my reasons for believing that a general debate in which such problems could be explored should take place before we sought to table substantive resolutions. The hon. Gentleman's point is an obvious one that should be considered carefully.

[Mr. Newton]

Thus, with what are quite limited provisos, we would be happy to see 10 pm become the regular finishing time for public business. Whether it worked out like that in practice is for the House to determine. However, with good sense and a spirit of co-operation on all sides, I see no reason why it should not.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Newton: I will give way, but, obviously, my speech will be rather extended.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it not indicative that the proposals come from a Government in which almost uniquely in British political history, neither the Prime Minister nor many of his senior colleagues have ever been in opposition? That has not happened before. They do not know what it is like to be in opposition. I can see the attraction from the point of view of those on the Government Front Bench of streamlining things to make it easier, but if it were to happen that they had the duty of opposing and really meant what they said, rather than going through the motions and posturing, which is a fat lot of use to anyone, would they then take a similar attitude?

I beg the Leader of the House to understand that those of us who have been in opposition for a long time also have feelings about this. Those who have occupied the Government Benches for so long—uniquely in the case of the Prime Minister, who has never been in opposition—should understand precisely what an adversarial system is about.

Mr. Newton: As it happens, I have clear memories of my time in opposition between 1974 and 1979. It is because of my consciousness of the type of point that the hon. Gentleman has raised that I have gone to some length to emphasise in that part of my speech that I have so far been able to deliver that there is a balance to be struck, with consideration on both sides. I am not in any way dismissing, nor have I sought to do so far, the type of considerations that the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

I can give general support to the proposal for Wednesday morning sittings, although, as the report acknowledges, the structure of those proposed sittings needs to be carefully considered. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has thrown in another fact that needs to be considered. The Committee recognised the need to avoid Divisions and for that reason, rightly in the Government's view, decided that private Members' Bills should not be taken on such mornings.

The Committee did, however, propose that opposed private business might be taken at a morning sitting, and while I understand the reasoning behind that I see it as presenting rather more difficulty. Opposed private business is by defintion liable to be controversial, with the prospect of Divisions. Although the Committee recognised this and suggested that Divisions could be deferred to a later hour, I doubt whether that would generally be thought to be very satisfactory, and it could undoubtedly be potentially disruptive of the main part of the parliamentary day. I think that we should be looking to establish a position in which business taken at morning sittings is self-contained.

In any event, following the recent changes in the arrangements for dealing with private Bills, the House may feel that this is not the time to propose further changes to the Standing Orders relating to private business. The number of private Bills brought before Parliament is likely to decrease significantly following the recent reforms, and at the very least it would surely be wise to await experience of the new regime before considering whether any further step is needed.

The counterpart to the introduction of morning sittings on Wednesdays is the proposal that 10 Fridays in each session should be designated as non-sitting days. We are ready to accept that recommendation. We find it more difficult to endorse in the same way the other proposal with which it is associated, namely that on Thursdays before non-sitting Fridays the House should rise at 7 pm, which would bring us very close to a position in which for 10 weeks a year the House was reduced to a three-day week for the handling of Government business. Obviously, however, there would be scope, in discussions through the usual channels, to consider the business which might be taken on such Thursdays, with a view to minimising the demands made on Members. I acknowledge that the hon. Member for Bolsover has already referred, from a sedentary position, to the difficulty of deciding, as the report suggests, what is non-contentious or non-controversial. At least, that is what I took him to mean.

The second group of recommendations, which deals with the procedure on Bills—in particular, Ways and Means and money resolutions, and ten-minute Bills—is largely acceptable, subject to the detailed points I have already made about automatic timetabling of Government Bills and the handling of opposed private business.

The recommendations relating to subordinate legislation are generally sensible and right. In particular, we welcome automatic referral upstairs to statutory instruments. The only significant reservation that I must express in this connection relates to the proposal, relevant to what has happened in the past few minutes, that Front-Bench speeches should be formally limited to 20 minutes or 15 minutes in debates on statutory instruments and European Community documents. However desirable such economy may be—I have already made it clear that I am willing to endorse it on a "best endeavours" basis—the potential difficulties of a formal rule are obvious. They have become even more so in the past few minutes.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I wonder whether hon. Members would now let me get on.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I just rose to prove the point—it is made.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. Friend has suggested, according to the report, that statutory instruments should go automatically upstairs. Often, those statutory instruments are controversial and the House would prefer to debate them on the Floor. How, in my right hon. Friend's opinion, should they be dealt with?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend raises a point that needs to be considered as we study the details of the report. That was precisely the type of point that I hoped would be elicited as a concern among some Members during the debate. The purpose of the debate is to address such concern. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising it.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) should recall that I said that it would be difficult to accept the specific recommendations about a formal 20-minute limitation on Front-Bench speeches precisely because that would constitute a grave inhibition on the type of exchanges that have taken place in the past few minutes. If that is what the House wishes, I would certainly not wish to put a block on it.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): May I refer my right hon. Friend to paragraph 74 of the report:

"It will, of course, continue to be possible to debate the more important and controversial affirmative instruments . . . on the floor of the House."

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that clarification, but I believe that the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) raised, which he might seek to develop if he has the opportunity to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, relates to what mechanism should be used to determine what is or is not controversial and important. My hon. Friend is concerned about the problem of definition when determining what business should be taken in which way. We should not disguise the fact that there is scope for disagreement and difficulty, because different Members take different views about the importance and controversiality of particular proposals.

Of the other proposals in the report—those which I described earlier as miscellaneous—I judge that those of most interest to the House would be those relating to the notice and timing of recesses, and the making of business statements to embrace two weeks rather than one.

On the first of the issues, I need hardly say that I understand and sympathise with the wish for greater certainty and earlier notice of recesses, but it would be wrong for me to disguise from the House the fact that the setting of immutable dates many months in advance would give rise to problems similar to those I referred to earlier in relation to specific commitments to a 10 o'clock finish to Government business—that is to say, of strengthening too much the scope for mere obstruction of business. Dates that had to be changed could be the worst of all worlds for everyone.

I certainly can and will seek to build on the steps already taken by my predecessors in recent years to try to give the House an earlier and clearer indication of when it is intended that it should rise for the next recess, as was perhaps most clearly exemplified by what my immediate predecessor did when Easter fell late, to give an early indication that the recess would include the week preceding Easter.

I am of course conscious that the date for the summer recess is of particular concern, especially but by no means only to Members from Scottish constituencies with children at school, whose holidays fall earlier than those in England and Wales. I hope that what we have been able to do this year, in terms of both timing and announcement, may be taken as an earnest of good intentions to move as far as I can in the direction the House would wish.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Newton: In the light of the number of times that I have given way already, it would now be appropriate for me to seek to bring my speech to a conclusion.

Similarly, although I well understand the wish to see business statements covering a longer period ahead, I am also conscious that a situation in which business was announced on a basis which would inevitably be much more provisional that at present, with a correspondingly much greater risk that it would have to be changed, could prove even more inconvenient than the present convention. Of course, an overall package of reform may reduce the range of uncertainties and make it easier to plan over a longer period with reasonable certainty; but for the moment I think that I must confine myself to an understanding of "best endeavours", and in particular aim for rather more notice of what might be called "setpiece" occasions.

In seeking to set the scene for this debate today, I necessarily sounded some notes of caution, and not least thought it right to emphasise to the House, as I must again in concluding, the central importance of the balance that will have to be struck between the report's proposal on timetabling and many, if not all, of its other recommendations. But I hope that it is clear that I have done so in a constructive and positive spirit that, with co-operation on both sides of the House, can pave the way, in the wake of this debate, for important and worthwhile procedural reform in the interests of Members, the House as a whole and, above all, the essential democratic process which we are all here to serve.

5.22 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): My view that Parliament needs reform is widely shared not only in the House but increasingly outside the House, too. It is in the interests of the reputation of the House of Commons that we should make a serious attempt at reform.

I submitted a memorandum of evidence to the Jopling Committee. I congratulate my constituency neighbour, the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), on managing to secure a unanimous report. I shall not bore the House by reading out all my views but shall simply rehearse one or two to point out that the report falls far short of my views and recommendations to the Committee. I favoured morning sittings on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays; the ending of business at 9 pm from Monday to Wednesday and at 7 pm on Thursdays; no sittings on Fridays; a fixed parliamentary year; and the timetabling of legislation. I made many other recommendations for change.

The House sits for more days, and more hours on more days, than almost any other western democratic legislature. However, there is no evidence that we are conspicuously more effective at checking the Executive, scrutinising public expenditure or stopping Government legislation going through. I can say that with feeling, having spent seven years as shadow Environment Secretary dealing with numerous large and controversial Bills.

In the 1988 parliamentary Session, for example, environmental legislation took up one third of the parliamentary work load in the House, and it was not much different in earlier years. Of the 1,783 hours and six minutes—for what they are worth—for which the House sat, 606 hours were spent discussing environment business and my hon. Friends and I dealt with virtually all that legislation.

[Dr. John Cunningham]

Almost all the major Bills that one can recall were guillotined sooner or later. The housing finance Bill, the abolition of the Greater London Council and metropolitan counties, many other local government finance Bills, the poll tax Bill and water privatisation all inevitably ran into the guillotine procedure. That was not because hon. Members were filibustering—we were not. I gave up the idea of speaking for its own sake in this place long ago. I favour more effective scrutiny of the Executive, better-quality checks and balances, not simply of the quantity of time spent in this place, whether in the Chamber or in Committee.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): My first year in the House was 1988, and I served, as the hon. Gentleman probably recalls, on the Standing Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill. We sat many a late night in the Committee Room for six or more weeks before a guillotine came down on that Bill. We then reached the stage when several hon. Members like myself, who had reservations about various parts of the Bill, were able to start debating many of the issues in later parts of the Bill. Would not it be much better to guillotine all Bills from the beginning so that hon. Members who support the Government would not have to sit silently listening to the first six or eight clauses being exhaustively debated by Opposition Members alone before they, too, can discuss the Bill?

Dr. Cunningham: I shall return to timetabling in a moment. First I wish to make two or three general points.

Many of my constituents and the people with whom I discuss the affairs in the Chamber agree that the antiquity of our proceedings and the inadequacy of the facilities to help us deal with those proceedings are simply bringing Parliament into disrepute. People do not regard this place as effective and it becomes less and less attractive to many people, particularly women, to want to try to operate under the existing rules. It has been my strongly held view for many years that we should do more to attract women into the House.

Improving our procedures can make us more effective watchdogs of the Executive, which is one of our principal reasons for being here, but also more effective in representing our constituencies and the individual constituents who come to us for redress. I make no apology for being in favour of reform.

Mr. Barnes: How can hon. Members act as watchdogs when we are about to go into recess for three months? Avenues of scrutiny and the pursuit of grievances on behalf of constituents will not be available to us. Instead of a three-month break, why do not we spread six or seven of those weeks throughout the year as "constituency weeks"? We would then not have an excessive gap when we cannot keep the Executive in check. The Prime Minister now has the presidency of the European Community for six months and we cannot ask simple questions about it for three months.

Dr. Cunningham: I say this with some deference to my hon. Friend, but if interventions last as long as that we shall all end up making very long speeches from the Dispatch Box.

I do not accept my hon. Friend's basic premise. I do not accept that the work that I do as a Member of Parliament stops because the House of Commons is not sitting. I do not accept for a moment that, if I am not present in the Chamber, I cannot write a letter, demand a meeting with a Minister or take a deputation to see people in Whitehall.

I shall say this as humbly as I can. I remember when Labour was in government—my memory is as good as that—and I had the privilege of serving as a Minister. It is often far more difficult for a Minister to deal with well-researched, well-informed, well-constructed letters from parliamentary colleagues than it is for him to deal with questions at the Dispatch Box. I do not accept that I can act effectively on behalf of my constituents only if the House is in session.

Furthermore, I do not accept that our proceedings are effective only if they take place in the Chamber. That is why I am in favour of more business being dealt with in Committee. The lessons learned from the development of Select Committee work over the past few years have led to an increase in the effective scrutiny of Government Departments, public expenditure and Ministers' conduct of business through Select Committee procedures.

When I became a Member of Parliament in 1970, I volunteered to be a Select Committee member. Some of my colleagues thought that rather odd, if not foolhardy; but I served on a Select Committee for six years. I enjoyed it, and I learnt a great deal about the behaviour of Ministers and civil servants in Whitehall and the tricks that they play. That stood me in great stead. I believe that the House's Select Committee work has been one of its successes. At the time, many people opposed it on the ground that it would diminish the effectiveness of Parliament and take too much important business away from the Floor of the House, but I do not believe that that has happened.

We shall study with care what the Leader of the House has said. He has read a good deal into the record about the Government's attitude to the proposed changes. I am speaking for myself, but I hope that it will be possible for us to agree a way forward. I accept the argument of Committee members, and others on both sides of the House, that unless there is a broad consensus in favour of change, no change will come about. It was, after all, Conservative Back Benchers who wrecked the Crossman changes which were introduced in the 1960s.

Mr. Dalyell: I was the late Dick Crossman's parliamentary private secretary at the time, and I recall that that was done not so much by Conservative Back Benchers as by his Cabinet colleagues. That is another story, but I know quite a lot about it. My hon. Friend need go no further than Lord Callaghan for a explanation: he knows that what I have said is true.

Can my hon. Friend name a single crunch issue in regard to which a Select Committee has been really effective? What happened in the Westland case? At the end of the day, hon. Members gave in to Leon Brittan. Ultimately, party always comes before Government. Arrangements were altered when a guillotine could not be secured on the Floor of the House, and certain Bills were affected, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will recall—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions have become progressively longer. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is now becoming a speech.

Dr. Cunningham: As I remember, at the end of the Westland affair, Leon Brittan resigned. My hon. Friend's claim that the inquiry had no effect, or that its only consequence was that hon. Members gave in to the Minister, does not accord with historical facts. I believe that two Cabinet Ministers bit the dust. I do not attribute all that to the work of the Select Committee, but to say that nothing happened is to play fast and loose with the facts.

Let me deal in more detail with the issue of timetabling. I am clear in my own mind, on the basis of my own experience, that if we had agreed timetables, scrutiny of the legislation would have been at least as effective. As a result of an enforced guillotine, reams of Bills were never discussed in Committee by either side. That is the truth, and everyone knows it. I do not accept that timetables should be enforced by the Executive; there must be some agreement—on a Committee-by-Committee basis, through the establishment of an independent Committee or through the extension of an existing Committee's remit.

I want timetabling to include special evidence-taking sessions, so that Committees can call expert witnesses—that is already within the Standing Orders—before the application of a timetable. All that must be the subject of serious and careful negotiation. My hon. Friend the Opposition Chief Whip does not share my views; nor, for all I know, do most of his colleagues in the Whips' Office. However, I would join my hon. Friends in the Division Lobby to oppose an enforced timetable. There must be fairness between Government and Opposition.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend that the efficacy of Opposition scrutiny is part of the essence of parliamentary life. But how can he reconcile what he has said about the Standing Order arrangement—which would give the majority vote on Committees and timetabling to the Government—with what happens to some Bills? There is an arrangement between the usual channels, and a conversational agreement between hon. Members. Surely the great thing about the Standing Order arrangement is that the initiative is largely with the Opposition in Committees; the Government must produce a response. Surely, giving Governments power to provide an arrangement would diminish the power of the Opposition.

Dr. Cunningham: I do not agree. In my experience the initiative was not with the Opposition. Most Secretaries of State—or more commonly, their Ministers—came to Committee stages with a premeditated plan for a guillotine after a certain number of hours of discussion. They did not much care what took up those hours; they simply wanted them to accumulate. We all know that that is the truth. There is not really any argument about it. I have been here 22 years, which is far too long for me to pretend that the system worked in any other way. I do not see why we should disguise the truth from ourselves when we are talking about trying to make our proceedings more effective.

If we are to improve our scrutiny and effectiveness, and if we are to allow ourselves time for further research and better briefing, we need to do something about the hours the House sits. Let me give an example that highlights the weakness of our proceedings. Outside bodies such as pressure groups usually know far more about impending legislation than Opposition Members do. That is partly because Members of Parliament have not sufficient time and/or resources to ensure that they are thoroughly briefed and prepared. For that reason also, I believe that our procedures are in need of change.

The Leader of the House said that he hoped for a quiet afternoon. I never thought that likely; it was a bit of wishful thinking by the right hon. Gentleman. It is clear from our proceedings so far—and we have barely started—that these modest proposals will generate great heat—perhaps more heat than light, I regret to say. In general I endorse the Committee's approach, although I would not agree with every dot and comma. It is good that the Leader of the House mentioned specific proposals for change. They will have to be considered in greater detail than this afternoon allows—but I am certain about one thing: I am on the side of the reformers.

5.39 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): When we debated the report on 2 March I spoke for 18 minutes and I shall try to be reasonably brief today. I must begin this rerun debate by expressing my gratitude to the Committee members who worked so hard in the autumn and winter of last year and reported to the House earlier this year.

I remind the House that those who served on the Committee were distinguished: the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party, the chairman of the 1922 Committee, the Chairman of the Procedure Committee and the former Liberal Chief Whip. Our body of members was thus representative of those in positions of influence, especially on the Back Benches. I was particularly pleased that we produced a unanimous report.

I should like to repeat some of the important remarks of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), which also appear in the report. This House sits for more days and more hours than any other Parliament in the larger democracies. Our average finishing time in recent years has been almost precisely midnight. It is therefore clear to me, as it was to the Committee, that something needs to be done, because the present state of affairs is not satisfactory.

This debate is different from the March debate, because Front-Bench spokesmen on both sides have been much more forthcoming about the Committee's report. I am grateful to them for their general support this afternoon.

To judge from the speech by the Leader of the House, I would estimate that the Government have endorsed about 80 per cent. of the Committee's recommendations. The hon. Member for Copeland was good enough to say that he supported the report in general. It would be absurd to put a figure on his endorsement because, understandably, he did not go into detail. Nevertheless, I am grateful to the Government for their large measure of acceptance of our recommendations.

I draw the attention of the House to early-day motion 9 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick). It has attracted just short of 220 signatures—about a third of the membership of the House. It, too, endorses the Select Committee's report. A breakdown of that endorsement which the Library gave me last week showed 85 Government supporters and 110 Labour party supporters. I therefore see a great deal of support in the House for our report.

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

I welcome the fact that the Leader of the House told us that the Government will accept many points in the report, but I want to concentrate on the recommendations about which some doubt has been expressed.

My right hon. Friend referred to the difficulties of planning business if a set of time-buffers to Government or any other business is erected. I know that from experience. If we decide to bring business to a close at 10 pm precisely or to get up for the summer recess on 16 July, that offers the Opposition an irresistible temptation to drive the Government into the buffers to ensure that there is unfinished business when the buffers are reached. We all know that that is one of the Opposition's techniques; hence one of the techniques of the Government is not to erect the sort of buffers that provide such an irresistible temptation.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): They also appear to offer an irresistible temptation to their Lordships' House.

Mr. Jopling: Over the past year I have had enough problems with the procedures of this House not to get involved in all that.

Clearly, we want these changes. I agreed with my right hon. Friend that we do not want orders put on at 10 pm following a Second reading debate or an Opposition day —that represents totally new business beginning at 10 o'clock. We want that stopped as soon as possible.

Provided all Bills are timetabled sensibly, in line with the Committee's report, it should not often be necessary to continue Report stages on the Floor of the House after 10 pm. That may have to happen sometimes, but, with a sensible timetable system, it should usually be possible to bring a Report stage to a conclusion at or around 10 pm, obviating the need to go on through all or part of the night.

I understand the reluctance of the Government to agree never to sit beyond 10 o'clock, but we want from the Government statements of good will and of honest best endeavours—and we want the same from the Opposition and Back Benchers. Everyone is responsible for seeing that the general intentions of the House in this respect are abided by.

Mr. Spearing: I shall not deal with timetabling, although I take a view different from that of the right hon. Gentleman and of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham)—it is a Front Bencher against Back Bencher issue.

Did the Committee consider the simple device of the recommittal of Bills, whether guillotined or not, so that commitments and discussions that take place on the record but which are not necessarily a cause of division can take place on a recommitted Bill, not on the subsequent Report stage—which should nevertheless not be prejudiced?

Mr. Jopling: As I recall, the Committee did not spend much time on that, for the simple reason that none of its members was particularly attracted to that argument.

Mr. Dalyell: I marvel at what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. What was he doing about the 10 o'clock rule when he was Opposition Chief Whip? What was he doing to bleary-eyed Labour Ministers who were trying to get Government business through? It is all rather different, depending on whether one is in government or in opposition. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman believed any of this when he was Opposition Chief Whip.

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman has a particularly bad memory; I never was Opposition Chief Whip or even Opposition Deputy Chief Whip. For a short time I was the Opposition pairing Whip—a different matter altogether.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): What does my right hon. Friend say about the constitutional point that a strong Executive can control the legislature? The only real power of the legislature is on the timing of legislation and debate. The unpredictability of that timing is what gives Back Benchers and Parliament real power over the Executive.

Mr. Jopling: I shall deal precisely with that matter when I reach the part of my speech which deals with timetabling.

The Committee proposes 10 free Fridays. Many Members, and especially those whose constituencies are a long way from London, wanted clear and certain Fridays to enable them to make firm engagements in the constituencies weeks or months ahead without the risk of having to tell their constituents that they had to be in the House. Members who were keen to have free Fridays were also keen to have the freedom to return to their distant constituencies on Thursday evenings so that they had a clear start on Frieday morning.

Mr. Cryer: Will the 10 Fridays to be abolished be those devoted to Government business or private Members' business? With a few exceptions for highly controversial private Members' Bills, for which many people outside want to be sure that we are in the House, by and large most hon. Members can decide whether to be here on a Friday.

Mr. Jopling: The Committee proposes that the Wednesday morning sittings for private Members' business would almost exactly replace private Members' time on Fridays. Therefore, the 10 Fridays would come almost entirely out of Government time. I shall shortly turn to the issue of balance. I accept that a business statement on Thursday and perhaps another important statement would make it difficult to finish by 7 o'clock on Thursdays preceding non-sitting Fridays. There should be discussions on that. The Committee and many hon. Members found such moves desirable and worth while.

There is a proposal for a weekly statement giving details of business for two weeks ahead. I am glad to see that the Government Chief Whip is in his place. I entirely understand the difficulties of presenting such a business statement. I know from experience how often the business changes on Tuesday or Wednesday before an announcement on Thursday. I also know that that often happens at the request of the Opposition. That is why the Committee suggested that it should be done as an experiment to see how it works. The House may find that it does not work because of business announced for the second week having to be changed. However, I ask the Leader of the House to look at the matter again because, although it may not work, we should at least try it.

I shall now deal with timetabling. The Committee spent a great deal of time agonising over a package of proposals that would maintain the crucial balance between preserving the Government's right to get their business and giving the Opposition ample opportunity to oppose. Another consideration was the preservation of the rights

of private Members. The transfer of private Members' business to Wednesday mornings leaves it almost exactly intact but spread much more evenly over the parliamentary year.

The Committee believed that it had created a balanced package preserving those priorities. It would be unfair to one side or the other for the House to start to unpick that package by taking bits out and putting bits in. The Government cannot refuse to accept shorter hours and expect the package to remain fair. It would be unfair to the Opposition if the Government said that they would not accept a 10 o'clock finish as a general rule or 10 fewer Fridays. Conversely, it would be unfair to the Government if the Opposition refused to accept timetabling. The Committee looked carefully at the issue of balance and it would be unreasonable to remove bricks from the structure.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): As a former Chief Whip, does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the Government have a workable majority and not too many rebels, they will always get their business through? It is important to have a structured debate on all subjects giving ample time to the Opposition and to Government Back Benchers who are nowadays often inhibited because of time limitations.

Mr. Jopling: I endorse what my hon. Friend says and would have liked time to include the matter in my speech.

There is much work to be done in the recess. The usual channels have a great deal to agree if we are to find methods of changing the rules and introduce the carefully worked out and balanced package in the autumn. I wish them good fortune in their work. If there is the same good will between the usual channels that we had in our Committee, they will succeed—to the benefit of the House as a whole.

5.57 pm

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I shall be brief, as I spoke in the last debate on the report. I am disappointed that this is another open debate. I had hoped that we would be dealing with Government proposals which could be examined and amended so that we could make real progress in the interests of the House.

The past three months have provided ample evidence that the House needs to reform its procedures. There has been little business, but the House has continued to ramble on and sit for long hours when business has not merited it. As a result, the reputation of Parliament has suffered. Discussions this weekend about the manner in which the Whips have handled issues, the make-up of the Select Committees and the discussions surrounding the debate have done little to serve the interests of democratic accountability and the progress of real democracy.

I confess that I am not greatly enamoured of procedural debates. I am far more interested in debating issues and getting things done. However, I agreed to serve on the Committee because I believe that democracy is becoming almost a sham, and that people outside have less and less faith in the manner in which we conduct our proceedings. We have to take account of that and do something about it.

Changing and reforming the manner in which the Chamber operates will not make life less easy for the Opposition or make the Opposition more effective. I accept that I have been a Member of Parliament only since 1987, but during that time I have disliked the way in which the Government have used the guillotine. Their argument about the Opposition's use of time is irrelevant, because they have not been able to use time themselves. Neither have they discovered an alternative method of effective opposition, which is what is needed. I want to ensure that we have effective control of the Executive. In the past five years, neither Government nor Opposition Back Benchers have found an effective way to do that. Some of the policies which have resulted from that have not been in the interests of democracy. The poll tax is but one instance of that.

I shall also say something about the job of a Member of Parliament and why I do not accept that the way in which Fridays are organised means that one can make up one's own mind what one does on a Friday. Private Members' business is important, but I am forced by the House to make the decision that on a Friday I have to be in my constituency as much as possible. That is because I employ staff in the constituency and I cannot meet them unless I am there on a Friday. I also wish to visit establishments in the constituency which I can visit only on a Friday. That means that I cannot choose to be here to discuss the issues which are debated on a Friday.

I invite hon. Members to consider the pattern of participation in debates on Fridays. It is virtually exclusively the province of southern Members of Parliament and inevitably, therefore, of Tory Members. That is an abdication of the responsibility of democracy.

Mr. Dalyell: May I put a contrary point of view to my hon. Friend? She can go to Durham and do what is necessary in her constituency on a Friday but there are occasions when Scots and others are interested in a particular subject such as toxic waste, Rio or recycling, and have no other opportunity—at least those of us on the Back Benches——

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Those debates will be held in the mornings.

Mr. Dalyell: I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the late Dick Crossman when he introduced morning sittings and——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but it is not fair to the hon. Member who has the Floor when interventions become speeches, as I have said already this afternoon.

Ms. Armstrong: That is why I say that Fridays must be organised. I, too, am interested in recycling and toxic waste, but I am forced by the House to decide either to fulfil my commitments to my constituency or to take part in the debates. We should organise business so that such choice is not laid upon me. I want both to be involved in those debates and to be able to fulfil my commitments to my constituency.

I accept that things have changed, but constituents do not understand when we are not regularly in the constituency because they know that we can travel easily. We should organise our business here so that private Members' motions and Bills can be debated, but we should also ensure that that takes place in a system which recognises that a Member of Parliament's job is partly in Westminster and partly in their constituency. Furthermore, the House should be so organised that we

[Ms. Armstrong]

can make sure that Members of Parliament are much more likely to be listening to and among their constituents in normal times, with the result that we are much more reflective of their aims, aspirations and concerns. The more Members of Parliament are able to become normal —I doubt that we shall ever become totally normal—and the more that we are able to plan family and parliamentary life, the bettter we shall be in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of democracy.

It is because we are so unrepresentative—

Mr. Dalyell: Crap.

Ms. Armstrong: —that we do not attract more women Members and more Members from ethnic minorities. This will never be a nine-to-five job, but we must ensure that Members of Parliament can both have a family and be here, because that will encourage those people to come here.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) uses words that I would not use. If he looks at the women Members of Parliament representing northern and Scottish constituencies, he will see that the majority have no children. That means that we have accepted that doing this job means that we cannot do the job of being a proper parent. That decision does not have to be made by male Members of Parliament or by the partners of lady Members of Parliament. If the House is interested in democratic accountability, we need to have a much more representative and effective membership. I want our debates to be listened to with more care and consideration because people outside see us as being serious about the process of democracy and the issues that we are debating.

6.7 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): As the debate proceeds, two features stand out which I have learnt from 32 years in the House and nine years as Chairman of the Procedure Committee—longer, incidentally than any other Chairman this century. First, reform in this House proceeds exceeding slow. It makes a snail look like Nigel Mansell. Secondly, and of perhaps even greater importance, is the fact that the voices and actions of a few Members of Parliament have all too often frustrated reforms. Governments have seemed unwilling to act on procedural matters unless they could obtain almost 100 per cent.—or perhaps even 101 per cent.—acceptance of any changes that they wanted. I hope that that will not happen today.

I urge, I plead, I even demand, that the Leader of the House and the Prime Minister—both of whom I believe to be in favour of trying to streamline the way in which the House deals with public and private business—should get on with reform. That reform seems to receive approval of anyone to whom a Member of Parliament talks outside the Chamber. If Members talk to those who sign resolutions or to those who do the real work in the House, they will find that, with few exceptions, those people are in favour of the recommendations made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling).

Two years ago, during the summer of 1990, I told the then Leader of the Hosue—my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), now Secretary of State for Transport—that in the coming Session, in the autumn, the Procedure Committee was likely once more to investigate fully the sitting hours of the House and of its Committees. It was then put to me in the autumn of 1990 that the Government might wish to move on these matters themselves. As there was other work for the Procedure Committee to do, we pressed on with that.

Before Christmas 1990, and again in the early spring of 1991, I pressed the then Leader of the House because I wished to know what the Government intended to do. I reported the conversations to the members of the Procedure Committee and then reported to my right hon. Friend the then Leader of the House that I did not believe that they would brook any further delay and that we, the members of the Committee, would proceed unless the Government told us what they intended to do. This they then proceeeded to do, and in May 1991 they announced the membership of the Jopling Committee.

The Procedure Committee accepted the Government's position. It did so because the new Committee was to be established for a specific purpose and was composed of senior and very experienced Members. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has said, the new Committee proceeded with considerable speed. The objective was to produce a report which could be considered—we hoped that it could even be acted upon —before the general election. The first debate took place in March, and this debate takes place four months into the new Parliament. It is a debate on the Adjournment of the House, so there are no specific motions before us. I know that many Members expected the Government to take the necessary action to which the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) referred, which could be agreed by most hon. Members. If the relevant decisions were taken, we could start with the new procedures after we return from the summer recess.

The further delay means that we shall have to have a further debate and the Government will have to table the necessary motions. Is the House so decrepit that we have to lumber along like some tired old tyrannosaurus, hardly able to move forwards? The delay, however, goes much further than that. Exactly half the recommendations of the Jopling Committee are resubmissions or approvals of recommendations made by the Procedure Committee in reports produced in 1985, 1987 and 1989. The longer we wait, the longer it will be before anything concrete is done, and the more we are limited to talk, the greater the likelihood that nothing worth while will be obtained.

Two items in the Jopling report have already been referred for further consideration. I may sound unduly pessimistic, but experience has told me that all too frequently that reform becomes bogged down in inaction. That is not acceptable to the House now.

There are three matters which need to be emphasised, or even re-emphasised. With the normal time scale—that is, not when an early election has been called—over the past 25 years no piece of legislation announced by a Government in a Queen's Speech has failed to take its place on the statute book during the then current Session.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Only the Maastricht Bill.

Sir Peter Emery: I was talking about the past. I am not looking into the future, and I do not think that I can be asked to do so.

As I have said, no piece of legislation has been delayed because of the major weapon, as Oppositions believe it to

be, of time. The effectiveness of that so-called weapon has been exaggerated to a considerable extent, and I do not speak as someone who has not sat on the Opposition Benches; indeed, a third of my time in the House has been in Opposition.

I can think back, all too clearly perhaps, to the days when the then Conservative Opposition were discussing the legislation which followed "In Place of Strife". We sat in Committee for hour after hour. We began our afternoon deliberations at 4.30 pm, and we would break at midnight. We then continued until about 7 am. At midnight, a group of Conservative Members used to return to my flat, where we would have a quick beer and a shower. We would change our shirts and suits and then return to the Committee Room. We hoped thoroughly to annoy the Government by appearing to be in pristine condition and ready to go on for ever.

Did that really achieve anything? Did that really annoy the then Government so much that they were minded to open up "In Place of Strife"? The answer is that it did not. The real difficulty for the Labour Government was that the then Secretary of State, now Lady Castle, lost the confidence of her Cabinet colleagues. We claimed a victory, but that loss of confidence did not result from anything that the Conservative Opposition had done. If we are honest, we know that that is so. Let us therefore reject the concept that time in the hands of an Opposition has a marvellous effect in altering what Governments do. That is pure "Alice in Wonderland" thinking. In other words, it is not realistic.

Mr. Dalyell: There is another view. The arguments advanced by the Conservative Opposition against "In Place of Strife" created a situation in which James Callaghan could act as he did. Indirectly—I did not welcome this—that was a major factor in the lack of success of the Labour Government and ultimately in bringing them down.

Sir Peter Emery: If the hon. Gentleman believes that, he gives the then Opposition much more credit than any of us who considered the "In Place of Strife" legislation in Committee ever believed should be accorded to us. We know that what he suggested was not the case.

Secondly, there is the amendment that I moved in Committee on 18 February. The Committee seemed to be setting out to fit the same amount of work into a different shaped bottle. My amendment reads:

"Up to this point in our enquiry we have rearranged the times of sittings of the House as nearly as possible to retain the same number of working hours spent by Members at Westminster. We have devised methods that really do no more than rearrange the existing working hours of the House into a different working pattern, with little overall loss of parliamentary time. However, if we are to make any major alteration or a substantial change to the demands of Parliament itself, one needs to consider the work pattern of today's Members.

The Committee has accepted that the House sits longer than any other legislature and, in addition, the constituency demands on the Member have become considerable, growing beyond all previous comparisons. Therefore, a reduction in actual sitting time in Parliament, so that a Member may be more in his constituency, must not be interpreted as a decrease in the workload of the Member of Parliament. It is rather an acceptance of present day demands of the electorate to have the MP in his constituency able to consult more and more with constituents and so reflect the demands of a modern democracy."

The Committee did not have the time or the ability to consider that proposition if it was to report within the time scale of the previous Parliament. I believe, however, that the House will have to return to these issues. The demands on Members to be in their constituencies, to be seen in them and to be seen working within them, are so different now from 1959 or 1970. Demands have changed. Perhaps pavement politics has brought this about, but it is something that the House must consider.

The Committee's terms of reference precluded our considering the actual size of the membership of the House. Having 651 Members of Parliament makes us the second largest democratic national parliamentary assembly in the world—second only because Germany has brought together the east and west German Parliaments, but it is now taking steps to reduce its size. This House is too large, and there are too many Members of Parliament —*[Interruption.]* People say that it is impossible for the work load—*[Interruption.]* It is worth noting——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Too many seated interventions make it difficult for me to hear the Member who has the Floor. If we intend to make reforms, let us start with a little courtesy.

Sir Peter Emery: In talking about the work load of a Member of Parliament, it is interesting to consider the work loads of the leaders of the two main parties. The Leader of the Opposition has an electorate of 55,000; my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has 93,000. If we took my right hon. Friend's electorate as the average, we could reduce the membership of the House by almost 200. Many of our problems would then disappear—*[Interruption.]* It could be done quite easily if both sides announced that it was to happen in 10 years. Natural wastage and those Members coming up to retirement would then work their way through the system. As I have said many times, it is difficult for a chicken to vote for chicken pie, but if we want major reforms we must consider that proposal.

I wish to discuss the recommendations as a whole. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) has dealt with them seriatim. I wish to consider them as a package because there are balances and counter-balances within that package. There are ways in which the Opposition would benefit. When there is timetabling, the Opposition can call the tune on what is debated—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps I may finish my statement. As hon. Members who have served on special Committees know, when a timetable motion has been passed we consider how the time should be allocated. The Minister does not mind how it is allocated; it is the Opposition who decide how the time will be spent. The Opposition are given the power to decide what they want to debate.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I have served on a large number of Committees, but I cannot think of one in which the Opposition have not worked out, right from the start, how they want to allocate the time. That allocation may be disrupted as the Bill proceeds, because of developments and changes, but it would be an irresponsible Opposition who did not allocate time, at least in their mind, as the Bill proceeded. The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that that right to allocate time should be taken away from the Opposition and given to the Government.

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman has not listened to what I have said. He pays no attention to facts. It is true that when both sides go into Committee somebody—who is not too far away from the Chamber at this moment—has already decided when he needs the Bill out of Committee so that it can go to the other place. Every Minister, whichever party is in government, knows that. Provided that the Bill meets that time scale, the whole thing proceeds normally. If that does not happen, after a certain number of days of debate the Government introduce a timetable motion. It would be better if that timetable were imposed at the start of the proceedings, with the Opposition having a say from the start. It should not be left to the Government——

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I should like to confirm something that the hon. Gentleman said, but in the context of the poll tax Bill. We forced the guillotine on that because the Government wanted an early final day. At home one Sunday afternoon I wrote a timetable motion for the five-day Report stage, which was accepted without quibble by the Minister in charge once the guillotine had been accepted. The opposition had total control over what happened on Report, right down to the last hour. We were satisfied with that, but we were dissatisfied with the early introduction of a guillotine motion.

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman makes my case for me. That is why there are checks and balances in the packages of recommendations. They are necessary if we are to go ahead with reforms which make sense both from the Opposition and for the Government. I do not want the Opposition to be weakened—I have been in opposition, and I or my successor is likely to be there again. I am not thinking solely of the power of Government. No one who served with me on the Procedure Committee could level that accusation at me; I have always wanted to ensure power for the minorities and for the Opposition.

Finally, I want to ask for three things. First, now that the debate is virtually over, the Procedure Committee should be reappointed because there is already a queue of subjects with which it needs to deal. I hope that we can get on with that.

Secondly, the departmental Select Committees need to be established. That they have not been established already, despite the recommendation of the Procedure Committee, is a scandal. We have wasted public money. Thank goodness, we should be able to deal with the matter tonight so that those Committees can start their work and operate properly when we return from the recess.

Thirdly, will the Government give me a guarantee that the recommedations of the Jopling Committee will be voted on by the House within 30 days of its return in the autumn? If those three matters can be dealt with, today's debate will have been worth while.

6.27 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I have two brief comments on the speech of the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) before dealing with the matter in general. Although some in the House have seen life only from the Government's perspective, and others, like the hon. Gentleman, have seen it from the perspective of both Government and Opposition, some whole parties have seen it only from opposition——

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): And always will.

Mr. Hughes: It is certainly not as it always will be, as it is not as it always has been in the past. Therefore, our comments both today and in evidence, written and oral, come from the perspective of opposition, but do not preclude the idea of them being implemented when we share in or are the Government.

The hon. Member for Honiton painted a wonderful picture of how much more acceptable life would be if there were fewer Members of Parliament. He compared the electorates of the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister. The logical conclusion of his suggestion that life becomes much easier the larger the electorate is that, with one person representing everybody, there would be no need for debate—*[Interruption.]* I know that he did not quite suggest that, but some of us believe that we already have enough difficulty adequately representing 80,000 people. Any more than that, especially in urban areas with great social problems, would make life very difficult.

The debate has continued over a long period in different guises, with contributions from our former Chief Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), and our previous Chief Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). Although all three of us have held a Whip's position—I am currently deputy Chief Whip—I would not want my remarks to be perceived as a Whip's view of life. We try to reflect the views of our colleagues as a whole.

I reiterate the point made in the introduction to the report, which we generally welcome, and I will amplify it in one respect. It is true that we sit for longer than any other Parliament in a comparable democracy—by a long way. We seek to do an enormous amount of work, yet, as others have said, we do not feel that we accomplish it adequately. When studying other Parliaments in democracies during their sitting periods, I have found it interesting that they are generally far fuller than ours is. Members of Parliament elsewhere do not have as many competing demands, so other Parliaments are able to devote themselves more substantially to the significant business of the moment.

Although I would put it differently, I do not dissent from what the Committee identifies as the three principles, which are set out in paragraph 7. First, we have a legislative duty to control and scrutinise the Executive. We have to hold the Executive to account and scrutinise legislation, which is mainly Executive legislation, but also comes from other quarters. Secondly, we have to allow Back-Bench Members to represent interests of concern to them. Thirdly—I make the point rather more widely than the Committee did—we have to allow all parties to put their case as part of the national forum of debate, with the assumption that the Government will get their way in the end. The Committee makes the point about the parties putting their case and also that, at the end of the day, the Government must get their way.

As we made clear in our evidence, we believe that we shall never adequately answer the questions that the report seeks to address—this is no disrespect to the work well done by the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and his colleagues—until there is substantial devolution of power and responsibility to the regions and countries of the United Kingdom.

The S word at the moment is subsidiarity. Unless there is subsidiarity in this country as well as in this continent, we shall not carry out our functions adequately. People ask me, "What were you doing last Wednesday night or last Thursday night?" The answer may be that we were debating Northern Ireland legislation often of quite significant insularity to that part of the United Kingdom. We may have been debating Scottish legislation in a debate in which only Scottish Members took part because the subject was relevant only to Scottish Members who were the only people with knowledge of it. We may have been debating Welsh legislation.

Unless we come to the conclusion that it is better that such matters are dealt with in Northern Ireland, in Scotland, in Wales or in the regions of England, we shall not be able to shed that work which we try to do along with everything else.

We try to deal with the whole of the international agenda and with the whole of the United Kingdom agenda. We try to deal with the national agendas of Ireland, Wales and Scotland, with the regional agenda and with the local agenda. That is an impossible collection of work. Just as work will gradually go up to the European level and to the European Parliament, so work must gradually go down to the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. We could then cope with the work load and we should all feel much happier as a result.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): I do not want wholly to destroy the hon. Gentleman's argument, because I agree with a great deal of it. However, is it not possible that if, rather than devolving government as he suggests, Governments did less, there would be less for us to talk about? The argument for devolution does not stand on its own.

Mr. Hughes: They are separate arguments; I understand that. My late colleague David Penhaligon, when he used to take tours round the House, went into the Lobby, where there are two volumes of the statutes currently in force. One runs from 1265 to 1956 and the other volume, of similar size, runs from 1956 to 1986, the year he died.

We legislate an enormous amount, although that is not always the fault of Government. Many of us put pressure on Government to legislate, and the pressure comes not only from non-Conservative parties, but from Conservative Members. With the best of intentions, any Government, no matter how thin a programme they have, end up legislating far more; I fear that that is the nature of society. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, if we thought twice and found other ways in which to deal with problems, it would be better and we could reduce our load in that way. However, that does not detract from my more fundamental constitutional point about it being a better system to decide matters at the appropriate level.

The Leader of the House divided the 26 recommendations into five categories. Fifteen concern our sittings and three concern secondary legislation. A few are about the parliamentary year, and there is a pair of proposals about the timetabling of speeches and about the timetabling of legislation. There are three proposals at the end about various separate and relatively ancillary matters.

My colleagues and I welcome the report generally. We have given our evidence and I do not intend to rehearse what we have said. We would have gone further on certain points; we would not have gone less far on any point. It takes a long time to get movement in the House, but implementing the report would be a step in the right direction. I agree with the hon. Member for Honiton and with the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale that the mood of the country is that we should move in that direction. People do not understand why we are left in a time warp.

There is not yet a consensus, although there is a clear better view on the two controversial issues of sittings and of timetabling. I and my colleagues agree with the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) on sittings. The competing demands on Members of Parliament are such that, especially for those representing far-flung parts of the United Kingdom, it is not possible to do the job properly if, on a Friday or a Monday, one is obliged to be in two places at the same time. There may be equally good reasons for a Member to be here and to be in his constituency.

We cannot do everything during the summer or Christmas holidays, we cannot visit everybody, many places are not open on Saturdays and Sundays, and we have constituency obligations. To move to fewer Friday sittings while ensuring that the balance of the week combines some morning sittings with some later sittings until 10 pm seems about right.

I do not agree that the principal reason for continuing to sit from lunchtime until the evening on most days is the jobs and convenience of people in the City or in the law courts. The House will make a decision on the matter excluding the interests of those Members, although there are some interests that militate for such hours.

In view of the time taken in opening our post, dealing with our correspondence and serving on Committees, we must have some time mid-week when we are not sitting in the Chamber. The balance is to sit on a Wednesday morning to deal with less controversial business and to finish generally at the sensible hour of 10 pm.

If people are going far away, they need to get away on a Thursday night. We must allow some people, especially London Members who have obligations, the opportunity to do other things in the evenings. The balance is more or less right. Let us try the proposals and then review them if they are gradually found to be unsatisfactory. We are not writing the proposals in stone for all time.

Mr. Rooker: What are the special obligations for London Members in the evening which bypass the rest of us?

Mr. Hughes: I was making the point that one of the many factors that the report seeks to balance is the fact that different Members in different parts of the country have different time obligations and constraints. I cited the hon. Gentleman's colleague, the hon. Member for Durham, North-West, who said that she needs to be back in her constituency on Fridays.

There are arguments for keeping some parts of the week free of sittings so that we can perform different constituency obligations. We must arrange our hours differently. I am not asking for special considerations for London Members: I am saying simply that there are many different considerations which mean that we cannot satisfy everyone's best interests by any proposals.

The other controversial matter is timetabling. It is important that the report does not intend timetabling for

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Bills whose further stages will be taken on the Floor of the House. It is important that constitutional matters are not timetabled and are taken here. We should all be aware that such legislation is excluded from the proposals.

I have not been a Member of this place for as long as some: I have been here for nearly 10 years. However, I believe that, over that time, the Opposition have never gained from trying to trip up the Government in respect of their timetabling. We may prolong a sitting, keep people up all night or keep debates running, but at the end of the day, the Government get their legislation. They normally do that with a guillotine, which means that there is no debate on the later swathes of that legislation.

When the Government have been tripped up over the past few years, it has happened because the view across the Floor of the House has provided a majority against the legislation. That is not a matter of procedure; it is a matter of substance. That happened with Sunday trading. The poll tax came close, and it happened with dog registration. It has occurred with big issues and little issues. In respect of timetabling, it is not that the Government failed to win the tactical, internal procedural battle: instead, they failed to win the battle on the merits of the issue.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It is clearly a matter of fact and part of our constitution that the Government get their business. If they do not, there is a confidence vote and if they lose that, the Government must go to the country. The issue is whether, by having some unpredictability in our timetable or potential rows between the Opposition or Back Benchers and the Government, the Government must then pause for thought and modify their position.

I have been here for 20 years, and I believe that Governments do modify their position. When I was in government, one worked out in advance what issues might cause rows and where one might have to modify the issue, but without giving up one's basic principles. However, the fact that it is not completely predictable that the Government will get their legislation is of some importance.

Mr. Hughes: I understand that, and that is the balance that we must weigh. Is there an overriding advantage in giving Opposition Members and parties that opportunity, or are there more advantages the other way? We believe that, although there are sometimes advantages, by the end of the parliamentary year the Government have got their way on everything, although there may be a little internal manoeuvring.

However, more importantly, there is better and more substantive debate if legislation is timetabled. It is also possible to win some of the arguments. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said, timetabling normally means that what the Opposition want to debate is chosen. It avoids silly time-wasting when, to be honest, we do not all have the time to spare to debate through the night for no purpose other than to delay legislation to gain a tactical advantage.

On balance, I am convinced that, although the Opposition are giving away one of their present rights, in the end they are giving it away for something that will produce better legislation, give a greater opportunity to influence legislation and achieve better debate, and will not provide a disadvantage in terms of what is debated. I say that as the hon. Member who, I believe, holds the record for keeping the House going for the longest time since the war, when I forced the House to sit for 37½ hours on the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties. It felt very good at the time, but at the end of the day, the Government got their business a day earlier than they would otherwise have got it. Therefore, to that extent, the delay was not worth it.

I believe that we should timetable legislation and speeches. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made a fair and generous point when he said that there must be fairness in the House between the Treasury Bench and Opposition parties. The one thing that I would want on behalf of my colleagues and me and on behalf of hon. Members who might be members of parties which are not the official Government or Opposition parties, is that any Business Committee that timetables legislation should include representation of that interest—as there is at the moment, quite properly, on the Committee of Selection.

There must also be fairness in respect of allocation of time for speeches. I heard the Leader of the House earlier, and I am aware of the problems with interventions. There must be fairness to avoid what happened in the debate on the common agricultural policy the other day, when the spokesperson for the third party was limited within the 10-minutes rule, but the Front-Bench spokesmen spoke for 37 minutes and 35 minutes respectively.

Fairness for different points of view enhances Parliament as a forum for debate. I hope that one of the things that will come out of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House is that all parties will be involved in the procedures in a way that they traditionally have not been during a generation when there were only two large parties as a matter of British constitutional tradition. I share the hope that we will proceed after this debate, which I accept was a necessary step, to implement the reforms as early as possible when the House returns in October, and certainly so that they take effect no later than 1 January 1993.

6.45 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): My most abiding and vivid impression of my first Parliament, which was the previous Parliament, was not of the Chamber or congested offices, but of the Library where, night after night on occasions, I saw senior Members—both in age and position—aroused from their slumbers in armchairs to vote, vote, return to their armchairs and go back to sleep straight away as though nothing had happened. They would then get up again, vote and go back to sleep.

As a newcomer, I marvelled at that performance. I could not understand how anyone could do that so quickly. I felt as though I was in a state of permanent jet lag, but those supermen and superwomen were able to treat our most anti-social and unusual schedule as though nothing were happening.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that this debate is very much for the new Members. It is a great pity that there are not more of them here. However, we are on a one-line Whip today and many hon. Members will have taken this opportunity, because of the pressures of the business of the House, to be in their constituencies —or perhaps to catch up with their sleep.

The procedures that we have seen this summer are not representative of the House in full swing in June or July. New Members would be ill advised to take their decisions on the basis of the business that we have conducted this summer. They have been lulled into a false sense of security; the business can be much tougher at this time of the year.

My belief in reform is absolute. That is why my first act in this new Parliament was to go to the Table Office and table early-day motion 9 to gauge support among hon. Members for reform. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) generously referred to my motion and to the 85 Conservative Members and more than 100 Opposition Members who signed it. However, there are also many other signatures from the minority parties. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale does not know that I have a sheaf of letters from Ministers, Opposition Front-Bench Spokesmen and Parliamentary Private Secretaries, who cannot, by convention, sign my early-day motion. The total of signatures is not 216—the most signatures that any early-day motion has attracted this Parliament; the real support amounts to nearly 300 signatures, which is almost half the House of Commons.

It would be bizarre if this House, which passes reforms that affect all walks of British life, should not apply that reforming spirit to itself. As televising has been thrust upon us, the demands are that much greater, as many hon. Members have said.

Our constituents do not like hon. Members to traipse through the Lobbies during the night, pretending that they are doing something useful when they are not. Because of our archaic procedures, they are simply following the rules that have been laid down to deliver the business. That cannot be the right way, and it must be changed. The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) eloquently put the position for women, particularly northern women. She said that many ladies who represent northern constituencies have given up the option to have a family in order to come here. That is absolutely disgraceful.

Mr. Barnes: How many all-night sittings take place and how many hon. Members are expected to be present? Often, a small number of Opposition Members can keep the Government going. The Government require about 120 Conservative Members to ensure that there are 100 to vote on a closure motion, but that is done on a rota. Hon. Members are not always sleeping in the Library. The process is selective.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's view. With respect, he is being rather selective, too. If there is a three-line Whip, all hon. Members must be here. What is more, as the hon. Gentleman will know, at times there is pressure to find somewhere to put one's head down. I am not saying that that happens all the time—that would be misleading. My right hon. Friend the Chief Whip has said that he has tried to make the procedures easier within the existing constraints. That has been widely welcomed.

I now refer to the substance of the report. The proposals to reduce the number of late-night sittings are excellent. It is sensible, having read previous reports on how the Crossman experiment in respect of morning sittings worked, not to put business down for Tuesday and Thursday mornings, as that would disrupt Standing Committees, but it is eminently sensible to try the experiment on Wednesday mornings.

I do not often find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), but I have some reservations about doing away with so many Fridays. Fridays are good opportunities to be present. We are seldom required to be present. As there is much evidence of the pressure of time, knocking out Fridays is not the way to proceed. The way to proceed is to insist that we can get away at seven o'clock on Thursday evenings and have the option of Fridays. There do not appear to be many days of tough Government business on a Friday—I can hardly remember one.

The report says much about when and how often we vote, but nothing about a reduction in the time it takes to vote—that is, the mechanics of voting. I applaud the idea of putting money resolutions in substantive motions, but it is extraordinary that we have not considered electronic voting. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) complains. I am not suggesting that we should always vote by means of an electronic voting system. I know the arguments about Divisions being great opportunities for hon. Members to meet Ministers and senior Front-Bench spokesmen in the Division Lobbies, but surely we do not need to do that time and again in one evening.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is looking for extra hours to replace the business that he wants to take off after 10 o'clock. Surely we can experiment with electronic voting. I am fortunate because of my eastern European interests. I have been able to observe electronic voting in Parliaments in Moscow, Kiev, Bucharest and Sofia. They believe that electronic voting is a terrific help. The Bulgarian Parliament can conduct a vote in 20 seconds. Surely there is a way of marshalling some votes so that we can conduct them very quickly, thus saving much time. It takes the best part of half an hour for a Division on a three-line Whip.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My hon. Friend has mentioned countries that have just managed to emerge on the democratic scene. Is he proposing that as they have had such enormous experience of democracy and have push button voting we should follow them? Surely that cannot be part of his argument.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for helping me. Those Governments have examined all the best democratic systems and have formed a view of what is most efficient and what is best. I am not suggesting that for the House of Commons, but we should examine electronic voting as a possible way of reducing the time that we spend voting.

Another option is available under Standing Order No. 39 and that is votes being taken by hon. Members standing in their places in certain circumstances when the Chair believes that a vote would be carried by a substantial number of hon. Members. I have seen that procedure in action once. We should consider using Standing Order No. 39 more often.

Hon. Members have referred to late hours and family pressures. My family is very important to me. All hon. Members' families are important to them. The late hours make family life difficult. The uncertainty about the business of the House is a nightmare from the point of

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view of trying to look after a family and one's constituents and interests in the House. Not knowing the business for Tuesday until Thursday evening makes life difficult. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for considering the possibility of giving greater notice of business. It is irritating never knowing what we are to do next week.

Surely there is a way of giving one day or two days' business two weeks ahead? Surely my right hon. Friend can give us one day when he can say, "That is a sure two-line Whip." He may not be able to give the business for the whole of the second week, but he might be able to say, "I am certain that Tuesday will be all right, but I cannot be sure about Wednesday and Thursday."

The Jopling report found that 50 per cent. of hon. Members were not happy with the recess times, because of the school holidays, and 72 per cent. of hon. Members were dissatisfied with the uncertainty of business in the House. I agree that the three-month break is absurd. I should like to share a memory with hon. Members. A very great friend of mine, the daughter of a very senior, alas departed, hon. Member told me, when I was contemplating a parliamentary career, how the parliamentary year had affected her family. She said, "I hate to see it. My father comes home at the end of July absolutely drained and exhausted. He then takes three months to wind down completely and then he has to wind himself up again in the autumn." That cannot make any sense, never mind the point about the House not sitting for three months of the United Kingdom presidency of the EC. Hon. Members do not need five weeks to travel by road to their constituencies. That is the reason we have the long recess. It must come to an end.

When the proposals come before the House on substantive motions in the autumn, as I hope they will, I shall urge hon. Members to vote for reform, particularly new Members, to avoid——

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Tredinnick: I am sorry, but I shall not give way, as I am finishing my remarks.

My hon. Friend should vote for reform to avoid themselves and their marriages being broken on the wheel of late and all-night sittings.

7 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I have been saddened by what I have heard so far in the debate. I am reminded how difficult it is to get anything done in this place. Indeed, it was you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who reminded me that, after three years, it is at last possible to have a glass of water available in each Committee Room when Committees are sitting. If it takes that long to achieve that little progress, what hope do we have of creating a Parliament which is worthy of our parliamentary democracy and to which people can come to do the job that they were selected to do—to represent their constituents and play their full part in the proceedings at Westminster?

One of the arguments that we have heard so often this evening is based on almost deliberate misunderstanding. I want to see not merely reform but radical reform, so that women in particular can come to the House and play a full part. When a substantive motion is put before us, we must address the need for Members of Parliament to have one job alone. The time they spend here should be devoted whole-heartedly to the House and the constituency.

Otherwise, we shall always work according to a set of assumptions which decree that we cannot start until 2.30 pm, except perhaps on one day a week if we are lucky. We shall be committed to sittings which continue all night and extend from Thursday into Fridays, for example. We shall not organise ourselves in a competent and efficient way. We should take one step back and ensure that there is no moonlighting. We should be here simply and purely to represent the needs of the people who elected us. That is fundamental.

I shall keep my speech brief, because we have had a lengthy discussion. One further issue must be addressed. I would introduce not merely reform but radical reform. I would introduce a new model for organising our debates. We should not play around the edges and change a Friday or Thursday here and there. My ideal world would be a cycle of four or perhaps five weeks of Committee meetings and opportunities for legislation. We would then have perhaps a week in which we could spend time away from the House legitimately in our constituencies and be in touch with the people we represent, attend meetings, organise surgeries and do all the things that a hard-working, conscientious Member of Parliament should do.

Such a model, which has already been adopted by other European Parliaments, would allow us to deal with the fundamental problem of how best to represent people. I am sorry that, in its deliberations so far, the Select Committee did not feel able to make such radical proposals. The report tinkers with the edges and satisfies no one. It may make matters better for some constituency Members of Parliament in London and the south-east or those who do not have families with whom they wish to spend time. The Committee may have thought that, by changing some of the hours, it could bring about change, but the change will not make it any easier to do the job that we were brought here to do.

I hope that the Leader of the House will table substantive motions early in the autumn. I hope that he will pay particular attention not only to Friday but to Thursday night sittings. What help is it to Members of Parliament who live far away to have 10 Fridays when we can be in our constituencies instead of in this place, if we cannot get away on Thursday night? Members not only from Scotland but from other parts of the country have long journeys home. It may be even more difficult to travel home to one's constituency and family if one cannot simply take a taxi to Heathrow and get on an aeroplane.

Mr. Dalyell: They can go by tube.

Ms. Walley: As my hon. Friend says, they can take the tube. In some parts of the country, we do not have rail services after 8 pm. If we are to have 10 Fridays on which we can make constituency commitments which are not subject to parliamentary business, it is important that we know with certainty that we can get away on Thursday night. It will be no use if we have to spend the night here in London because we cannot get home.

We must have access to public transport to return to our constituencies on Thursday nights, so that we can have

meetings all day on Friday, do the business that our constituents want us to do and be lobbied. Let us face it: our constituents cannot afford to travel down to London to lobby us. In any case, there are no facilities at Westminster for them to make their points to Members of Parliament. I hope that the Leader of the House will take that point.

We should carefully consider the recesses. I was disappointed with what the Leader of the House said. I hope that he will spend the long summer recess reviewing the matter. In my radical alternative, we would have four weeks on and one week off for not eight months of the year, but the whole year. We would have the same holidays as everyone else. If we have any commitment to our constituency, our constituents and our families, what good is it if we cannot even book a holiday or a weekend away? Why cannot we have more detailed information about the summer recess and Easter? I urge the Leader of the House to consider that.

There is a danger that we shall end up with a system which will defeat people who are prepared to serve a constituency. Members of Parliament will end up as clones. It will not matter which side of the House they sit on. We shall end up with only people based in the south-east and London. That is fine if one has a constituency in that area and one can attend essential meetings during the day, but it is not fine if the constituency is some distance from London. We must address the issue urgently.

I do not want a system which allows few women to deal with the strains that being a Member of Parliament necessarily involves for not only women but men. We must ask how it is possible to juggle not merely the usual demands of work and family that everyone faces but the demands of work, constituency and family. Our job requires us legitimately to be in two places at the same time. To spend four and a half days a week at Westminster and an additional eight hours travelling to and from Westminster leaves us with precious little time to be with our constituents, never mind our families.

The House will be a worse place if people are forced to end all the ties with their constituency because they cannot live there as a result of the demand placed on them by Westminster. People will end up in desperate situations with their family life because they do not have the time to spend with their family. If we were prepared to manage our time efficiently and programme the parliamentary timetable, we could make tremendous improvements.

The greatest irony is that we talk about ourselves as the mother of Parliaments yet we positively discourage women from becoming Members of Parliament by having a system with which they cannot deal. I want changes, and I urge the Leader of the House over the summer recess to think about all the people who have resigned from the Government simply because they wanted to spend more time with their family.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Did my hon. Friend believe any of them?

Ms. Walley: I did not believe any of it.

Would it not be far more positive and constructive if people's energies were channelled into finding a way in which Members could come to Parliament to further the aims of parliamentary democracy and do exactly what they were elected for—serve their constituencies with honour? I hope that, no matter how much time we have wasted already, when we debate the matter next time, we shall be in a position to make some real progress. I look forward to that day.

7.8 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): Some of this debate has sounded like shop stewards meeting to determine improvements in our contracts of employment. Perhaps we should all resign en bloc, study the matter properly, and ensure that our holidays and family relationships are sorted out before we decide whether to come back. As we all know, there is enormous competition to do our jobs, both within our own parties and, at general elections, across the party divide.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) touched on the subject of public opinion. For what it is worth, my view is that the public are somewhat perplexed about why we are increasing our expense accounts and proposing to cut our hours. Public opinion on the matter is rather mixed.

The nub of the problem, which has come out well in the debate, relates to the constitutional question and the relationship between the Executive and Parliament as the legislature. It is better to consider the problem in those terms, rather than in terms of Opposition or Back-Bench interests. A fundamental constitutional issue is involved which is peculiar to this country. We have a strong parliamentary tradition but, unlike the United States, there is no division of powers with separate powers being given to the Executive and to the legislature—powers with their own legitimacies.

We have an integration of powers, in which the Executive control the legislature, and would have to resign if they did not control it. We therefore start with a fundamental constitutional imbalance. Some European countries do not have a parliamentary tradition—the French, for example, have virtually dispensed with their Parliament—so it does not particularly matter. In our country there is at least the myth of a strong parliamentary tradition, but there is an imbalance because of the position that the Executive have built up over many years.

The question is whether that imbalance will be aggravated or worsened by the proposed measures. My submission is that it will. I have listened intently to the debate about time, which has been well argued by both sides. Of course I accept that the Government must have their business—that is part of our constitution. I also accept that we have left behind the romantic ages when we persuaded one another of anything through debate. There is no question of persuasion—we all have our views, we speak about them, and then we rush off to do whatever we have to do. There is no question of hon. Members listening and determining their view as a result of debate.

In many respects, the objective of the report is to improve the detail and honing of legislation. I accept that the proposals might provide extra time for detailed analysis in Committee, and that in the past that may well have been distorted due to the way in which we have conducted matters. However, time is the fundamental issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith), among others, said that, since the Government get their way anyway, there is not much point in worrying about time, or even discussing whether

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Parliament is a check or balance in the constitution. The Government get their way and we must organise things so that everyone can have their say tidily. That is the nub of the argument.

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) shakes his head, but he advanced a similar argument. His speech was well reasoned and argued but as I understood it he said that, despite all their efforts, Oppositions never achieve anything, and instanced various occasions when he had been in opposition. That requires testing, first, from the point of view of whether protest through a row, or the threat of a row, is any check on the Executive.

Having been a member of the Executive for 10 years, I can say that, when we decided on details of legislation or the way in which we should present it or argue it in the outside world, the fact that we thought that there might be a major row which would affect the ease with which we secured the passage of a Bill did have an effect on the way we discussed the legislation. In many cases, the details of legislation and how Parliament should proceed with it were discussed in detail through the usual channels, so it is not accurate to say that the Opposition and Parliament have no control through timing. The unpredictability of timing is the key factor, because that determines whether the Executive must pause for thought before introducing legislation to the House.

One of the reasons why the Executive pause for thought and why the Opposition and other Members are able to discuss issues with the Government is that rows have affected the course of legislation and subsequent history. I was and still am in favour of the community charge, so I can say that. The rows over community charge legislation, many of which were associated with timetabling, percolated out, affected the mood outside, and therefore played a part. I concede it was not necessarily a decisive part and those rows were not necessarily the only constraints on Government. The present untidiness in Parliament is a strength of a constitution in which Parliament is pretty weak.

One of the reasons why Parliament is weak is that most of its Committee structure—certainly the Select Committee structure—is set up to deal with matters after they have occurred in Government. That has been the constitutional position of Parliament for many years. As events now move so fast, especially technological events, increasingly Parliament must have a role in pro-actively considering the options facing Government. That is one reason why I was honoured to take on the chairmanship of the parliamentary office of Science and Technology. That seems to be a new parliamentary organisation which, with staff, can begin to look ahead and to provide Parliament with the options so that it may debate the political dimensions. That aspect did not emerge in the report by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), and we should be involved in such activity to a greater extent.

Before I conclude, I cannot refrain from saying that this debate may be academic if the powers of Parliament are transferred to European non-elected institutions, in particular, the Commission, the law courts and a central bank, if there is to be one; then many of these arguments may be fruitless. If that happens, there might well be a case for timetabling ourselves strictly because debate would be a waste of time anyway. However, I do not think that we have reached that situation.

Mr. Tredinnick: I have been listening carefully to my hon. Friend's arguments. Does he agree that the Maastricht treaty would bring power back to this House? Would it not set the trend to bring back national powers from the European Parliament?

Mr. Spicer: If my hon. Friend is talking about subsidiarity, I thought that we had that already. I do not see the point of having to give away powers before the new institutions and, in particular, the Commission are generous enough to give them back. No doubt we shall debate that at some length in the autumn, or whenever the Government decide to move on the matter. I do not want to anticipate that too much, save to say that this Parliament is worth protecting and preserving.

Parliament is not in a strong position vis-a-vis the Executive or, increasingly, the European non-elected institutions. We should therefore be very wary indeed about doing something which, in my humble opinion, would be good for the Executive and thus almost, but not quite, by definition bad for Parliament. This is a very serious matter and I am highly sceptical about the propositions before us, especially those concerning timetabling.

7.20 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) has just made a very fruitful contribution. Debate in the Chamber is important. In the 19th century, John Stuart Mill drew attention to the difference between putting forward dead dogma and putting forward an argument that was part of a living truth. One may speak the truth, but if people do not listen and if one does not have to justify one's position, the truth may die away, and the reasons for coming to the conclusion may disappear. However, when there is proper debate, even those who take up what are held to be correct positions are on much stronger ground as a result of having tackled other ideas and listened to other arguments.

That is what should happen in this House. We ought to have genuine debate. It should not be simply a question of blocks of Members doing their 10 minutes while everybody else waits around, nobody listening to what anybody else says. It should not simply be a matter of proceeding to votes as quickly as possible. If it were, everything could be worked out by machines. This ought to be a living Chamber, in which Members can alter situations by debate and discussion. Even if one were unable to influence a decision about a specific piece of legislation, one might alter attitudes in the House and in the country at large.

Mr. Dalyell: I would not interrupt my hon. Friend if his speech were limited to 10 minutes. That would be discourteous to a colleague. One may interrupt hon. Members—opponents or one's hon. Friends—if one knows that their time is not limited, but if my hon. Friend were time-limited, I would not muck up his speech by interrupting.

Mr. Barnes: That is how my hon. Friend behaves, but there are hon. Members who would interrupt. Of course, I could refuse to accept interventions, and could be just as rough as those seeking to intervene.

We often talk too much about our own concerns and problems, and too little about the needs of our constituents. I realise that, if we are half dead as a result of the way in which we do business, we cannot look after our constituents' interests properly, but there is a great deal of mythology. The problems are exaggerated.

Let me refer in particular to all-night sittings. It may be that debates involving three-line Whips that take place at one o'clock in the morning could be organised for more sensible times, but how often do we have all-night sittings for which all hon. Members are expected to be present? Last week, we put out a story that something called the Consolidated Fund Bill kept us here all night. In fact, the few people lucky in the draw and duty Front Benchers were the only ones involved. Those who did not put their names down, those who were unlucky in the draw and those who, like myself, came so far down that they withdrew their names were able to pop off and get to bed.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that the last time there was consensus between the two Front Benches in respect of changes in the House was the occasion on which the Consolidated Fund Bill debate ceased to be a proper debate? We secured a major concession in terms of legislation. Under the previous system, debate was virtually open-ended. The current curtailment is due entirely to the conspiracy of consensus between the two Front Benches, and that appears to be very much the case tonight.

Mr. Barnes: I accept what my hon. Friend says—not because I was in the House at the time, but because he has already told me and I have not heard any counter-argument.

Mr. Rooker: I was in the House, on the Government side, when at 3 o'clock in the morning, during a debate on a Consolidated Fund Bill, there were 100 Members on the Opposition side. They learned the lesson. The Conservatives, in opposition, used the Consolidated Fund Bill, but having got into government, they made damn sure that that would not happen to them. The incident to which I refer took place about 1976.

Mr. Barnes: Obviously there will be 100 or 120 Members present for open-ended debates—for instance, for the Report stage of a Bill. In such circumstances, the Government must have 100 Members available so that a closure motion may be carried. Members may filibuster, intentionally or unintentionally, but the Opposition do not require massed ranks in those circumstances. A dozen people can keep things going, and the pressure is on the Government to close debate at a certain stage. But that is fruitful pressure, which does not necessitate the presence of all Government Members for the purpose of going through the Lobbies.

Arrangements are made to have people on duty at different times. We hear about people sleeping in libraries, but the difficulties ought to be put into perspective. We can all tell sob stories, but adding them all together creates a false impression. We do not often have all-night debates necessitating the presence of the massed ranks of Members. A few weeks ago, we had an all-night debate about Maastricht, but the number of people who wanted to get on the record was relatively small. They were the ones involved in those matters—although others may have wondered whether they ought to turn up.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): As a member of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, I am very much aware of the fact that the 10 o'clock recommendation relates to primary legislation taken as the first Order of the Day. Does my hon. Friend agree that this place is really a museum, and anachronistic? We are arguing about the terms for all-night sittings. Surely, in the 20th century, we could finish our business by 10 o'clock. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very difficult to tell constituents that we cannot complete our business during the day and rise at a reasonable time? The current situation simply adds to the mystique of this place. It is absolute nonsense to argue that all-night sittings are necessary.

Mr. Barnes: It depends on what we are trying to do on behalf of our constituents. The Report stage of a Bill, for instance, may involve amendments that we have put down in the interests of constituents. It may be in the early hours of the morning that we have an opportunity to get a response from a Minister. Indeed, we often get quite favourable responses—favourable in the sense that they are levers that can be used in the future, if not promises to accept the arguments that have been advanced. Obviously I am in favour of sensible sitting arrangements. It might be helpful if we were able to start earlier and finish earlier, but hon. Members' involvement in Committee work has to be taken into account. Often, the people who are most active in Committee are the ones who are willing to stay late at night. They do not want to lose the opportunity to argue on behalf of their constituents.

We keep hearing about how this legislature has longer sittings than any other legislature in the world. The current Session will have included two summer recessions and a general election, and by mid-October next year, the House of Commons will have sat for 27 out of 63 weeks.

I do not think that that is too burdensome for hon. Members. We should tackle the problem of lengthy recesses——

Mr. Rooker: Those figures take account of two summer recesses.

Mr. Barnes: Yes, I accept that——

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend would be more open with the House if he said what the figures would be by the time we reach next June, because they would include two parliamentary years and two summer recesses, rather than two summer recesses and one parliamentary year. We can do arithmetic, Harry.

Mr. Barnes: I was open with the House, because I said that the figures related to a 63-week period, which included two recesses and a general election. Of those 63 weeks, we will have been here for just 27. I know that some adjustments to the figures should be made, but the big problem behind those figures is the two summer recesses. One of them lasted three months and the other for about 11 weeks.

Those lengthy recesses present us with a great problem, because they mean that our constituents, through their Members of Parliament, are denied avenues of scrutiny and the means to pursue grievances. It is all very well for

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my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to say in answer to me that I can write letters to Ministers or organise deputations during a recess. I can write such letters when the House is sitting—I do so regularly—and seek to organise delegations. However, if a request to meet a delegation is refused by a Minister, it is much easier to try to reverse that decision if the House is sitting, because I can then use the various available avenues to pursue that matter.

The beauty of the House sitting is not so much that Ministers are present and respond to questions as that civil servants are available to respond on behalf of Ministers, because they try to protect Ministers from criticism. If they know that a Minister is to be criticised in the House, they will respond to that. During the recess, if I write a letter to a Minister and do not receive an answer, all I can do is to write again or telephone the Minister's private secretary to try to get a response. If the House is sitting, I can table a written question bout when I will receive a proper answer. One is always then told that the formal answer is on its way, or that it is in one's pigeonhole awaiting collection. Hon. Members may be able to write to Ministers, ring a private secretary, try to organise a delegation or issue a press release, but the success of such procedures is much more likely if the House is sitting.

We should not have a break of three months when avenues of representation are denied our constituents. We should follow the pattern advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley), of a parliamentary Session of four weeks, followed by a week's break, which could be called a "constituency" week. During that week, constituency meetings, activities and visits could be organised. If the House does not sit for a week, the other avenues of representation available to us —early-day motions and questions—are not greatly harmed. A three-month break does terrible harm to them.

A six-week summer recess, which allows for a holiday and a party conference, would be sufficient, as long as that break was built into the year so that we knew when it would occur. If we had a constituency week, hon. Members would no longer be able to argue with the Whips about why they should be away from the House because of pressing consituency duty. The Whips could then say that such Members should perform that duty in the constituency week, just like everyone else. In that way, the House would be more of a hive of activity.

We should not be concerned to debate our private lives and problems in public; we should be much more concerned about our public lives and the public avenues that we seek to use in the House on behalf of our constituents. If we do not want to build a pattern for the work to be done, there are masses of people who are willing to stand for Parliament to do it. It is amazing how people struggle and fight to get here, but, as soon as they do, they want to introduce measures to allow them to get away from the place altogether, or they seek membership of a Select Committee so they can pay visits all over the world. They do their best not to involve themselves in parliamentary procedures, but they are the justification for their presence here in the first place.

7.34 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I agree with a great many of the prosposals in the report and I agree wholeheartedly with the suggestion that we should sit on Wednesday mornings. I also accept that we should have a certain number of so-called "free" Fridays, designated well in advance. Of course, they would not be free Fridays, but we would be able to make appointments in our consituencies, well in advance, without the danger, which we all face now, of having to cancel them at the last minute because of parliamentary business.

I agree with the suggestion that we should try to announce the dates of the recesses earlier than has been the practice. I confess that, on that issue, I am influenced entirely by my personal and family convenience. I do not think that that should be decisive in our consideration of the report, but this is one issue about which we can safely do something to contribute to our personal and family convenience without damaging our parliamentary functions.

It has been suggested that, if we announced further in advance the date on which the House would rise for a recess, it would establish a buffer. It was argued that that would constitute a challenge or temptation to the Opposition of the day to try to ensure that they ran the Goverment's business up and over that buffer. I cannot see any greater danger of that happening if the date of a recess is established six months in advance rather than just four weeks in advance.

Any advance knowledge of the recess date is a buffer —the present buffer is this Thursday. If the Opposition want to delay parliamentary business so that the Government are faced with the choice of either losing some of their business or suggesting to the House that we should rise at a later date, it is perfectly possible for them to do so. We can make a change to current practice, which would suit us all, without causing any damage to the important role that we like to think we play in the House.

I fear that I disgree with the real kernel of the report: that the House should rise regularly at 10 pm, or at 10.30 pm if one takes into account the Adjournment. I disagree with the natural corollary of that suggestion—that business should be automatically timetabled. Any attempts to establish an arbitrary limit on the time which debates can take can only have one effect—whether or not that is the intention, and I am sure that it is not—which is to curtail the range of opinion expressed and to reduce the scrutiny that we can apply to legislation.

We are all influenced in this matter by our personal experience of the business of the House. Last month, we had a debate on Maastricht, when I was called at about 6.30 am. I was delighted to be called then and to have that opportunity to take part in the debate.

I am only too well aware that, had I not been called at 6.30 am, the alternative for someone like me, who is not a member of the Government, a Privy Councillor or similar grandee, would have been not to participate at all. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] The fact that Opposition Members would be pleased to know that I could not be called in certain debates is the greatest form of flattery. I appreciate it and take the opportunity to thank them. It is the most sincere flattery that I could expect to receive from the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr Cryer).

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Cryer: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. It is not entirely clear to whom the hon. Gentleman is giving way.

Mr. Davies: I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Bradford, South.

Mr. Cryer: The comments from these Benches were not derogatory. We were echoing the fact that a Conservative Back Bencher, who is not a Privy Councillor, had an opportunity of being called to speak because the House sat until a late hour. There is considerable resentment on both sides of the House at the fact that, although we are all elected equally, Privy Councillors have more access to the Chamber than the vast majority of hon. Members. Every Back Bencher should have an opportunity to be called in important debates. We were echoing support for the hon. Gentleman's view that the long hours of debate gave him that opportunity. It also gave some of us the opportunity.

Mr. Davies: It was not personal flattery but political support from the hon. Gentleman, and I value that, too, very much.

Mr. Dalyell: However deeply my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South and I may disagree with the substance of the hon. Gentleman's trite phrase, we would defend to the death his right to say it in the House of Commons.

Mr. Davies: Naturally, I reciprocate that sentiment and hope that it is one of the principles that bind hon. Members, from whichever party they come.

Mr. Jopling: I was interested to hear what my hon. Friend said about being called at 6 o'clock in the morning in the Maastricht debate. He implied that he was afraid that he could not have done that had the Committee's 10 o'clock recommendations been implemented. May I therefore direct his attention to paragraph 30 of the report, which says:

"We accept that it should continue to be possible for the Government by means business of the House orders to extend or otherwise alter the time of sittings to meet the general wish of the House, for example, to accommodate those Members wishing to speak in debates involving constitutional or other matters of high importance."

The Maastricht debate in particular caused us to include those words in the report so that we could preserve the right of hon. Members to speak at 6 o'clock in the morning if they wish to do so.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful for that limited assurance in the report and to my right hon. Friend for drawing my attention to it. I did not miss it when I read the report, as I did with great attention and interest, but I wish that that protection were available for all Bills decided in the House because they are all important. Some may be more important than others, but our views will differ on the relative importance of Bills. As a Back Bencher, I do not accept that the Government should decide whether a Bill is so important or raises issues of such fundamental significance that it may be possible to allow even the most humble hon. Member to express an opinion on it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) triggers my memory about another personal experience. A few days ago, I was able to propose an amendment to the Finance Bill in Committee shortly before breakfast time. I have no doubt that, had his proposals been implemented, I would not have had the opportunity to do so, because the Bill does not raise matters of fundamental constitutional importance.

I described this matter as the kernel of the proposals because it is about the House's ability to act as a check on the Executive and to conduct its traditional role of scrutinising legislation and the day-to-day governance of the nation by the Executive. Those issues were lucidly raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer).

I recognise that there are abuses in the present system. In some ways, the abuses have inspired the desire to look again at our procedures and we should not be afraid to review them. The abuses form the bases of the report, and we all know what those abuses are. They have been referred to several times this afternoon.

There is a degree of filibustering in this place and I thought that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was a little self-righteous in saying that he had given up filibustering many years ago. He may not know that his party has not given it up in the past few years. Since I have been in this place, I have often listened to filibusters on private legislation here in the Chamber, and in Committees on public Bills upstairs, and they can be excruciating in the early hours of the morning, as they are intended to be. To respond to filibustering and to get their business through, the Government must naturally and rightly introduce a timetable motion—a so-called "guillotine". They have had that possibility for 100 years or so.

Those two factors are linked—one is the logical and necessary converse of the other. Both are undesirable, and I deprecate them. But the way to solve an abuse is not necessarily—still less ideally—to throw over the whole system. It is to deal with the abuse and limit, if not totally exclude, that abuse without totally destroying the merits of the system.

Although this is not the right time or place to examine proposals for dealing with abuses, we should look again at your right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that of your colleagues to introduce a 10-minute rule on speeches. At present such a rule is limited to two hours in the evening. Perhaps you should have the right to impose that rule at any hour of the day or night, and Committee Chairmen should also have the right to impose that rule if hon. Members are wasting time and the only alternative is a guillotine motion.

Many of us would regard the imposition of a 10-minute rule on speeches as undesirable, as it is in many respects. Although the hon. Member for Copeland made it clear why it is undesirable, it would be more desirable than maintaining the dialogue of filibuster and guillotine, which too often happens. It would be much more desirable than the institution of a timetable motion, not as an exceptional measure but as part of the normal Standing Orders that govern our business, as proposed in the report.

That is my view on the substance of the report. A secondary point touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South was not about the substance of the proposals and the likely practical consequence of implementing them but about the appearance of the proposals and the signal that will be received outside the House, intended or not, if we change

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our Standing Orders along the proposed lines. I agree with my hon. Friend that people would receive an unfortunate signal.

We live in a world in which far too many people find excuses for doing less. The hon. Member for Bradford, South will be on his feet again when I say that the European Community is proposing a working time directive in an attempt to make it illegal for anyone to work more than 48 hours a week. The trade unions are arguing for 37 or 35-hour weeks—as short as possible. A certain number of general practitioners are currently lobbying and writing to me suggesting that they be relieved of their 24-hour, round-the-clock responsibility for their patients. I note, however, that in many other contexts doctors are only too ready to insist on exclusive responsibility for their patients.

I fear that, if the House agreed to measures that would limit our hours or, at least, cut debate arbitrarily at a certain time, it would be thought—no doubt unjustifiably—that we had adopted those measures largely for our own convenience, rather than for the benefit of those whom we serve, or for the greater efficiency of the institution that we are all proud to serve. That would be very unfortunate; but, in the final analysis, we should take account of such factors. We must be governed in this matter, as in others, by our political and constitutional principles and our view of the likely impact on the workings of the House of any alteration in its procedures. Nevertheless, I feel that it would be wrong for a debate such as this to contain no reference to what is admittedly a secondary aspect.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and his colleagues: they have produced an excellent report and there is no doubt that they have satisfied a widespread feeling in the House that a review of our operations was needed. I hope, however, that my right hon. Friend will understand when I say that, in the light of the considerations that I have mentioned, I shall find it necessary to oppose the essential elements of the proposal if they come to a vote.

7.51 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I apologise for my absence at the beginning of the debate. I found myself in a position in which many hon. Members are caught: as a member of the Select Committee on Information, I was required to attend to provide a quorum. It is a little ironic that hon. Members can be torn between the requirements of a Select Committee and the desire to be in the Chamber to comment on a report such as this.

I very much enjoyed sitting on the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, and I also enjoyed the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). What emerged chiefly from the report, however, was the absence of a consensus. The best that could be hoped for was give and take on both sides, and some progress on the basis that most people were dissatisfied with our present hours. Given all the pressures, it was not a bad report, and I put my name to it for that reason; but I should much prefer the House to sit regularly much earlier in the day. I think that 11.30 am would be a much better starting time, and that Question Time would be better reported then. Many of my constituents would like to be able to watch our proceedings on television at lunchtime rather than in the middle of the afternoon.

Let me stress that most members of the Select Committee—and, I suspect, most hon. Members—do not want shorter hours; they want better hours. We do not object to the length of time for which the House sits. Many of us recognise the importance of expressing minority points of view, especially in the case of debates such as the one on Maastricht. We should, however, prefer as much debate as possible to take place during daylight hours, when it is likely to be reported, rather than late at night—on occasion, well into the early hours of the morning.

Having said that I am firmly in favour of better hours, let me add that I believe that that can be achieved without the timetabling of all Bills. It was unnecessary to bring that into the report. If we are to scrutinise the way in which Bills are handled, we should do so in some detail, rather than introducing the subject by the back door. Timetabling would transfer a great deal of power from Opposition to Government, which would prove very unsatisfactory.

The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and others have claimed that they can find no examples of the Opposition stopping a Bill's passage by using time—filibustering, perhaps. Of course that should not happen: if a Government have a majority, they should be entitled to get their legislation through. Nevertheless, I could cite many instances in which sensible use of time by the Opposition has persuaded the Government to modify legislation, and a useful exercise has resulted.

An example is the Education Act 1980. The Committee stage—when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was on the Front Bench—took long enough to enable people outside to organise opposition to the proposals to remove free school travel. Campaigns by the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches were not sufficient to persuade enough Conservative Members to throw out that part of the Bill, but they did persuade enough of their Lordships to do so, and it was lost. I believe that, if that Bill had been timetabled from the beginning, the Government would have insisted on pushing it through in a shorter time, and it would have been impossible for outside organisations to act.

A less controversial example is the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and I were members of the Committee, and Denis Howell—now in the other place—was on the Front Bench. Denis Howell did not want to be in the building a minute after 10 pm if he could avoid it, but on that Committee he carefully paid out the time to the Government. On some occasions, he stopped the Committee; on others he kept us on one point for the whole morning. As a result, he secured a number of concessions. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow managed to keep us up for nearly two hours after midnight on one occasion: again, concessions were obtained from the Government. The Bill was not fantastically controversial in party political terms, but I would argue that that was a sensible use of time by the Opposition. Improvements were made as a result.

Just before the election, we debated the Transport and Works Bill 1992, whose aim was to rid the Chamber of private Bills. We nearly secured an agreement between the Front Benches; the Bill could have been dealt with in four sittings without much difficulty. My hon. Friends the

Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), and one or two other Opposition Members, were not very happy with that proposal. After they had taken up nearly a whole morning with points that the Minister did not find particularly exciting, he suddenly decided that, given the approaching election, he had better have a look at the points that we were making about representations from the Inland Waterways Board and so forth. Within virtually one sitting, he had produced a number of concessions.

That too, was a good use of time. A coupe of academics outside the House told me that they were very puzzled by what had happened: a whole morning was taken up with pointless debate, and, following a rushed procedure in the afternoon, the Minister made a series of what were in effect concessions. That made no sense to people outside the House, but every member of the Committee understood what was going on. The threat of lengthy proceedings concentrated the Minister's mind, and we knew that he had to make some attempt to meet the Opposition's demands.

It would be a mistake to hand power from Opposition to Government, mostly because the House now deals with Bills in a very inadequate way. We need to examine our whole method of dealing with public Bills. If it then seems more sensible for the House to impose a timetable, let us do that; but we must examine the procedure first, rather than imposing a guillotine on all Bills and continuing to deal with them inadequately.

I stress that there is far too short a time between publication of a Bill and Second Reading in this House. Outside groups hardly have a chance to get hold of a Bill, let alone to read it; they certainly do not have time to put their case to Members of Parliament before the Second Reading debate. Furthermore, sometimes, when a Second Reading debate takes place on the Monday of one week, the Bill goes into Committee the following week, so it is extremely difficult for outside organisations to make their representations. There should be more time between publishing a Bill and Second Reading, and between Second Reading and Committee stage.

Committee proceedings can also be a farce. Many people outside want to make representations about a Bill. On the whole, they have to make them through Opposition Members, although sometimes they will find one or two willing Conservative Members to make them. Would it not be far better to set up a public system so that these people can make representations directly to the Government and to members of the Committee? Such a procedure came into being with Special Standing Committees. It was used about three times, and because Ministers felt that they did not do very well out of it, it was not used again.

It would be far better to put all Bills through that system of scrutiny than to continue making people outside submit representations at second hand to Members, who then try to dream up amendments—often only dodgily in order—to make their point. It would be far better to have a Special Standing Committee to examine a Bill—a great improvement, in short.

After the Committee comes the Report stage. When I came to the House, I thought that Report stages were well attended, but for several recent Bills, those stages have badly attended. Half the members of a Committee do not bother to come, and virtually no other Members turn up. Report stages have been devalued in many senses. The first part of a Report stage—dealing with representations made in Committee—could be effected by the recommittal of the Bill. At that time, we could find out whether the Government had met the undertakings that they gave in Committee. There is no need for the whole House to go into that sort of detail. Points of principle should of course be dealt with on the Floor of the House.

In recent years, Report stages have often been hijacked by people interested in a subject that is only tangential to a Bill. A couple of environment Bills, covering a wide range of environmental issues, have been dominated on Report by the issue of dogs. That is extremely important, but I can well understand the resentment felt by members of the Committee, who, having gone through all the detailed work on the Bill, find that a new clause on dogs dominates the Report stage. We need carefully to examine the opportunities to bring in new clauses on Report.

Report stages can also be hijacked by people running a wholly different exercise, which has nothing to do with the Bill but something to do with another argument between Opposition and Government. We ought to leave the timetabling of Bills out of any discussion of improving the hours and let the Procedure Committee be set up again with the task of scrutinising the manner in which Bills are dealt with, to try to improve our scrutiny of them. Unless that is done, we could begin to rush into timetabling Bills, with the result that they are discussed far worse than they were before.

I must tell enthusiasts for guillotines that it is always possible to manipulate them. Once a line has been drawn, it is always possible to ensure that the debate that comes first after the line is not the debate of major substance—the latter gets squeezed. With timetable after timetable, I have seen Ministers encouraging Back Benchers to spend half an hour or 45 minutes on minor amendments so that the crucial one on which the Opposition want to concentrate the Minister's mind and the press's attention is squeezed out and not given as much time as it deserves. If we go in for the regular timetabling of Bills, more and more of this manipulation will occur.

As long as Bills are not timetabled, the Opposition are left with an area in which they can exert pressure on the Government. We have our formal proceedings, and we also have informal proceedings under which the usual channels meet to argue over how time should be allocated, when the Government should make a statement, and so on. The Government can always claim that they have a majority and can get their legislation through. The Opposition's only power is to be awkward and to make a nuisance of themselves.

Sometimes, when one or two of my hon. Friends have been involved in the Front-Bench negotiations, they have asked me to cause a bit of trouble and raise a few points of order—we all know that they are really points of disorder. They have asked me to make a row in the Chamber, thereby possibly enabling them to get a Minister to come and make a statement or give an answer. It is very difficult to keep such points in order while including a political message. An advantage of keeping Bills open-ended is that, instead of causing a row in the Chamber, we can threaten a series of votes. It is much better for the dignity of the House to be able to call a series of votes and to be able to make it clear that the Opposition are not happy with the negotiations through the usual channels than to raise points of order and make a row in the Chamber.

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

The more we remove the opportunities for the Opposition to make these points, the more we will end up like some other democratic assemblies, in which Members have to be thrown out or sittings suspended. If the House wants to retain an effective safety valve, it should look very closely before introducing guillotines on all Bills. That would merely remove one more way in which the Opposition can show their displeasure.

I hope that, in the next 12 months, the Government will try to reduce the likelihood of our having to sit after 10 pm. I hope that we can try Wednesday morning sittings. I should like to adopt a much more radical approach and have the House meet each morning at 11.30. But it would be too high a price to pay for improving the hours if all legislation were to be guillotined. That would greatly reduce the powers of the Opposition legitimately to oppose the Government.

8.7 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Originally, I had no intention of speaking in this debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Until the Whips told you to."] Funnily enough, that was not the reason—I have been spurred into making this modest contribution by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) and by what I detect to be a relentless pressure from some quarters to change the procedures of the House for social rather than for good procedural reasons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth, who has temporarily left the Chamber, referred to the new boys perhaps needing more time to consider the changes proposed—*[Interruption.]* I am glad to see that my hon. Friend has returned. On my own behalf and, I suspect, on behalf of many other new Members on both sides of the House, I must point out that we revere the procedures of this House. Indeed, it was the reputation and historic fame of this Chamber which prompted us to seek election in the first place.

Mr. Tredinnick: I said that the debate was about giving new Members a chance to speak on the topic.

Mr. Duncan: I take my hon. Friend's point.

To many of us who have just been elected, there can be no greater compliment than to be called a parliamentarian. Anyone who adds to the reputation of the House deserves a higher compliment than many who have held the highest offices of state, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) on the evident sanity of his Committee's recommendations. However, I endorse them with some reluctance, because I do not want to see fast changes. Morning sittings are totally inconsistent with having members of the Executive also Members of the legislature.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): That is poppycock.

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend says that that is poppycock. When she was a Minister how could she have organised her busy diary if she had been liable to be called here at any moment under the legitimate procedures of the House?

Mrs. Currie: My hon. Friend is doing very well so far. I was called here. Ministers are frequently called to various Committees—including, for example, the new European Standing Committee, of which I am a volunteer member.

Mr. Duncan: I bow to my hon. Friend's greater experience. Nevertheless, if the House is in permanent session in the morning, that will increase the difficulty of organising ministerial diaries.

Mr. Cryer: I give the organisation of ministerial diaries a low priority. However, on Tuesdays and Thursdays there are morning sittings of Standing Committees, which are often attended by Ministers. There are also morning Committees on Wednesdays at which affirmative resolutions are often dealt with. It would be difficult to organise morning sittings of the House and enable hon. Members to work in Committees as well on those three mid-week mornings.

Mr. Duncan: For once, I am happy to agree with the hon. Gentleman. Any proposal for morning sittings in the Chamber merely compounds the problem that he has properly described.

The Committee does not propose electronic voting, but we have to look to our public because such voting is widely discussed. I abhor such voting. We have not been elected to sit in a queue pressing buttons. How can we know that the right person is pushing the right button? What procedural problems will arise from a blown fuse? Anyone who is prepared to register his vote should hold his head high, march through the Lobby and be seen to register his opinion on the record of the House. Electronic voting is no more desirable than the replacement of the Speaker by a robot.

A fixed-term Parliament was discussed, and was also raised during the election campaign. I totally reject it. What could be more dangerous to democracy than the Opposition's knowledge that an election would not be called for four or five years? What better encouragement could there be for the Opposition to lie idle and not attack the Government than the knowledge that they will not be called to account in a general election at any time? The proposal is inconsistent with the traditions of the House.

My main argument is that, after 13 years of Conservative government, there is a great danger that any proposal to reform the procedures of the House will be influenced by the stability that the House has enjoyed during that time. In shaping amendments, we must look many decades ahead to possible changes in the party system and to the more acute balance of influence in the House which would make procedure of paramount importance for the workings of the democratic process in the country at large.

After I left school, I watched the debates in 1976 when Government and Opposition were in a delicate balance. I remember the tied vote on the Shipbuilding (Redundancy Payments) Act 1978. Some would argue on good procedural grounds that the vote was not tied at all. I remember the debate on the confidence motion in 1979. In those matters, every procedural device used by the Opposition was of the utmost importance. Perhaps those devices now have limited effect, but we cannot foresee when they might become of supreme importance and perhaps of value to us or to the Opposition.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) should continue to filibuster, using every device he can

find, because, who knows, in the far distant future that may be of use to my hon. Friends and to me. I am for the reforms, but I say, "Thus far, but no further."

8.16 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): The great merit of the speech by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) is that it was made by a new Member. We were told that the debate was for new Members to assess the position following the election and that that was why no decision was taken in the previous Parliament. However, until 10 minutes ago no new Members attempted to speak. The hon. Gentleman finished by saying he supported the recommendations. That was a surprise in view of what he had said earlier in his speech.

I did not come to speak, but, except for two minutes, I have been here for the whole debate. Before I came to the House just over 18 years ago, I heard a Member who is no longer in the House say that we represented our constituents at Westminster and not Westminster in our constituencies. That may have been true in the past, but it is not the case today. I am held as much to account in my constituency for what happens here as I rely on my constituency for the material that I use here to represent my constituents. There is some merit in arguing for constituency days or weeks.

Some years ago I learned about the way the Australian Parliament works. I hasten to add that I did not learn that from a visit there. Because of the distances, it sits for only four weeks at a time so that Members can return to their constituencies. There is some merit in that. I do not accept the argument about the length of recesses. When Parliament is convened after an election it should remain in being. However, it should not be in continuous session.

I have never understood why we cannot table written questions during a recess and have them answered. I have never understood why we cannot table early-day motions during the recess and get them printed on an Order Paper. The one crucial thing we lack during a recess is parliamentary privilege. We have it in a partial, qualified way through letters from Members to Ministers. However, if key issues arise, we should be able to raise them and, by a combination of written questions and early-day motions, with an Order Paper and a weekly *Hansard*, we could overcome many difficulties.

I do not wish to argue about the number of hours we sit, but, as we are the most centrally governed country in Europe, it is bound to be the case that we sit longer. The Government hold the power in our unitary state. It is not divided as it is, for example, in Germany, which is a federal country. France has an independent form of local government, so it is not necessary for the French Parliament to sit for long hours.

The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton reminded us of 1976, but I was going to use the example of 1977. When I served on the Committee examining the Finance Bill in 1977 and took part in the debates on Report, I did not need time, I did not need to filibuster and I did not face the threat of a guillotine to stop me and my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), who then represented Coventry, South-West, to amend the Budget. We were told that we should not have done it, but it was probably one of the most popular moves to benefit the low-paid that we ever made.

We used parliamentary procedure, but we used a device that has not been used by Conservative Members in this long period of stability. I will not use the word "courage", because it did not take courage, but we were prepared to use our vote in the way that we saw as best for our constituents. We put them before the Government of the day, not before our party because our party policy was clear. In the past 13 years, not enough Conservative Members have been prepared to do that. I remember the Monday on the Report stage of the poll tax Bill, when we debated the Mates amendment. The Opposition had agreed that it should be debated on that day. The Government's majority was 25, so obviously many Conservative Members voted against the Government, but such examples are few and far between.

We boast that we are the oldest Parliament in Europe, implying that we are the best, but we are the only Parliament in western, industrialised, old-style, democratic Europe that works on the basis of the whipping system, patronage, Orders in Council and guillotines by the Government of the day. That is a powerful combination. It is difficult for us to boast to other parliamentarians about how good and strong our Parliament is when the Executive have at their disposal all the weapons to manipulate Parliament, to snuff out opposition and to create circumstances in which Government Back Benchers do not feel free to speak and vote as they ought to.

I am not in favour of rebellion every day. That is stupid, because one devalues one's vote and one's voice. However, all rebellion has been snuffed out over the past 13 years, and that is sad.

Mr. Bennett: Will my hon. Friend accept that the attraction of the Rooker-Wise-Lawson amendment was that the Government of the day could not gag my hon. Friend because there was no procedure for timetabling the Committee stage of the Finance Bill? Therefore, as long as my hon. Friend had the courage to stick to the amendment, it was bound to be debated and there was bound to be an opportunity to have a vote on it.

Mr. Rooker: That is the case. The Government of the day accepted the amendment and it was never challenged on the Floor of the House. That is unusual, because normally Governments seek to overturn defeats in Committee. On that occasion, they did not do so, but that was probably because they knew that they were going to lose because the amendment was so popular. My hon. Friend is right. The guillotine was never a threat. It did not figure in our calculations. We tabled an amendment and we chose to vote for it or to abstain.

It is a pity that the Leader of the House is not here, because we supported his amendment on that occasion. The first amendment on upgrading tax allowances was his, but, because we voted for it, he never got the credit for it. The indexation came later in the day during a whole series of votes. I am sure that the Leader of the House remembers it, because I saw him look across the Chamber at an earlier speaker.

After 18 years here, I am still a reformer, but I would not go for electronic voting. I see merit in what is perceived as our arcane system of voting. However, I would go for timetabling of Bills. When we talk about timetabling, we think about guillotining, because that is what we are used to dealing with. However, if the timetable were based on an end date—by and large, the Government of the day will

[Mr. Rooker]

get their way provided that they can carry their Members with them—we could agree on the way that the available time was used. I do not mean just a number of hours but the time between one day of debate and another.

The amount of time devoted to the Bill should be within the control of the Opposition, and if we chose to debate all through the night on one occasion, that would be our decision. If we had the final decision on how the time was divided, we could choose the key subjects, as I said earlier in an intervention.

The poll tax Bill spent 200 hours in Committee, but, out of 200 clauses, we debated only about 40.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Only 21.

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend reminds me of how few it was; he served on the Committee with us.

We hardly got anywhere. We never debated any of the business taxes or other important matters. However, when we had five days on Report under the guillotine, the Opposition chose what was debated each day and we chose what time matters were debated each day. On behalf of the Opposition, I drafted the business statement. Ministers did not care. They told us that we had five days and should use them as we liked. We raised all the issues that we wished to raise, although we felt deprived because we had not raised them in Committee. That is an inefficient way to do it, but if we were given an end date and the Opposition were given some control over the way the time was used, that would be a good system.

I agree that there should be longer time between the publication of a Bill and Second Reading and then between Second Reading and the Bill going into Committee. That is crucial. This recent nonsense of the Bill being published on a Friday, Second Reading being on the Monday a week after, 10 days away, the Committee of Selection meeting on the Wednesday and the Bill in Committee on the following Tuesday has to stop, especially for important Bills. That procedure is an affront to those outside on whose behalf we are legislating. Any agreed arrangement on timetabling must include an improvement on that practice.

The idea of Fridays off is a good one, but it must go with early Thursday evenings. The one without the other would be ludicrous. We can all swap our diaries showing what we do on Fridays. It has been said that we can choose to come to Friday debates is we wish, but it is not like that. Many of us are terrified of entering the ballot for motions for Fridays when we look at what is in our diaries for Fridays. We know that we will have given a firm commitment to a whole series of people and organisations —chambers of commerce, schools and others whom we cannot meet on a Saturday or Sunday.

Many more Members of Parliament enter the ballot for motions to be debated on Mondays because that does not interfere with their constituency time, which is extremely valuable. Front-Bench speakers have a similar problem. They do not know whether they will be called for Front-Bench duty because the subject chosen—a choice out of their control—is one on which they have to reply. That is true of the Consolidated Fund as well. There is a compromise to be reached, whether we do it by the Select Committee report recommendation or by the more radical proposal of a week off every four or five weeks. There is scope for compromise, but it must be reached quickly.

I fear that we shall return in October and face a delay of a few weeks before there is a substantive debate. We shall then be told, "We cannot alter the Sittings of the House this Session. The revised sittings must start in November 1993 because of the legislation that is already under way. We must consider Ministers' diaries and the programme of parliamentary questions and answers. Days have already been set aside for private business on Fridays." We shall be under pressure to delay the implementation of anything that we agree until the beginning of the next Session after we return in October. That will be sad. There should be best endeavours to implement the maximum number of agreed recommendations from January next year. That would be to the benefit of Members and of those whom we are here to represent.

One or two Members have spoken—it is their prerogative to do so—as if we are proceeding for our convenience. We are all privileged to be elected to represent our constituents. We are the last port of call for many of them. In many instances, we are the only voice they have in our archaic electoral system. That is something that I do not propose to go into. I could have been misled by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton, who talked about fixed-term Parliaments, a subject which is not part of the report. If it were, I would have tabled amendments with a view to securing a longer debate.

We Members are transient; we are passing through. It is important that we think about our procedures for the future and learn the lessons of the past. I am glad that I have had the experience of sitting on both sides of the Chamber. I fear for those who have sat on only one side of it. When I listened to the previous debate on these matters—it took place before the general election—I thought, "There are going to be some new Ministers with a bit of luck after 9 April. Will this be good or bad?" The issue is whether changes will be good or bad for Parliament. It does not matter whether they will be good or bad for the party which is in opposition or in government. Some of the recommendations will be to the advantage of the Government, but others in the package will be of advantage to the Opposition. As a package, they are of advantage to the House. That is the basis on which we should arrive at our decisions.

We all have experience both inside and outside the House and I hope that we are all mature enough now—we have been able to talk about these matters in two debates and we have listened to at least one new Member voice his opinions, an opportunity which the debate was designed to present—to make some early decisions and to sell them to the country.

I caution any hon. Member who has not attended the debate and who has the temerity to enter the Chamber tomorrow to say, "Well, you spoke and voted for shorter hours of sitting and shorter weeks yesterday and you want more money tonight." We shall get ignorant contributions of that sort tomorrow from Members who have not been in their places this evening. The fact is that we need better resources. We need a better-informed House so that we are able more effectively to challenge the Executive. I say that on behalf of both Opposition and Government Back-Bench Members. Hours of sitting and resources are separate matters.

Over the past 13 years, since a Conservative Government have been in office, I have spent 11 years on the Opposition Front Bench. One of my reasons for having two years off it was to get some experience of Select Committee work. The two years that I spent on the Public Accounts Committee taught me more about the machinery of government than all the time that I spent on the Opposition Front bench. Those two years were extremely valuable. I know that that view is shared by many hon. Members.

There were many times on Mondays and Wednesdays when I regretted that I had to leave the Chamber to attend sittings of the PAC. The fact is, however, that that business is crucial. The Committee was able to bring civil servants to account. It was not possible to exert that discipline over Ministers because they do not appear before the Committee. As I have said, the work of the PAC is extremely valuable. We must take cognisance of that and, as individual Members, take a decision. We cannot be in Committee and on the Floor of the House at the same time.

On the other hand, that is no excuse for saying that we should not change the sitting hours of the House because it would mean that it would not be possible to do our work in Committee. It is vital that we should accept the Wednesday morning experiment. If that means that the parliamentary Labour party has to change the time of its meetings, that is neither here nor there. It will be able to find another slot in the week.

By and large, I support the package before us. What can be agreed must be implemented from January 1993. There must be no messing about with delays until the next Session. We can make adjustments to the decisions that are already being made about Friday sittings to meet everyone's convenience when it comes to private Members' Bills. That can be done without any difficulty. I implore the Government—it is in their gift—to organise our procedures to ensure that that happens.

8.36 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): The fact that I stand in my place in splendid isolation has more to do with my being at the tail end of a flu virus than interest in the report. The thing that worries me is that I agree with just about everything that was said by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker)—a unique experience in my nine years in the House. The hon. Gentleman's contribution was thoughtful and I can think of few points which would cause me to disagree with him.

I think especially of the hon. Gentleman's warning to my right hon. and hon. Friends about thinking of being on the Government Benches for ever. I fear that there is a tendency for some of my colleagues to think that their present position will ever be so. That is why it is important that the House should proceed with great care when it comes to change its procedures. That applies especially to those of us who sit on the Government Benches in the belief, perhaps, that we shall always occupy them. The same point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). I suspect that, by the time he finds himself on the Opposition Benches, he will be the Father of the House, so he has some time to prepare himself.

I was intrigued to see how the Committee had come to terms with and arrived at a balance between those who are primarily London-based Members—sadly, not all of them represent London constituencies, but they are capital-based Members—and those of us who, perhaps by perversity of nature, insist on being thought to be, and adamantly continue to be, provincial Members.

I have always been a reluctant reader of the *Evening Standard* because I do not wish to be sucked in, as some Members are, to living in London and being in London. I suppose that that is why my wife and I have always ensured that our small flat is an especially grotty one and not one in which we wish to spend a great deal of time. Like many Members—perhaps younger Members—my family remain in my constituency, which is in Shropshire. Anyone who has visited Shropshire—particularly Shrewsbury, which I am blessed to represent—will understand immediately why it is preferable to be thought of as a provincial Member and to be based in such a place to being a London Member who makes the occasional visit to his constituency to make sure that all is well.

I suspect that the days are long since gone when Members could get away with an annual visit to their constituencies, with the station master meeting the train wearing a bowler hat and white gloves. The pressures upon Members—this is certainly the view of colleagues who have been in the House for far longer than myself—have undoubtedly increased considerably. That is why I am particularly pleased with the Committee's conclusions on morning sittings and the fact that it did not plump for the four mornings per week option. Those of us who live in our constituencies and spend three, four or five hours travelling to London need Monday mornings to get to Westminster. If those mornings were not available to us, we would have to travel on Sundays.

The press comments on how the House works and the long summer recess, which it describes as a holiday. It often does not focus on our working week. Over 25 years in politics and nearly 10 years in the House, I have seen no reference to the fact that many Members spend at least a day a week getting backwards and forwards from their constituency to the House. It seems to be thought that we materialise in the House at will.

As I have said, I was intrigued to see how the Committee would arrive at a balance between those who have families in London and therefore are probably quite keen to be away from the House at 6 pm, and those of us who have families in constituencies away from London, whose wives are probably not too keen on the idea of our being footloose and fancy free after 6 pm. One of my wife's great attributes is that she has steadfastly refused to take a close interest in politics. She has been concerned that the House will change its routine and that I shall be able to go —perhaps with my hon. Friends the Members for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), whom I see in his place, and for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—into the wilds of Soho to be led astray, for want of parliamentary business to keep me occupied.

On behalf of Mrs. Conway, I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Committee, that she is glad that the House will not adjourn too early in the evening, so she will know exactly where I shall be during an evening in London alone.

I am pleased to note that recommendation 47 will give the House the opportunity to meet on a Wednesday morning. As I was not in the House when the experiment was tried some years ago, I have no idea how it will work, but many of us are looking forward to it. It is a cautious attempt, but it is worth a try.

[Mr. Derek Conway]

I am also pleased with recommendation 82—something about which my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary is less enthusiastic—on the setting of the parliamentary year. For many hon. Members, much depends on the ages of their children, whether or not they are at school and even whether they want their company. I remember that, in my first year as a Member of Parliament, I was cautioned by a senior and outgoing Member about my enthusiasm for the House to rise early in the summer so that I could see my children during the summer recess, rather than going into recess only couple of weeks before they were back at school. He predicted that within two decades I would be wishing that the House would sit throughout the entire summer period so that I had an excuse not to return to the family. I am glad to say that I have not quite reached that stage.

The media will write tomorrow night about secretarial allowances, just as they have written about summer recesses. I am not sure what they mean by "summer holidays". When I was a new Member of Parliament, I visited a factory in Shrewsbury—a large employer—during my first summer recess. Its marketing director was giving a presentation about the work of that wonderful organisation. He summed up by saying to me, "While you are on your summer holidays, we are keeping the wheels of industry turning."

I have had enough of that twaddle. My idea of a summer holiday is to be in my Shropshire garden with the children, not sitting in a factory listening to its tales of woe, however justifiable they may have been. That chap spoke as though sitting listening to him whining was a holiday. It is quite a perverse view, but many of our constituents reading the newspapers think that the summer recess is a summer holiday. Since that experience, I have not been afraid to remind my constituents that it is not.

The House sat until 2 August one year during my time here. As many people know, the Scottish schools return quite early, and even schools in England are now returning earlier than they used to. The amount of time available to a Member to spend a holiday with his young children is nothing like the length of the summer recess, which the editors of the tabloids would have our constituents believe is a holiday. The recommendation to specify the Christmas, Easter and Whitsun recesses is welcome, and will be even more so for those Members with young children.

Recommendation 84 to rise by mid-July is good. I hate being in London in July. I know why we have to be here, but it has nothing to do with parliamentary business or the timetable of Governments——

Mrs. Currie: It is the garden parties.

Mr. Conway: It may be because of the Buckingham palace garden parties, or even the Prime Minister's receptions, but I think that it has more to do with the timing of the party conferences. The Labour and Tory party conferences are held in October—the Liberal Democrats have theirs in September—and the House cannot sit during those great occasions. Instead, we have to be in a sweltering London in July and fight our way through the crowds of tourists, mostly American, to get to the House. That enables us to be present and to cheer at our party conferences, which we all loyally love to do. The recommendation to rise by mid-July is not over-ambitious. Indeed, if it were to be early July, so much the better. If that also gave us an excuse not to attend the party conferences, that would be even more welcome.

The proposal to announce two weeks' business in advance is helpful. The hon. Member for Perry Barr spoke about organising constituency events. It is difficult for our constituents to understand the short notice of proposed business. Most of them have no idea that we find out the following week's business on the previous Thursday. They cannot believe that we operate in such an inefficient and unclear way, but we do. Even if the House takes a long time to push through the report—which it shows every sign of doing—I hope that my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary will look kindly on introducing that reform of his own volition. I do not think that it would require a change in the procedure of the House and it would be a welcome gesture. Most hon. Members enjoy being in their constituencies and want to plan for that.

The old adage that we have to be in Parliament to represent our constituency, rather than representing it in the provinces, is still frequently heard, but times and demand have changed and constituents will no longer put up with an absentee Member of Parliament. Anyone who goes about his business in that way will get short shrift, not only from his constituents but from his constituency party. The demands upon Conservative Members have changed during my 25 years in politics. Perhaps the Labour party has always ensured that its Members of Parliament are accountable to its organisational structure, but that is a fairly recent innovation for the Tory party—although it is clearly growing. The House must take account of that and respond to it.

I have my doubts whether the proposed changes will make us a more effective legislature. I often think that, as a Chamber, our only way to control the Executive would be to make talking or any form of communication between the usual channels a capital offence. Then Members of Parliament might have some small say in the way in which the House regulates itself and tries to monitor what the Executive are doing.

This is a thorough report, which we considered before the general election and are considering again today. I share the view of many hon. Members that the recommendations should be introduced soon, rather than drifting on towards next year or even the end of the session. It is not an over-radical report, so it should not worry Members. Provided that the House accommodates Members of Parliament with independent spirits and minds, such as the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), and allows them to keep us here—even those Members who support the Government—when we do not want to be here so that they can make difficult comments, the system cannot be too bad. It is not a radical report, but it is long overdue. The sooner the House endorses it, the better.

8.46 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Consensus in this Chamber is the worst aspect of Parliament at work. I well recall the day in 1981 when it was agreed that the Consolidated Fund should be changed to a series of Adjournment debates and that the holiday Adjournment

debates should be limited to three hours. The debates used to be open-ended and people could come here in the knowledge that they could take part in a debate. The Consolidated Fund Bill debate lasted all night and was regulated by hon. Members. They would put down their names to speak on a particular subject and those subjects would be debated for three, four or five hours, while smaller debates were over in half an hour. The system worked extremely well.

There was an awkward point—the Government had to get 100 Members here for the closure motion in the morning and 100 for the closure motion on the holiday Adjournment debates. That was just a little inconvenient. One day, the Labour Opposition ran away with the debate and took the Consolidated Fund debate through the night and the next day. We said to the Government, "Give us some concessions on the Housing Bill or we will keep running." We gained important concessions.

What did we do then? We said that there was a strong chance that at the next election in 1983 we could form the Government, so it would be awkward to have to find 100 Members for the closure motion in the morning. Therefore, the Labour party agreed with the Conservatives to abolish that practice and instead have a series of fixed Adjournment debates. That was very neat and tidy, but we can no longer run away with the debate. That gives the Government an advantage.

There is a rich stench of that around the report. A number of Labour Members thought that the report was not a bad idea and that the timetabling of Bills would be very neat and tidy when we formed the Government in April. Of course, the election did not turn out as was intended. That is one of the problems with democracy—we can never be sure of the outcome. Now that things did not turn out as we expected, Labour Members are changing their minds and retreating. That is right and proper.

The name of the Chairman of the Committee was announced before the membership of the Committee, which is pretty unusual. The reason was that the Committee was chosen to produce a result. The result was intended to be to make everything here neat and tidy. One of the great advantages of this place is that it is not neat and tidy. I have been in a neat and tidy place for five years; it is called the European Parliament. I call it an assembly because it is not a legislative body. Everything there is organised by the parties. It had electronic voting which used to break down regularly, although it was state of the art electronics, and which was the subject of an enormous amount of fiddling.

Simple systems may be old-fashioned and unpopular. Going through the Lobbies is a simple system and if one supports the Government, one can get hold of Ministers. If one is an Opposition Member, one can also get hold of Ministers if one wants to twist their arms about something. It is very difficult to cheat. That is not much of an issue at the moment, but if there is a minority Government or a Government with a majority of two or three, cheating may become an important issue on special occasions. We should not ignore that factor in modernising Parliament because of considerations of fashion.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): One of my first experiences here was the debate on the Ways and Means resolutions. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) may recall that he forced Conservative Members through the Lobbies time after time. Opposition Members clocked up between nine and 15 votes each time, whereas my hon. Friends clocked up about 250 votes. If we had had electronic voting, the whole procedure could have gone through in a short time. In the event, it took more than three hours. That time could have been used for useful debate. Does the hon. Gentleman not feel that it was rather a waste of time and that electronic voting would have helped?

Mr. Cryer: I do not want to go too far down that road because the subject is not part of the report. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that in this place, we have the old platitude of checks, balances and leverage. The opportunity of voting 10 times is often a useful lever with which the Opposition can gain some concessions from the Government. There are, for example, 10 orders tonight which are to be taken forthwith, which means that they can be voted on. That can be handy if the Opposition want to gain some concessions. It may be relatively trivial, but over a period of weeks it could make things difficult for the Government. I take the view that we could run this place ragged if we set our minds to doing so. It would be awkward, but it is a possibility.

I do not make that comment in a macho spirit of male assertion. Long speeches and voting are nothing to do with assertion of masculinity. They are intended to get concessions from the Government. Hon. Members do not undertake long speeches for the sake of it; the purpose is to try to obtain concessions. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) pointed out that the Opposition used that tactic on the Transport and Works Bill, which was going to go through on an agreed basis in a couple of neat and tidy sittings. As some of us did not like that idea, we spoke lengthily on the sittings motion and we went into detail. Eventually the message got through to the Minister and his hon. Friends that it would be a long and difficult Committee unless some co-operation were established and unless some concessions made. Concessions were produced, the Committee proceedings were good and the Bill was much improved after the Committee stage. That is an important point.

People accuse me—I wince at this—of being a good parliamentarian—[HON. MEMBERS: " Never."] It is pretty dreadful, but they do say that. I have a private list of people who make such accusations. My emphasis is always on the constituency. I have always been a Member of Parliament for marginal seats and I always emphasise the importance of constituency work. In my present constituency, I maintain a full-time office. I do not say that Parliament is everything and then ignore the constituency. My constituency is important, but I do not see that it is necessary to have 10 Fridays off per Session to provide a compulsory opportunity to be in the constituencies.

As I said in an intervention, there is an opportunity for hon. Members to be in their constituencies on many Fridays. People in Bradford, South do not say to me, "Why were you not down there speaking on the disposal of Welsh toxic waste last Friday?" It is not a subject which is greatly debated in Bradford, South. Last Friday was an opportunity for me to spend as much of the day as I could in my constituency. Such opportunities often occur. Fridays provide a valuable opportunity for hon. Members —last Friday, it was Welsh Members—to raise constituency matters in the most important assembly in

[Mr. Cryer]

the country. Getting rid of 10 Fridays is potentially wrong. As usual, it is not the Government who will suffer; it will be Back-Bench Members who suffer. They will also suffer in other ways.

The Committee started off on the wrong basis. There are a few paragraphs at the beginning of the report to justify the Committee's course. It should have begun by asking, "Is Parliament doing a good job? Is it scrutinising all aspects of Government work and ensuring that there is an element of accountability? Can we improve that if we change the hours?" The Committee started, because of the composition of the membership, on the basis of changing the hours and then fitting the scrutiny with the changed hours. The approach was back to front.

The proposals were made under the cloak that women would be more attracted to the idea of entering Parliament if the hours were changed. I do not share that view. People may say, "Of course he would not." I have discussed the matter extensively with my wife, as I am bound to do, and I have not taken a narrow male view. We both take the view that there will always be difficulties for provincial Members. Underlying the report is the convenience of London-based Members, not the convenience of provincial Members.

It is up to the political parties to determine that women should come into this place. There are many able women who are willing and eager to come into Parliament and to serve their party and their constituents here. For a variety of reasons, they do not get in here. Women on the national executive committee of the Labour party must be more determined to put women on short lists. I well recall—this is no reflection on my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney), who ran an excellent campaign—that two women were nominated for the by-election short list. Neither was even proposed by any women members of the national executive committee of the Labour party.

Until that kind of omission is rectified, women will find great difficulty in getting elected to this place.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has given way to a provincial female Member of Parliament. I believe that it is exceedingly important that we should be able to rely on Fridays to do things like visit schools. One cannot expect a headmistress to suddenly jack in everything because one is coming to visit the next day because our business has been changed.

We should be able to plan ahead for visits to schools or factories. We should not have to tell people at the last minute that we are descending on them. Such planning is very important for me. Yorkshire may be a little closer to this place, but I have a five-hour journey to get to my constituency and I will value those 10 Fridays.

Mr. Cryer: I disagree with the hon. Lady. I believe that hon. Members can plan visits in advance on most Fridays. However, it would be difficult for hon. Members to get away on some Fridays, particularly when there are debates on controversial private Bills. People outside this place may press hon. Members to be present for such debates because of their controversial nature.

I do not believe that the Select Committee report deals adequately with statutory instruments. Many detailed aspects of people's lives, including their benefits, housing and construction and use of motor vehicles are dealt with in statutory instruments. The vast majority of legislation is carried out through delegated legislation: between 1,500 and 2,000 statutory instruments are produced every year.

In 1990-91, just over 100 statutory instruments were prayed against because hon. Members thought that they should be debated and voted on in the Chamber. The Government granted 25 such debates. If hon. Members pray against a negative procedure instrument, unless that prayer is tabled by a Front-Bench spokesman, there is virtually no chance of a debate.

Affirmative statutory instruments are debated automatically. However, the House treats delegated legislation with a significant lack of scrutiny and that is appalling. The Select Committee did not address that problem, although I gave evidence on that. The Committee dismissed my concerns too easily.

It is proposed that, instead of being debated on the Floor of the House late at night, affirmative resolutions should be sent to a merits Committee on a Wednesday morning because that is when such Committees meet. However, private Members' business is also proposed to be taken in Wednesday morning sittings. What happens if hon. Members wish to speak in both debates? They cannot be in both places at the same time. If we are to deal with the affirmative resolutions that are dealt with in this place and with those that are dealt with in Committee, many hon. Members will be involved in those Committees. That proposal is incompatible.

It is unfair that hon. Members should face the alternative of exercising a self-denying ordinance by removing themselves from the Chamber so that they can serve in Committee. The Select Committee report will place more obstacles on the 150 or 200 people in this place who are the workhorses of Parliament. They staff the Committees and frequently take part in debates. If we are to have morning sittings on Tuesdays and Thursdays, there will be more problems if Standing Committees meet at the same time.

There was an agreed timetable on the Broadcasting Bill which was a major piece of legislation. People argue that the timetable procedure ensures that all parts of a Bill are debated. That was not true for the Broadcasting Bill, even though the timetable was voluntary. Large chunks of that Bill were not considered because the Government wanted their business on the Floor of the House. In return for our timetable concessions, we had an extra day on the Floor of the House. The procedure does not work perfectly.

I do not cavil at the timetable on the Broadcasting Bill, although that was not a path that I would have followed. That timetable was introduced by agreement. However, the idea of compulsory timetables gives the Government a big incentive. A Conservative Member said earlier that he and his colleagues were going to speak. Of course they are. Conservative Back Benchers usually do not speak, because they do not want to take up time to justify a guillotine on the Floor of the House.

There was another confession, in this evening of confessions, from a former Minister who said that the thought of a row over a guillotine on a particular subject influences Ministers. It is therefore worth bearing in mind that we can exert pressure in this place.

It is true that some of my hon. Friends do not think that those pressures have been effective, but, when we face a Government with a huge majority of 150 over Labour and 110 overall, it is very difficult to make any indentations on

their political progress, but we can do so if we keep up the pressure and keep our wits and eyes about us. We will not do so if we hand an important power to the Government. Conservative Back-Bench Members will then use up the available time under the guillotine and we will lose one of our most important powers. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] I am not used to being surrounded by such support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) mentioned patronage being used to influence procedures. He claimed that comparative European Governments do not have the patronage that exists here through the whipping procedure. They have a system of patronage that is called proportional representation. Proportional representation is of concern of my hon. Friend. When the additional member system or any other list system applies, the relevant political party has enormous patronage. Other Parliaments do not have the problems that we have, because the people who are sent to other Parliaments, having been chosen by the machinery of the party, are clones of the leadership. All the dissidents are sorted out first of all. They never get on to the list in order to be electable. The result is safe, sound, dull assemblies which act as rubber stamps for anything that the leadership puts forward. Patronage comes from outside and makes its will felt inside before one runs into trouble.

One of the strengths of this place is that it is awkward. It is not neat and tidy, but we can use it as a platform —we can state our ideas. Sometimes it is difficult for a party leadership to stop ideas being expressed in this place. That makes it a bit awkward from time to time, but democracies are about awkwardness, about ideas being raised, and about clashes of opinion—even clashes of opinion on the same Benches. We will have clashes over the Maastricht Bill if the Government are silly enough to bring it back.

I do not believe that the report will advantage anybody except London-based Members who want to get home at seven o'clock, safe and sound and in time for tea and crumpets. If one lives in Bradford, that would involve a 400-mile round trip, and one cannot manage to do that. We have a decent system in which we utilise time to the maximum. We can have improvements in Parliament, but not in that respect. The Committee was set up for a certain purpose. I do not think that it is satisfactory. If the report comes back to this place, I hope that there will be lots and lots of amendments—in fact, I want to see it buried under amendments.

9.8 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): No doubt the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) will keep us up through the night when the matter comes back to the House. We shall look forward to that. I represent a London constituency, but I do not work near enough to go home for tea and crumpets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) and the hon. Member for Bradford, South summed up my views on the report. My hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham pointed out many reasons why we need sensible reform of our hours in this place. Equally, the hon. Member for Bradford, South rightly highlighted some reasons for our procedures. We need to get the balance right when we consider the report.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and the members of his Committee, from both sides of the House, who considered the matters that we have discussed tonight on their attempt to make agreed proposals which might at some point get through the House. However, we should be careful about welcoming those proposals and examine them carefully before we go overboard accepting them.

I hope that hon. Members heard clearly the words of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). He referred to the danger that hon. Members might come late to the proceedings and start talking about Members voting themselves shorter hours. It is not a question of that, and I hope that that will not be written in any newspaper columns. We are talking about making this place more efficient. It is not a question of time off. We seek to ensure that Parliament can do its job, but that legislation is not produced by a set of zombies—as can occasionally be the case when we have been here too many hours and days on the trot.

We seek a double balance. The Executive have a right and a duty to get their business through the House. One way in which they can do that is to produce less business so that it can go through at a more orderly pace and in a shorter time. We must seek a balance between that and the right of Parliament to careful scrutiny of legislation.

The other balance is between the mandate of a Government and the opportunities for opposition in Parliament. I do not refer only to opposition across the Floor of the House, although that is crucial to parliamentary democracy. If the Opposition do not have any weapons within the parliamentary system, there ceases to be any reason for them to be here. That is why I urge caution on my colleagues about removing the weapon of time from the parliamentary Opposition. If that weapon goes, there is some danger that opposition will leave this place.

I refer also to opposition between ideas. We have often seen private Members' Bills blocked. My Bill was blocked because Members talked it out. That was their absolute right. I disagreed with their tactics and their view, but it was a perfectly reasonable use of parliamentary time to block the progress of a Bill by talking it out. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) was correct when he said that often the judicious and sensible use of time produces amendments and concessions which can make for better legislation or, indeed, stop legislation and give time for second thoughts.

Like the hon. Member for Bradford, South, I do not like the idea of morning sittings. Parliament has other duties in the mornings. It is not that I have an outside job; I do not. My morning work is connected with my parliamentary duties. Like those of many hon. Members who represent inner-city seats, vast numbers of my constituents write to me. I have some 50 casework letters every day. That is not unusual among inner-city Members. We need time to deal with that case work. Ministers also need time to deal with work in their Departments.

I slightly resent the time when I have to sit upstairs in Committee while a debate is taking place in the Chamber in which I wish to take part. That happens often enough now, when debates in the Chamber and in Committee clash only after 4.30 pm. It would be doubly bad if debates

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took place in the Chamber in the mornings, even if only on Wednesdays. I therefore urge caution also on Wednesday morning sittings.

The recommendation to timetable Bills makes sense up to a point. Timetabling of the Report stage would probably make good sense. It might answer the suggestion made during the proceedings of the Select Committee that Report stages should be limited and the Bill sent back for a further stage of consideration in Committee. The sensible timetabling of the Report stage would ensure that all the issues that should come out in the debate did so.

I suspect, however, that the timetabling would have to be decided according to a procedure other than the whims and wishes of the two Front Benches, especially the Opposition Front Bench. We must ensure that the wishes of the House determine the subjects to be debated.

It is reasonable for us to consider ending earlier on Thursdays, but the House might consider the following alternative. Recently there have been many debates on the Adjournment on Thursdays, and Members have not had to be here to vote. I wonder whether it would be a better use of parliamentary time if it were the normal procedure to have a debate on the Adjournment on Thursdays, enabling us to finish at the normal time. Such debates are often more informed than others.

Perhaps we should also consider having concurrent debates, as is often the practice with orders. Several related subjects could be debated at the same time, with separate votes at the end.

I agree with the proposal that there should be more 10-minute limits on speeches. From reading the report, I am pleased to learn that that would apply to our most senior colleagues as much as to us more ordinary mortals. I am also pleased with the suggestion that the 10-minute rule for Bills should be left alone.

I am pleased at the proposals on proxy votes for the sick who are genuinely unable to attend. I look forward to finding out how those will be defined to avoid any of the voting abuses that have been mentioned. I suspect that there might be some challenges to those proposals.

I am unashamedly one of those Members who wish us to continue to troop through the Lobby. It is right that we should not be able to hide how we vote but should do so in person, except in the case of illness. The first time one votes against one's party certainly concentrates the mind, although I do not recommend that we do it too often. I vividly remember the first occasion when I did so. I think that it might have been a vote on your amendment, Madam Deputy Speaker, opposing the Government on the ending of dog registration. I did not go through the Lobby lightly. That is one of the procedures and traditions of the House that we should keep, although we might consider our procedures on multiple votes. There have been occasions when we have had to stand up and sit down in the Chamber with fair regularity. Perhaps we could consider group voting through the Lobby.

I welcome the report, and I look forward to the motions which will stem from it. Like the hon. Member for Bradford, South, I hope that we shall be able to vote on the various measures proposed because like him, I suspect that I may agree with some but wish to oppose others.

9.17 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): As a member of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, it gives me pleasure to speak on the report in this new Parliament. My feelings on the report are characterised by one word—timidity. It is not quite like changing the deckchairs on the Titanic, but it is not far from it.

The report is timid in many respects. First, respect for this place is overwhelming. One should be respectful of history and tradition, but in this place respect goes as far as the ridiculous. We refer to our constituents in the Gallery as strangers, but none of us referred to any of them as strangers in March and April. Not only were they friends, they were deep friends as they trooped loyally to put their cross for us in the general election so that we could represent them here. Then we have the cheek to call them strangers for the next four or five years before we ask for their vote again. That is one example of the anachronistic practices of this place. It is a museum: it is not designed for the needs of the 20th century.

The report is timid in that, for reasons of time, it did not tackle the wider pressures on the House and Members. Considering the pressures that Members are under in the House and in our constituencies, I feel that our modest contribution could be swept away in the tide of external demands that Members have to face in fully representing our constituents in the latter half of the 20th century.

Fridays have been mentioned. It is proposed that there should be 10 Fridays on which we would be allowed not to be here. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said, "Yes, a four-day week." I challenge my hon. Friend and other hon. Members who have made that point. There is no question of our having a four-day week. Indeed, we ought to be off every Friday to enable us to go about constituency business. The newly elected hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) nods in agreement. He is a humble Conservative Back Bencher, as I am a humble Labour Back Bencher. During the previous Parliament I went to the school where he was a humble teacher to tell modern studies pupils all about Parliament. That is the kind of thing that I can do only on a Friday; it is a necessary aspect of the job to speak to our young constituents. Reference to Members attending Monday to Thursday as working a four-day week is not only gross cheek but amounts to gross insensitivity to the demands that Members of Parliament face. I for one would not be in any way shy about debating that matter anywhere at any time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) referred to the fact that power is flowing from the Floor of the Chamber to Committees. As a Member elected in 1987 I can say that my most fruitful work here has been done not in the Chamber, where on occasions it is very frustrating trying to be called to make one's points, but in the Committee rooms, where civil servants and Ministers—the people who hold the power—can be scrutinised. There is insufficient scrutiny of the Executive. Often on the Floor of the House, all we have are artificially long debates in which we get nowhere in terms of scrutinising the Executive. That could be changed, but unfortunately it is a matter which the Committee did not tackle.

We do not have sufficient opportunity to raise matters on behalf of our constituents. I should have liked to see the Committee suggest, for example, a period of 10 or 15

minutes at the beginning of each sitting when Members could have the Floor of the House for one minute to speak for constituents with pressing needs. Ten or 15 Members could be given that opportunity every day. It would be a service not only to those Members but to their constituents.

I welcome the idea that we should work towards a 10 o'clock vote. It is not shorter hours, but more sensible hours, that I want. I do not want to curtail the expression of opinion; I want to encourage more scrutiny. Why cannot we have more sensible working arrangements? Why do we start our business at 2.30 in the afternoon?

Mr. Cryer: We do not.

Mr. McFall: Business on the Floor of the House starts at 2.30.

The Committee's recommendation that there be one morning sitting a week—on Wednesdays—is timid. Why should not we sit every morning? Many, but not all, Members do not commit themselves to full-time membership. In saying so, I refer more to Conservative Members. If we had a commitment to full-time membership we could certainly have more orderly hours. We are told that this Parliament has more sitting days per year than any other Parliament in western Europe. That is true. But why do not we sit more than 161 days and spread the sittings out? That would be more sensible.

What are the drawbacks of our present system? Let me give two personal examples arising in the present Parliament. Last week, a very serious constituency problem—possible privatisation measures in relation to the Clyde submarine base—was brought to my attention. If the matter had been put to me next week or the week after that, I should have been unable to do anything about it, as the Executive cannot be scrutinised during the long parliamentary holidays. However, I was able last week to address the problem in the summer Adjournment debate. The Leader of the House passed my comments to the Ministry of Defence, and on Wednesday morning I am having a meeting with the Minister.

One week later, that effort would have been futile. I would not have had the opportunity to put my concerns to the Ministry. Once we came back in October, we could not have addressed that issue. It is a burning one presently, but in October when we return the decisions will have been taken.

Two weeks ago I was fortunate enough to have the Adjournment debate, but it took place at 7·45 am. The Minister replied at 8.10. I was up all night, I went to my flat at 9.15 and was back here to see constituents at 11 am. Back-Bench Members cannot give of their best in such circumstances, so what can Ministers do? We need to make far more radical changes to our procedures, but we have not taken the opportunity to do so.

I too have been taken in by the history and tradition of this place. I moved an amendment in the Select Committee on Sittings of the House to cease business in mid-July for our summer holidays. I felt that I was rather bold to move that amendment and I was happy when it was accepted. However, the next week the Chancellor gave his Budget speech and told us that the Treasury was changing the financial year so that the Budget would no longer be set in March. Experienced Members told me intially that I could not get away with the mid-July proposal and that, if I did, I would get away with murder. But a week later the Chancellor stumped us all. That is another example of the way in which our respect for this place makes us myopic so that we cannot see the real issues. In this instance, I am as guilty of that as anyone else.

Why is the Leader of the House unable to give us more than two weeks' notice of forthcoming business? Last year, the secretary of a women's guild in my constituency wrote to me and gave me nine months' notice of a meeting she wanted me to address. I thanked her for her letter, but I had to say that I would write on the Friday before the meeting—in nine months' time—to say whether I could come. My action might seem sensible to my right hon. and hon. Friends, but does it make sense to the secretary of the women's guild in my constituency? I think not.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Did my hon. Friend go?

Mr. McFall: Yes I did, but it should be possible for me to organise my parliamentary diary more sensibly. It is not sensible to be told of parliamentary business with less than one week's notice, as at present.

I also moved an amendment in the Committee to introduce proxy voting, which summarised the difference between its experienced and inexperienced members, such as myself. We do not need to remind ourselves of the grotesque circumstances that prevailed in the 1970s when Labour Members were dragged from their sickbeds to vote here. At the time when the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Bill went through, George Cunningham, then a Member, recounted how three hon. Members had been dragged from their sickbeds to vote, any one of whom could have died in this Palace that night. The House insists that hon. Members should be here to vote, but that grotesque arrangement should stop.

My amendment was accepted by seven votes to six. Thew seven who voted in favour were, generally speaking, the least experienced Members of the Committee. The experienced Members warned us, "No, no, no. We cannot do anything about it. We cannot tell when a Member is sick." It was suggested that a doctor might give a sick line to someone who was not sick. It appears that we cannot apply the finest minds, which grapple with the problems of the nation, to defining when someone is sick. However, the inexperienced Members of that Committee voted in favour of my amendment. I remind the Leader of the House that we asked for a Speaker's Conference on that issue. We should have that conference as soon as possible.

The Committee also interviewed the previous Speaker about which proposed changes he would regard as beneficial. He said that, from his long experience, all reports recommending change had given more power to the Executive. I realise that that is a danger of this report. There is a democratic deficit in this country at present because the Executive power has grown and, to some extent, Parliament has become a spectator. I ask hon. Members, in voting and recommending the measures tonight, to bear in mind the words of the previous Speaker and ensure that the change gives not more power to the Executive but more power of security to Members.

9.29 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): As a new boy coming to the House for the first time, I was struck by one rule at an early stage: the 10-minute rule imposed while I made my maiden speech. As a result, I did not have an

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opportunity, which I intend to take now, to say a few words about my constituency—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no."] I will only be short. I had an opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Am I right in assuming that the hon. Gentleman has made his maiden speech?

Mr. Heald: Yes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In that case, and given the hour, the hon. Gentleman should confine his speech to the subject in hand.

Mr. Heald: In general, the 10-minute rule is extremely good, despite the difficulty that I have experienced in that connection. If one cannot say something in 10 minutes, it is probably not worth saying.

It may have been right in former times for the House regularly to sit until the early hours, but it is now the centre of national debate in a rather different way. Given the measures taken in the past few years such as televising the House, and the development of public interest in our debates, with more people attending debates than previously, the House should carry out its business when the public are available to take an interest. Regularly to sit beyond 10 o'clock is no longer a sensible way to proceed when people at home wish to visit the House and hear our debates and to see them on television.

I welcome the recommendation that the sittings of the House should end at 10 o'clock if possible. It is not only a question of the reporting of the House and its activities, and the fact that people can see the House operate, but a question of the life style of Members of Parliament and the people who can be attracted to put forward their names to attend the House.

Members who live in the shires close to London, or in London, could then have a prefectly normal life style, going home to their families at night. It is ridiculous to stop that happening and continue with unnecessary late-night sittings. It puts off many people, especially women and those with young families who might otherwise be interested in putting their names forward. Such restrictions should not exist.

The House is not simply a focus of national debate, but a place where representative individuals can put forward their view on behalf of their constituents. I am particularly concerned about the Maxwell pensioners, and it seems ridiculous that the major debate on IMRO and the supervision of occupational pension funds should have taken place at 5 am, when that subject is at the centre of national interest and should have taken place during normal hours.

Similarly, my experience so far has been that constituency work can be undertaken on Fridays. For example, last Friday I visited the Howard Cottage Society in Letchworth, which is putting forward plans for 110 new dwellings in Letchworth. It has a range of schemes for the disabled. At my surgery on Saturday, I was able to say with experience to someone with a housing need that that was the institution to go to for help. Such basic constituency work must take place on Fridays, when such institutions are open. Factories, too, can only be visited on Fridays. We would be wrong not to allow such opportunities regularly, thus allowing diaries to be filled in advance.

Schools are currently very interested to hear hon. Members talk about the workings of the House of Commons. That should be encouraged: we want school children to know about such matters. Schools are also interested in the environment, and want to know about environmental measures, the Rio conference and so on. We should protect Fridays for that purpose, too.

I accept that the voting system does not feature in the motion, but it strikes me that we spend hours voting on, for instance, ways and means motions, when there is no serious challenge to the measures in question. Nine, 10 or 11 hon. Members will be voting on one side and 250 on the other. Hours that could be used for debate are being wasted so that hon. Members can troop through the Lobbies. I hope that the House will either introduce electronic voting or, if that is not considered suitable, at least come up with a measure that addresses the problem. Perhaps the voting system suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) could be introduced. If debates are to end at 10 pm, every hour of precious debating time will need to be saved.

Thank you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry that my original thought that I could mention the towns in my constituency rather more fully than I had done previously was not in order.

9.37 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My hon. Friends the Members for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and I wish to ask the Leader of the House a question. If there are to be Wednesday morning sittings and—heaven help us—Tuesday and Thurday morning sittings, what will happen to all our constituents who visit the House from other parts of the country?

Following the perceptive speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South, I have some questions to ask about Friday sittings. We have heard a lot of cant on the subject. Last Friday we had a debate about toxic waste, which related especially to Wales. What other opportunities will the Welsh have to discuss Pontypool and its problems in the House? On the Friday before that, my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) raised the issue of special educational needs. When did the House of Commons ever have an opportunity to discuss that issue, except on Fridays?

Before that, there was a debate on action for the countryside. I agree with the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald): Rio is important. That was my only opportunity to raise, at some length, issues arising from it.

Before that, there was a debate on recycling. The House has never had an opportunity to discuss that properly. The Friday before that, there was a debate on the common agricultural policy. When have we ever had a relaxed debate on the common agricultural policy?

Ms. Armstrong *rose*——

Mr. Dalyell: I will give way, but my hon. Friend will forgive me if she gets a sharp answer.

Ms. Armstrong: Is the time on Wednesday between 10 am and 2.30 pm significantly different from the time that we have on a Friday? It seems to me that there is only half an hour's difference.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend has asked the wrong friend. I was the late Dick Crossman's parliamentary private secretary when he tried to bring in morning sittings. The Leader of the House when I was first here was Iain Macleod, a man whom I admired greatly and who was personally extremely kind to new Members, including Opposition Members. He warned that morning sittings would end in fiasco—and so they did.

To return to my hon. Friend's question: the parliamentary Labour party hold its weekly meetings on Wednesday morning; when is it to hold them if we sit then?

All these issues are of minor importance compared with a much more fundamental one about which I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South. It concerns the rights and effectiveness of the Opposition. We have an adversarial system in this House and in the British political system, so what weapon besides time do the Opposition have? As the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) pointed out, the use of time can be a threat, and it would be removed from us. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South about John Silkin—the pass was sold, although de mortuis nil nisi bonum. It was all a matter of convenience; and once we make the House more streamlined and less inconvenient, the powers of the Opposition will be diminished.

I should like to offer some concrete instances. Only once in Mrs. Thatcher's early days as Prime Minister was a Government decision changed. That was when some of us—very few of us—decided to talk all night about retrospective Iranian sanctions. The Leader of the House may remember the occasion. The change came about—the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) will remember this only too well, because the Whips were involved—because of effective opposition.

After the event that I have just described, there was a truncated debate in the House, when the usual function of the Chamber was distorted and the rules were broken. The date was 3 April 1982; the occasion, the Falklands debate. Dissent was ruled out: there was no time for it. As George Thomas states in his memoirs, he decided that, in the short time available, the Prime Minister had to be supported. Had there been a six-hour debate, other voices would have been heard. Had they been heard, the battle fleet might not have gone south with the imprimatur of Parliament and some of the ridiculous statements made from the Labour Front Bench by Michael Foot and John Silkin would at least have been challenged. Things would have turned out very differently.

So much is arguable; what is not arguable is what happened in the 1960s. I am one of the dwindling band of Members who remember—my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) will contradict me if he thinks that I am terribly wrong—our late colleagues Jack Mendelson, Michael Foot and a number of others below the Gangway, arguing the case day after day against committing British troops to Vietnam. Because of the set-up in the House which allows the dissenters to have their say, this country, rightly or wrongly—rightly as some of us passionately believe—was kept out of the Vietnam war.

If there had been box-like 10-minute speeches of the type to which my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) referred, what would have happened over Suez? How could there have been opposition, rightly or wrongly, with its effect on political history if Members had been straitjacketed into speeches which no one interrupted? Such speeches are neat and tidy contributions which have little effect on the outside world. The House should not be unduly tidied up, because when we are tidied up we become much less effective. There is a dilemma between so-called efficiency and effectiveness. Warts and all, I would rather be effective.

9.45 pm

Mr. Newton: The truest comment in this fascinating debate was made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who has apologised for not being able to stay until the end of the debate. He said that in this area it was clearly impossible to satisfy everybody's interests. I think that I have quoted him correctly. That has been clearly borne out in the debate. As I said in opening the debate, I was endeavouring to accord with what I took to be the spirit of the House by confining my speech to the magic 20 minutes recommended in the Jopling report. However, I found the widespread and entirely legitimate demand for interventions incompatible with limiting myself to 20 minutes. That is an interesting illustration of the sort of balance that we must strike in these matters.

Manifestly, whatever general importance the House attaches to short Front-Bench speeches in the interests of wider opportunities for Back Benchers, Members value the opportunity to get directly at a Minister by way of an intervention rather than in a later speech. Therefore, I would have upset the House more if I had attempted to stick to 20 minutes than I did by going beyond that time and seeking to answer some of the interventions. That would be accepted by anyone who has been present throughout the debate.

It has been an interesting debate, from which it is singularly difficult to draw clear and firm conclusions. Very strong cross-currents have emerged in all parts of the House—more than I expected when it was decided to have the debate. At times, those cross-currents almost became altercations. I shall have an abiding memory of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) shouting to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) that he should remember that some of us were capable of doing arithmetic. That was because the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East quoted statistics which included two summer recesses. The hon. Member for Perry Barr thought that that was an overstatement of the extent to which Parliament does not sit. Such differences have emerged on both sides of the debate.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) spoke from the Dispatch Box in the place customarily occupied by the spokesman for the official Opposition. The hon. Gentleman has apologised for not being here for the winding-up speeches. He said that was speaking pretty much in a personal capacity. I am glad to see the two Opposition Whips nodding. The hon. Gentleman made it fairly clear that there are what I have delicately called cross-currents among those on the Opposition Front

[Mr. Newton]

Bench as well as among those on the Benches behind them. That is one of the factors that both sides of the House will need to note and bear in mind.

On the Opposition Benches, the hon. Members for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) and for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) broadly supported the proposals, although neither of them said a great deal about the timetabling provisions. They were focusing more on other aspects of the proposals.

I am afraid that I missed the speech of the hon. Member for Perry Barr, but I am told that it was supportive of the report. I am not sure that he referred to the famous Rooker-Wise amendment to a Finance Bill in the late 1970s. I do not think that I was an Opposition Whip then. I think that I was simply a Back-Bench Member. As far as I could discern from what I was told about the hon. Gentleman's speech, he was suggesting that the amendment was mine and that he had simply hijacked it. I am not sure whether I regard that as supportive in all the circumstances, but it was an interesting time.

There was considerable support, going beyond what he described as the "timid" proposals in the report, from the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), who was a member of the Committee.

Against that were some very strong arguments that cannot be dismissed—I entirely accept that—from the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East, who was pretty militantly opposed to the report, and the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), who made his reasons clear. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who spoke with such force a few moments ago, also strongly opposed it. I am not in a position to answer his question about what would happen to people seeking to visit the House of Commons if morning sittings were to take place on Wednesdays. Ultimately, that will be a matter for the House, but if our existing rules about the line of route were maintained, Wednesday mornings would be more limited, if not disappear altogether, as an opportunity for visiting the House. That would have to be considered by others.

I also cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's question about where the Labour party's weekly meetings would take place. I am quite happy to leave that to his right hon. and hon. friends. However, and more seriously, the hon. Gentleman raised queries, which were answered by sedentary interventions, about the opportunities to debate the important subjects which he referred to as having been debated on recent Fridays. The answer is that the report envisages that the Wednesday morning sitting should be used for precisely that purpose. It may be that the opportunities for discussing these issues will be as great or even greater.

Mr. Cryer: The Leader of the House will bear it in mind that the difference between Friday and Wednesday is that there are no Committees sitting on a Friday, so people are free to concentrate on the Chamber, whereas on Wednesdays there are competing responsibilities of merits Committees and, under the Committee's proposals, more people will be involved in those Committees. Inevitably, more will be faced with a choice between attending the Committee and attending the Chamber and that is surely wrong.

Mr. Newton: I understand that point. I was trying only to comment on the suggestion by the hon. Member for Linlithgow that opportunities for debate on such subjects as come up on Fridays would disappear. I agree that Wednesday morning sittings raise questions of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, but they are not entirely unique and new. Similar problems already arise from Standing Committees and Select Committees sitting in the afternoon. They should not be seen as insuperable, although I accept that that is one of the points that need to be considered in deciding what the way forward might be.

Matching the differences of opinion and concerns expressed on the Opposition Benches were comparable differences and concerns expressed by my hon. Friends. There was, first, the understandably strong support expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), which was endorsed very much by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), who rightly reminded us of his long experience as Chairman of the Procedure Committee and of the extent to which earlier work of that Committee underlay the work of the Jopling Committee. There was strong support, too, from my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), though he expressed some reservations. In some respects they were perhaps surprising in view of his early-day motion. There was support, too, from my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald).

Against that support, concern was expressed—I recognise that the arguments advanced cannot be dismissed—by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), by my hon. Friend the Member and, for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), who said that he would not feel able to support some of the proposals should they come to that stage. There was also my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis)

—

Mr. Grocott: The Leader of the House made an ominous remark when he said, "should they come to that stage." He was talking about some of the proposals. Perhaps he will answer a question that has been raised many times during the debate, bearing in mind the fact that this is the second debate that we have had on these matters. When will specific motions be brought before us so that the House, which is admittedly divided on many of the issues which have been raised, can reach a decision on important matters? Can the right hon. Gentleman give us a date and a time when he plans that to happen?

Mr. Newton: I cannot go beyond what I said in my opening speech, which was that I would be setting out in reasonable detail the Government's thoughts on the report. I said that I would, as I think I can claim faithfully to have done, pay careful attention to the views expressed during the debate with a view—I shall repeat what I said because I think that it is important and I suspect that the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), the Opposition Chief Whip, will agree—to identifying a basis for agreement that can thereafter be discussed through the usual channels, with the aim of being in a position to bring forward substantive motions at an early stage after the House resumes in the autumn. I think that that is reasonably clear and I think that it is also a reasonable way in which to proceed.

In the concluding minutes of the debate, there are two fairly broad conclusions that I would draw. First—I take some comfort from this in view of the reservations expressed in some quarters—it has been right to have a wide-ranging general debate in the new Parliament before attempting to come to detailed decisions and to bring forward detailed motions. The quality and range of the debate have demonstrated the importance of proceeding in that manner.

Secondly, there have been differences of opinion—not least on the Opposition Benches—about the consequences of some aspects of the report if they were implemented. For example, the hon. Member for Perry Barr strongly took the view that they would assist the Opposition in scrutinising legislation more effectively, doing their job better and putting more pressure on the Government. There is the equally strongly held view of the hon. Member for Bradford, South and a number of other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Linlithgow, that they would gravely weaken the capacity of the Opposition to do the job that they wish to pursue. That is perhaps an illustration of the difficulty of achieving the consensus that would be required to carry matters forward in the way that we would all wish in a general sense.

The exact effect of what is eventually proposed will depend very much on detail, which can be achieved only by talking matters through in detail and not in a general debate of this sort. I would not wish to disguise from the House my own prejudice, which corresponds with some earlier parts of my experience. It picks some of the remarks that have been made about the absurdity of some aspects of that which our present procedure imposes upon us. As a Government Whip in the early 1980s, I have a clear recollection of going into Committee with the sole aim of clocking up enough hours to justify a guillotine. I do not think that many people would regard that as a sensible way of approaching the consideration of Bills in Committee.

Mr. McFall: Will the right hon. Gentleman give a commitment to convene a Speaker's Conference on the proxy voting issue?

Mr. Newton: You are sitting in the Chair, Madam Speaker, and I think that I would be right in saying that a Speaker's Conference is a matter for you rather than for me. I have no doubt that you have studied the recommendations in the report and heard—or will be made aware of—the comments of the hon. Gentleman and a number of others during the debate.

Among all the difficulties that I face in replying to the debate is the fact that alongside the differences of opinion about the proposals in the report, there has been a wide range of proposals that are not in the report and, in some cases, have been suggested as substitutes for it. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, who has now departed——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With the leave of the House, I propose to put together the motions on statutory instruments and EC documents.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Speaker: Then I shall put them separately. The Question is the next motion on the Order Paper.

Hon. Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Order. The motion must be put forthwith. I can accept an objection. Is there an objection to the motion?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Madam Speaker: In that case, we come now to the third motion——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I understand that we can vote on the motions, so a vote must be taken.

Madam Speaker: I am sorry. There can be no debate, but if the House wishes to divide, it can do so. Does the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) wish to divide the House on motion No. 2?

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Yes, Madam Speaker.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

COMPANIES

That the draft Companies (Single Member Private Limited Companies) Regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 11th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

The House divided: Ayes 207, Noes 77.

Division No. 61] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel

Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, Andrew F.
Bermingham, Gerald
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Connarty, Michael
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Eagle, Ms Angela
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Janner, Greville
Kennedy, Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morley, Elliot
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Primarolo, Dawn
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Malcolm Chisholm.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Coal Industry

That the draft Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd.

That the draft Caledonian MacBrayne Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1922, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

The House divided: Ayes 230, Noes 50.

Division No. 62] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chaplin, Mrs Judith

Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Salmond, Alex
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Boyce, Jimmy
Burden, Richard
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Etherington, Bill
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Galloway, George
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hinchliffe, David
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Lewis, Terry
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Meale, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
Pickthall, Colin
Primarolo, Dawn
Raynsford, Nick
Rooney, Terry
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Tipping, Paddy
Watson, Mike
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and
Mr. Harry Barnes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Motions Nos. 5 to 10. Not moved.

Departmental Select Committees

Madam Speaker: Before we proceed with motions 11 to 26, it might be helpful to the House to indicate the procedures to be followed on the 16 motions for the nominations to Select Committees. First, there will be a joint debate on the motions and selected amendments, which may last for one and a half hours. The amendments selected are to motions 17 on health and 18 on home affairs.

At the conclusion of the debate, I shall put separately the question on each motion. Before putting the main question on motions 17 and 18, there will of course be an opportunity for the amendments to be moved formally and to be decided upon. In each case, the amendment to leave out a name will be decided first, because it is obvious that, unless a vacancy is created, a new name cannot be proposed.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You gave a ruling earlier today. Does that ruling apply to all the names on the Order Paper this evening? Should everyone have been consulted as per your ruling?

Madam Speaker: We have to proceed on the assumption that all Members have been asked, in accordance with the Standing Order to which I referred earlier.

10.26 pm

Sir Marcus Fox (Shipley): I beg to move,

That Mr. Richard Alexander, Mrs. Angela Browning, Mr. Christopher Gill, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Martyn Jones, Mr. Paul Marland, Mr. Eric Martlew, Mr. Colin Pickthall, Mr. George Stevenson, Mr. Jerry Wiggin and Mrs. Ann Winterton be members of the Agriculture Committee.

Madam Speaker: As I said, with this it will be convenient to discuss the next 15 motions on the Order Paper:

That Sir Nicholas Bonsor, Mr. Menzies Campbell, Mr. Churchill, Mr. Michael Colvin, Mr. Frank Cook, Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, Mr. Bruce George, Mr. John Home Robertson, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Neville Trotter and Mr. Peter Viggers be members of the Defence Committee.

That Sir Paul Beresford, Mildred Gordon, Mr. David Jamieson, Mrs. Angela Knight, Lady Olga Maitland, Mr. Edward O'Hara, Mr. David Porter, Dr. Robert Spink, Mr. Gerry Steinberg, Sir Malcolm Thornton and Mr. Dennis Turner be members of the Education Committee.

That Mr. Ian Bruce, Mr. Sebastian Coe, Mr. Ken Eastham, Mr. Oliver Heald, Mr. Greville Janner, Mr. Ron Leighton, Mr. Iain Mills, Mr. Andrew Robathan, Mr. Ernie Ross, Mr. Richard Spring and Mr. David Young be members of the Employment Committee.

That Mr. John Battle, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Mr. Barry Field, Helen Jackson, Mr. Robert B. Jones, Mr. Tom Pendry, Mr. Eric Pickles, Mr. Nich Raynsford, Mr. Gary Streeter and Mr. Roy Thomason be members of the Environment Committee.

That Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. Mike Gapes, Mr. David Harris, Mr. David Howell, Mr. Michael Jopling, Mr. Jim Lester, Mr. Ted Rowlands, Mr. Peter Shore, Sir John Stanley, Mr. David Sumberg and Mr. Robert N. Wareing be members of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

That Mr. Roland Boyes, Mr. James Clappison, Mr. David Congdon, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mrs. Jacqui Lait, Alice Mahon, Mrs. Marion Roe, Mr. Roger Sims, the Reverend Martin Smyth, Mr. Michael Trend and Audrey Wise be members of the Health Committee.

That Mr. David Ashby, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Mr. Hartley Booth, Mr. Peter Butler, Mr. Edward Garnier, Mr. John Greenway, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Mike O'Brien, Mrs. Barbara Roche, Mr. Keith Vaz and Sir John Wheeler be members of the Home Affairs Committee.

That Mr. Joe Ashton, Dr. John G. Blackburn, Mr. Gyles Brandreth, Mr. Jim Callaghan, Mr. Paul Channon, Mr. Patrick Cormack, Mr. Bryan Davies, Mr. John Gorst, Mr. Alan Howarth, Mr. Gerald Kaufman and Mr. John Maxton be members of the National Heritage Committee.

That Mr. Spencer Batiste, Dr. Jeremy Bray, Mr. Malcolm Bruce, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Cheryl Gillan, Mr. William Powell, Sir Giles Shaw, Sir Trevor Skeet, Dr. Gavin Strang, Sir Gerard Vaughan and Mr. Alan W. Williams be members of the Science and Technology Committee.

That Mr. Peter Atkinson, Mr. Eric Clarke, Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, Dr. Liam Fox, Mr. Phil Gallie, Mr. Robert Hughes, Mr. George Kynoch, Mr. William McKelvey, Mrs. Ray Michie, Mr. Raymond S. Robertson and Mr. Andrew Welsh be members of the Scottish Affairs Committee.

That Mr. Michael Bates, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. David Faber, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Clifford Forsythe, Tessa Jowell, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Patrick Nicholls, Mr. David Shaw and Mr. David Willetts be members of the Social Security Committee.

That Mr. John Butterfill, Mr. Richard Caborn, Dr. Michael Clark, Mr. Jim Cousins, Sir Anthony Grant, Dr. Keith Hampson, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Adam Ingram, Mr. Cranley Onslow, Mr. Stanley Orme and Mr. Barry Porter be members of the Trade and Industry Committee.

That Mr. Robert Adley, Mr. Jack Aspinwall, Mr. Matthew Banks, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Terry Dicks, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Mr. Keith Hill, Mr. John McFall, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay and Mr. David Marshall be members of the Transport Committee.

That Ms. Diane Abbott, Sir Thomas Arnold, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Nicholas Budgen, Mrs. Judith Chaplin, Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. John Garrett, Mr. Barry Legg, Mr. Giles Radice, Mr. Brian Sedgemore and Mr. John Watts be members of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee.

That Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Jonathan Evans, Mr. Roger Evans Mr. David Hanson, Mr. Jon Owen Jones, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Peter Luff, Mr. Rod Richards, Mr. Mark Robinson, Mr. Walter Sweeney and Mr. Gareth Wardell be members of the Welsh Affairs Committee.

Sir Marcus Fox: For the benefit of our new colleagues, I must explain that it is nothing new for me to be standing here occupying a bed of nails. Since I took over about eight years ago, it has been just that—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members have helped to make it worse.

May I remind hon. Members—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] I do not mind going on for an hour and a half, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I mind very much. We have only one and a half hours for this debate. Let us proceed in good order.

Sir Marcus Fox: To illustrate my remarks, I shall take hon. Members' minds back to a similar occasion on 2 December 1987 when we were faced with exactly the same situation. I shall quote my own remarks because they are relevant for those hon. Members who suggest that we have somehow introduced a new idea by thinking that there should be a time limit. I said:

"I shall describe how the Committee works. Select Committees are a nightmare".

for those of us who have to do the selection. The Members who volunteer are many.

"Without any doubt, there is a surplus of possible members. It is impossible to give people their first choice. Many excellent colleagues are listed on the Order Paper. There may be more brilliant ones who have not been successful this time. We have to strike a balance between acknowledging the experience of certain hon. Members and giving other colleagues an opportunity to serve . . . When we make our recommendations, the choice rests absolutely with my four colleagues and myself. We represent the Government

party on the Committee and we take full responsibility for our nominations . . . In November 1979, my predecessor, Sir Philip Holland, said, as recorded in 'Erskine May'—that

> 'the Committee enjoyed full discretion and was under no obligation to consult, to take advice or to indicate any criteria of choice.'

It followed, therefore, that the Committee was procedurally free to choose whom it liked on whatever basis it thought applicable, subject to the eventual verdict of the House".—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1987; Vol. 123, c. 1042.]

Mr. Gerald Malone (Winchester): It would be helpful if my hon. Friend were to clarify a point early in the debate. During the weekend there was much talk about conspiracy theories. Can my hon. Friend confirm that on the Committee of which he is Chairman there serve the Labour deputy Whip, the Labour pairing Whip and the Liberal Whip, but no Government Whips?

Sir Marcus Fox: I confirm what my hon. Friend has said. The fact that we do not need that sort of advice makes the Opposition suspicious.

We can make changes of this type only immediately after a general election, and we do so by means of motions such as those on today's Order Paper. Between now and the next general election in four or five years' time, we shall be unable to make any changes, other than as a result of promotion, the creation of PPSs or resignations for other reasons. It is therefore important that we should establish, once and for all, why we have seen fit to operate as we have.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I should like the Chairman of the Committee of Selection to address a particular case. By what process of debate, discussion and agonised thought did the Committee come to the conclusion that the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) should be on not one Select Committee but two?

Sir Marcus Fox: The answer is quite simple: he is a man of considerable ability. And, just as important, he happens to be a friend of mine. It is obvious that, with interventions like this, we shall make good progress.

There is confusion in many areas, but particularly in respect of Select Committees. We are repeatedly blamed for the membership of Committees for which we have no responsibility. We do not mind if people serve on the Public Accounts Committee, the Select Committee on Members' Interests or the Liaison Committee; we are concerned purely with the 16 departmental Committees. Some people have suggested that we should have crossed the names of some colleagues off the list, having added up alll the other Committees for which the Whips have responsibility. If there is such confusion, if people do not understand the Committees for which we are responsible, it is not surprising that they imagine that outside influences are brought to bear on us.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Is the confusion in our minds or in the hon. Gentleman's own? He says that the Committee of Selection is not concerned with certain Committees. Presumably he means that he is not tonight moving a motion about the process of selection. Can he confirm that the membership of the Committees to which he has referred comes before the Committee of Selection and that a motion setting out their composition appears on the Order Paper?

Sir Marcus Fox: No. Unusually, the hon. Gentleman has got it entirely wrong. Apart from the Standing Committees that deal with Bills, the only ones in respect of which I have responsibility for vacancies are the departmental Committees.

Mr. Field: The hon. Gentleman puts forward the selections for Standing Committees. He is not concerned merely with departmental Committees. It is a very wide brief.

Sir Marcus Fox: I am awfully sorry. I accept, of course, full responsibility for Committees on Bills, statutory instruments and all the others. We were given the departmental Select Committees and the other, older Select Committees were left with the Whips. Those Committees are nothing to do with me, I have a big enough cross to bear as it is. I am glad that the issue about those Members who were supposed to serve on those Committees was not pursued.

I must assure the House that there is a clear distinction between the two types of Select Committee—some seek to blur it, for obvious reasons. I want to make it clear that the Government names on the motions are the total responsibility of my four colleagues and myself. I understand that there is a phrase going around—I think that it is a figment of the press's imagination—called the "Whips' rules", which is something to do with only serving in three Parliaments. That is not how it happened. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I notice that a quality newspaper said that the Whips' influence meant that three new Members who had applied to serve on Select Committees were kept off them because they had signed the anti-Maastricht early-day motion. I have checked early-day motion 174 and guess what? Nine colleagues on the 16 Select Committees signed it. Now, if the Whips had control, do hon. Members think that any of those Members would have been on those Select Committees?

In 1987, we considered introducing a time limit on how long one could serve on a Select Committee. We decided not to do so, for the simple reason that one could argue whether a term of eight years was long enough to justify a change. We thought not. Five years on, however, there are many good reasons why we should say that 13 years is long enough and that someone else should take part.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his wisdom. Could he tell us whether the entire Select Committee on Selection consider whether that rule should be introduced? Was that matter discussed? Was there a vote? Was it unanimous? If it was not, why does this co-called ruling, which my hon. Friend now denies, apply only to those on the Government Benches?

Sir Marcus Fox: My hon. Friend is also under a misapprehension. The Government always have the Chair of the Committee of Selection. The way in which the Opposition select their members of the Select Committees is entirely a matter for them. I repeat that it is entirely a matter for the five Conservative Members of the Committee of Selection as to how we select people. The quote that I read out from December 1987 made it clear —obviously some colleagues do not listen—that we do not have to explain our procedures. *[Interruption.]* I take it from the Opposition that there is never any question about their hon. Friends who serve on those Select Committees.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: The Committee of Selection does not need to explain its procedures because we can guess at them. Is my hon. Friend a Chairman of a Select Committee, because he is telling the House that he is only responsible for the Government Members on the Committees? If so why does the Committee of Selection not have a joint Chairman to represent the Opposition parties?

Sir Marcus Fox: My hon. Friend must read up on that Committee of Selection. When Norman St. John Stevas introduced the system in 1979, it was fully explained that the Government would have the Chair of the Committee but that each party would operate independently in nominating Members. The point that I was making was that, if Members could object to nominations to a Standing Committee on a Bill and we had to produce a reason for choosing one Member rather than another, we would never get a Committee set up.

In spite of the rulings that I have given, I pay tribute to those five colleagues who, whether Chairman or Members of those Select Committee, have made an outstanding contribution during those years. What we are trying to do takes nothing away from their contribution.

Mr. Bill Walker: I have no wish to attack my hon. Friend for his integrity. Will he assure the House that, as per the Speaker's ruling given earlier today, all those hon. Members named on the Order Paper were consulted before their names were tabled?

Sir Marcus Fox: Certainly—they are volunteers. On the Government's side of the Committee, all hon. Members under the motions in my name notified me that they wished to serve.

The real principle is whether those Committees were set up with the intention that Members should continue to serve year after year without limit. Is it fair to exclude those who are just as anxious to share that work? We came to the conclusion that we must at least create some vacancies because there were more than 200 applications for 96 vacancies on the Government side. Surely 13 continuous years on a Select Committee must be sufficient to bring about change.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Is my hon. Friend trying to say that it is wrong to be on one Select Committee for 12 to 13 years, when one would presumably gain expertise in a subject, but perfectly right to serve 12 to 13 years on a number of Select Committees consecutively? Many people feel strongly about that. If people are to be told that they must leave a Select Committee after 12 to 13 years, the same should apply to anyone who serves 12 to 13 years consecutively on a number of Select Committees.

Sir Marcus Fox: If my hon. Friend would like to give me an example of a Member who has served 13 years consecutively on two departmental Select Committees, I shall discuss it with him.

10.42 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I wish to speak to my amendment, but first, may I apologise to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) for choosing her name to be the one deleted from the Order Paper? It was not, as some hon. Members said it should have been, because the hon. Lady was a Minister, and ex-Ministers should play no part in the affairs of Select Committees. That is not a valid rule. Back-Bench Select Committees give us an opportunity for a career structure in the House as an alternative to being on the Government or Opposition Front Bench. It was because the hon. Lady has been in the House for a considerable time, is known and respected and has a considerable number of friends in the House. As two new Conservative Members were on the Health Committee, I thought it proper that we should remove the name of the person in a more powerful position rather than that of a new Member without the hon. Lady's following. Using that procedure meant that we had to choose a name.

Let me begin by dealing with some of the—in my view—fallacious arguments that have been advanced since it became known that an amendment would be tabled. It has been suggested, for instance, that I am merely doing the bidding of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), because on a previous occasion he tabled a motion to include me on what was then the Social Services Committee. It is true that, since Freud, none of us know ourselves fully, and perhaps I am kidding myself; but I have not moved the amendment simply as a pay-off for a kindness that was done to me—although, if that were the case, I should have moved it for reasons of friendship and loyalty, and I do not think that the House should discount such values.

More important issues are at stake, however. Although the amendments are linked to certain names, they are not about the hon. Member for Macclesfield. His name features, but we are dealing with more important questions than his fate. I hope that hon. Members will vote not on the basis of whether the hon. Gentleman is liked or disliked, popular or unpopular, but on the basis of the debate that they will have heard about the role of Select Committees and their development in our constitution.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Does the hon. Gentleman consider it desirable for Opposition Members to seek to determine Conservative membership of the Select Committee? Would he find it acceptable for Conservative Members to try to interfere with Labour selections?

Mr. Field: I think that we have already heard the answer this evening. I was somewhat shocked by what the hon. Member for Shipley said about putting his friends on to the Committee, and about the votes that he controlled. I think that on some issues it is necessary to take a view for the House of Commons itself, rather than a strict party view. As taking a non-strict party view sometimes gets me into trouble with my hon. Friends, it is interesting that that stick should now be wielded on the Conservative Benches.

We heard an extraordinary introduction to the debate from the hon. Member for Shipley. He explained a great deal about the working of the Committee of Selection, which will give many people a lot to think about. None the less, I cannot but contrast the performance of the brave sparrow who would regularly appear on the "Today" programme when running for chairmanship of the 1922 Committee, assuring Tory Members who might be listening that he was the man to stand up to the establishment and to ensure that their views were represented, with the performances that we have heard in private and again tonight.

If someone who has colleagues around him in the Committee of Selection can behave in that way and then present a report as we have heard this one presented tonight, the Patronage Secretary clearly will not have

many problems when the Chairman of the 1922 Committee comes to represent the views of Conservative Members. The man who told Brian Redhead that he was a man of great integrity who would fight Back Benchers' battles, protect their privileges and ensure that their views were known, rolled over at the first hurdle, and the Patronage Secretary managed to tickle his chest.

When hon. Members build up reputations and then do not quite live up to them, the convention of the House is to draw a curtain around the matter and not to dwell on it. Perhaps we should do that with the performance of the hon. Member for Shipley.

I come now to what appears to have gone on. Long before the final meeting of the Committee of Selection, we heard that the hon. Member for Macclesfield would be "got" because he had not written a letter asking to be on the Committee. I believe that the hon. Gentleman then wrote his letter. So another rule had to be found. Someone quickly discovered that the hon. Member had served in three consecutive Parliaments. Clearly, no further homework was done at the time; had it been, the other motions on the Order Paper tonight taking off Conservatives—we understand that the Chairman is not worried about Opposition Members; he is concerned only with policing his own hon. Friends—would not have been necessary.

So following the failure of the "get Nick" campaign and the failure of the letter rule, another rule had to be thought up: the three consecutive Parliaments rule. Instead of voting on the hon. Member for Macclesfield tonight, we should vote on whether we want the Government or the Chairman of the Committee to introduce motions at some later date taking our views on this matter into account.

For instance, I should like the House to consider the consequences of the three-Parliament rule. It will not operate only in this Parliament. If the hon. Member for Shipley is still here in the next Parliament, and if he remembers his rule, it will presumably operate against a certain party; and it will have a cumulative effect with each passing Parliament. The rule of the hon. Member for Shipley will de-skill our Select Committees. Those who have built up expertise on them will walk the plank—at the end of three terms, their time will be up.

For this and other reasons, the House should agree to our amendment. If this limitation is operated, it will destroy one of the main reasons given for the Select Committees in the 1979 Parliament—that they offer an alternative career structure for those not in government and for Conservatives who will not never have a chance to hold office. We shall curtail that career structure with no compensating curtailment on the careers of those who hold office.

Sir Marcus Fox: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, come the next general election in five years' time, some Members on the Committees will have served 18 years but only six will be affected, if the Committee takes the same view then?

Mr. Field: Only six! Six people with the most experience will have to walk the hon. Gentleman's plank into oblivion.

This rule, arbitrarily dreamed up when other rules to "get Nick" failed, will weaken our democratic process. The role of the House of Commons has changed, is changing and will continue to change. In the past century, our job as Back Benchers was to make and unmake Governments. The party systems were in their infancy then, and there was a large number of smaller parties. As we moved into this century, our role changed. Since 1931 at any rate, the function of the House of Commons has not been to make and unmake Governments, although Prime Ministers can certainly be made or unmade by Members in this Chamber.

Rather, the House has witnessed the unfolding of general election campaigns. Both sides have set out their wares over four or five years, trying to present to the voters what the issues at the next election will be. *[Interruption.]* I am pleased to note that I have the attention of the former Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), who may laugh and joke during this debate. He would be walking the plank under this parliamentary rule if he had not gained Government office.

The major opposition party has failed to win in four general elections, and there is now a question mark over our ability to win. That changes the function of the House. *[Interruption.]* I hope that those who so readily agree with me will join me in the Lobby. If the normal crucial check on Government—the fear of losing an election—appears not to have worked, at least for the moment, it is crucial to build up other checks and balances to prevent the Government from becoming arrogant and arbitrary in their use of power. None of us can see clearly now where that evolving debate will lead, but in it the Select Committees have a crucial part to play.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the Select Committee system should make up for the deficiencies of the Opposition?

Mr. Field: No. I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to the House. Plainly, he performed better at the hustings than he is performing in the debate.

I do not argue that by itself any one move makes good that crucial check in our constitution. Governments become fearful of losing their power and influence and their red boxes and cars. I say that it is one crucial check. I shall not move the amendment with the idea that the House could do without Whips because, without a whipping system, the House could not operate. But sometimes the Whips are insensitive to the needs of the House. Because they are anxious to complete the day's business, they inevitably take a short-term, day-to-day view rather than a year-to-year or a five-year parliamentary view.

When we vote, I hope that the House, unlike the Whips, will decide that it wishes to see the Select Committees develop with the help of the Whips but not controlled by them. I hope that, when we face the electorate at the next election, the Select Committees will have reached that crucial next stage in their development. That stage begins with tonight's vote.

[Mr. Field]

10.57 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): I welcome the fact that at long last these measures have appeared on the Order Paper. That is a tribute to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who has been anxious to ensure their appearance. We have made it by the skin of our teeth. That means that it will be possible for the Select Committees to meet before the recess, elect Chairmen, arrange a programme and provide work for the Clerks. At least we have done somewhat better than in the last two Parliaments.

There is no reason why the negotiations could not have been concluded earlier. We have not succeeded in achieving the time limit suggested by the Procedure Committee. We should consider a mandatory time limit for the future so that we do not get into the situation of the past few weeks. At all events, we have made progress.

I am deeply concerned about the way in which hon. Members appear to have been, or are said to have been, selected for the Select Committees. That brings me to the role of the Whips. It is a feature of our departmentally related system that the usual channels must be involved to some extent; otherwise, with a Government majority on all the Committees, one would be unlikely to have any Opposition Chairmen. That has always seemed to me to be an important all-party aspect of the system.

That having been said, choosing the Chairman must be a matter for the Committee concerned. It is wrong that the Whips should become involved, as they have increasingly become involved in the past 10 years, in the question of who is selected to serve on the Committees. I take the point that the Committee of Selection includes two Opposition Whips and one from the Liberal Democrats, but Whips should not be involved in the way they are. Furthermore, it is important that the Committee should act as a Committee of the House, representing all parts of the House. The party division suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) undermines the basic all-party nature of the Select Committee system.

This brings me to the controversy of the past few days, and to the fact that we were told that there is a rule that members should not serve on a Select Committee for more than a limited period. It is wrong that this rule should have been announced to the media rather than to the House of Commons. However, it is not surprising that that is so, because there is no such rule. The device has been invented at the last minute to justify a series of selections. The traditional practice, where the Committee of Selection gives no reasons for its selection, is the right way to set about it; whether it has any internal view as to how it should set about its task is a matter for it.

The effect of applying that rule—although there is no such rule of the kind described—has been to remove some choice. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) is clearly the best candidate for Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. In all events, the Committee should have the right to decide whether it wishes to continue to have him as Chairman. The Committee of Selection has removed a desirable degree of flexibility as to who is chosen. It is tying the Committee's hands by the kind of announcement that has been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley.

Of course it is important that Committees should have a balance between new Members of Parliament and Members with greater experience, but we should not necessarily circumscribe the question of who those Members with experience are. I am in favour of more ex-Ministers and more members of the Opposition Front Bench teams serving on, or becoming members of, Select Committees. That would give the Committees greater weight in the inquiries that they carry out. The crucial point is that we get the right person for the job. Imposing the kind of rule suggested will not allow that flexibility.

We are moving in the opposite direction from the United States, which is sometimes taken as a model and where the seniority rule is supreme. If we are to have this rule, it must be determined by the Procedure Committee, debated and examined in length, and the House should be able to decide whether it wants such a rule. I have consulted my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), who was Chairman of the Procedure Committee in the last Parliament, and I gather that in the elaborate discussions that the Committee had on the matter there was not even a suggestion that there should be any such rule—still less had the Committee considered the matter or made any such recommendation.

I am deeply concerned about the way in which the matter has been handled. It is difficult for us to express our concern other than in this debate and the Divisions that will follow it. One of the reasons why this is of great importance to the House is the fact that, in the past 10 years or so, we have seen a major change in the constitutional position of the House. That is reflected in the Committees, and the importance that the House attaches to them is one of the reasons why it is a matter of concern to the Whips. It is important that these matters should not be handled in such a way. Instead, they should be dealt with on an all-party basis. I hope that, in the light of the debate, we shall consider what should best be done in future. At present, it is wrong to suggest that there is a rule which has determined decisions. As I have said, these matters should not be handled in such a way.

11.5 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I wish only briefly to contribute to the debate. First, I should confess that I am a member of the usual channels and serve under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) on the Selection Committee. I was unable to attend the Committee's meeting last week because—luckily, perhaps—I was ill in bed. I saw the difficulty coming, and I took fever from the fright.

There are important issues at stake, and they have been set out at some length by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). As I am a member of the usual channels, I think that it is important that it is clear in our own minds that in our own parties and in our own ways we have means of bringing forward names to serve on departmental Select Committees. I am not especially interested what Members are put up by the other Whips on the Selection Committee, as that is a matter for the parties whom those Whips seek to serve.

There should be grave concern, however, if suggestions have been made by the 1922 Committee to produce the names of Conservative Members who have been put forward for the Select Committees. Surely that is a mistake. As the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr.

Higgins) has said, a ludicrous claim has been made that a rule exists when it does not, but if names have been put forward by the 1922 Committee for the Conservative party, that is not something that would have caused any opposition—even though the decisions may have been mistaken—from myself or any other representatives of the minority parties. As a shop steward for those parties, I speak on their behalf to the best of my ability.

We must understand that, at the end of the day, it is the Executive, through the Whips, who come along with names. That is exceptional, wholly wrong, disreputable and objectionable, and a substantial breach of the procedure as I understand it.

Mr. Higgins: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for interrupting his speech. I wish only to make my own position clear if I failed to do so earlier. I did not wish to continue to be a member of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service. That is important lest what I said a short while ago is considered to be special pleading on my behalf.

Mr. Kirkwood: I wish it to be understood that, from a minority party point of view and from my own position, I feel that the Government have not handled the nominations in the right way. At the same time, the House should recognise that the Whips have a function in bringing forward their party recommendations to the Selection Committee. If they did not do so, the Committee's job would be difficult, if not impossible, to sustain.

As a shop steward for the minority parties, I think that it is wrong that the Select Committees should consider setting up machinery to monitor eight principal Departments, including the Home Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Departments of the Environment and Employment, without having a member of the minority parties within it. There are precious fewoccasions in debate on the Floor of the House when that is the position. The minority parties have only about 40 Members in the House and we suffer from overstretch, but we try to the best of our ability to submit names for Standing Committees. We try as a group to play our full part in the House, yet we are denied places in major departmental Select Committees. That is something that will have to be considered.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kirkwood: No. I do not have time to give way.

There are amendments in the names of the hon. Members for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) that my colleagues will support simply to make the point about the minority parties being denied places in major departmental Select Committees. It is right that we should do so.

It is also right that Select Committees are an important part of the procedures of this place. They are an evolving scene and the new Members nominated to serve on them have an important job in protecting the interests of the House in their deliberations. I hope that they will discharge their duties well, and I wish them every success.

11.9 pm

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in this short debate and I shall certainly try to be brief. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) has invented a new rule, which we have just heard about tonight. It comes as a surprise to me and, had I known about it, as an honourable Member of this House I would not have put my name forward for membership of the Home Affairs Committee.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): My hon. Friend is making exactly the point to which we should all pay attention. Should not the rule have been laid down, in an authoritative way, before hon. Members were invited to offer themselves to serve on any particular Select Committee?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments.

I was glad to find my name on the Order Paper on 9 July. In accordance with my expectations, and I think I may say fairly the expectations of many other hon. Members, I fully expected to resume my duties as a member of the Home Affairs Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley telephoned me at 12 noon on 9 July to say that a mistake had been made and that my appointment was to be cancelled; hence the amendment on today's Order Paper in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw). Incidentally, I sincerely congratulate him on his nomination to the Science and Technology Committee. I am sure that he will serve with distinction.

All that I can say about the rules of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley is that they remind me of the unfortunate occasion when one steps on bubble gum deposited on the footway—tacky, sticky and lingering long after the event. I remind the House that, if we agree to motion 27, which refers to the interests of Chairmen and members of Select Committees, the proposed composition of the Home Affairs Committee will mean that nine of its lawyer members will not be able to inquire into such subjects as legal aid or the Crown prosecution service, as they would have a conflict of interest. I remind the House that, by a resolution of the last Parliament, that Committee has a responsibility for the Lord Chancellor's Department.

It is a privilege to serve the House as a member of a Select Committee. Any hon. Member who is selected for that service, which is quite properly unrewarded in any sense, undertakes an enormous burden of extra work, which it is a privilege to do. It has been my privilege to serve as a member of the Home Affairs Committee for 13 years, from 1979 until the general election this year. During my period of service, I was Chairman of the Sub-Committee since February 1980 and of the main Committee since 1987. It has been an immense privilege for me to make a contribution to the work of the Home Office and the Select Committee system.

Since the Committee was established, it has produced 67 reports, averaging 64 paragraphs in length. It is difficult for me to single out just one significant contribution to public policy, but I am especially proud of my work in 1981, in the aftermath of the inner-city riots, when the Sub-Committee prepared a substantial report on racial

[Sir John Wheeler]

disadvantage. I like to think that the report made an important contribution to policing and good race relations in this country.

More recent reports have included one of the British racing industry which, to my delight, has resulted in the Jockey Club and others proposing to establish a more broadly based committee for racing which will help to take that industry forward to a more successful future. Many of the Committee's recommendations and ideas on the structure and management of the police have been accepted or are in the course of being accepted.

No Select Committee and no Chairman could be successful without the wholehearted commitment and enthusiasm of the Clerks of the House. I know that they do not like to be referred to in debates in the Chamber. However, I have been fortunate to have worked with 10 splendid people during the time in which I have served on the Home Affairs Select Committee. All have been magnificent in their devotion to the work of the Committee and I am sure that it is right to thank the Clerks for their service during my chairmanship.

I am glad to be able to tell the House that the conclusion of my service was not apparently occasioned by any perceived lack of zeal on my part, by any lack of enthusiasm for the duties I voluntarily accepted or by my lack of attendance at meetings. I am proud to tell the House that, since my first appointment in 1979, I am recorded as having attended 489 meetings of the Committee and its Sub-Committee, with only 13 absences. Two were occasioned by illness and 11 by overseas duties. it is a record of service which I believe may stand comparison with that of any other hon. Member. I take this opportunity to wish every success to hon. Members who are privileged to be selected for that service. I shall observe the continued progress of the Select Committee with much interest.

I want the House to know that my name is on the Order Paper tonight and that I have neither sought nor canvassed any opinion on my behalf, as I should think that improper. I am content to leave the matter to the judgment of the House. I am satisfied that, over the 13 years in which I have had the privilege to serve on the Home Affairs Committee, I have done my duty to the best of my abilities.

11.17 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Those of us who are used to addressing debates on Select Committees in the House with gatherings of 10 or a dozen are delighted to see the intense interest this evening, including a massive attendance by members of the Government. I have spotted four or five Cabinet Ministers, and I hope that that augurs well for interest in such debates in the future.

We all know what the debate is about. In intruding from the Opposition Front Bench, there is an element of feeling that I am intruding in what is essentially a private matter for the Conservative party. From what we have heard so far this evening, there will be considerable interest in the votes that take place later. There should be no apology from any Opposition Member who takes part in the debate because it has been most noteworthy for the heroic, but failed, attempt by the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) to reconcile the irreconcilable—his responsibilities to the Committee of Selection which he chairs with his responsibilities to the Conservative party.

I welcomed the contribution by the hon. Member for Shipley if only because he coined the memorable phrase that 13 years is quite long enough. That apart, he failed to make any convincing case which any hon. Member could understand for the new three-term doctrine. That is the best way in which to describe it. As he was speaking, I wondered whether the three-term doctrine accounted for the departure of Lady Thatcher, or whether it will apply to members of the Government in future. Will their time be up after they have served for three terms? Or is this—as we know it is—a device in the Conservative party to deal with a particular local difficulty which has nothing to do with constitutional principle?

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): As I gather that the hon. Gentleman objects to the rule, does he also object to the rule, apparently between the usual channels, about who should be Chairman and which party should chair a particular Committee, or has that rule been thrown out of the window as well?

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the oddity about the rule enunciated by the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) is that he enunciated it as a member of a Committee, but it applies only to certain members of the Committee. It is not for me to determine how Members should vote on an issue of this kind.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): With regard to the points made by the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) and by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), who was a very fair and excellent Chairman of the Liaison Committee, the right hon. Member suggested that the chairmanship of Select Committees should be left for the members of those Committees to decide for themselves. Does my hon. Friend agree with that? If so, would that be advantageous for the House, because it would put an end to the trading that goes on behind the scenes?

Mr. Grocott: If my hon. Friend reads the debate on the Select Committee that took place two weeks ago, he will know how much I admired his work as Chairman on the Select Committee on Transport in the last Parliament. That was spelt out in *Hansard* two weeks ago.

Mr. Fry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grocott: No, I will not give way again. I intend to speak for five minutes, which is five minutes longer than the Leader of the House.

Mr. Fry *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Grocott: I want to use my remaining minute to refer to the report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests which referred to Select Committees and their Chairmen. That will be the subject of a motion later tonight, but it relates strongly to this debate.

I put it to the Leader of the House and to the Government that it is clear from earlier debates that the House believes that the rules governing the interests of

members of Select Committees, and particularly of Chairmen of Select Committees, need tightening and strengthening. There should be orders for that to obtain.

Given that the later resolution may go through on the nod, it is absolutely essential that newly appointed members of the Select Committees should, before a decision is taken about their Chairmen, be given clear information by the Leader of the House and the Government to ensure that they know the new rules that have been agreed by the House before they decide who their Chairmen should be. That is an important development and the House should recognise it, even though there have been no formal resolutions in that respect.

I will not be voting on the resolutions concerning the changes in Select Committee membership, although I doubt whether I will manage to convince many of my hon. Friends on that. I will not be voting because, so far as I am concerned, the membership that the Tory party proposes for its Select Committees is a matter for the Tory party. I do not apologise for giving the Tory party little lectures on democracy. In my view, we in the Labour party do things in a far more democratic way than the Tories.

Mr. Fry *rose*——

Mr. Grocott: No, I will not give way.

When the Labour party argues about members of Select Committees, we do it on the basis that each individual Bank-Bench member of the party puts forward their preferences. Preferences are determined partly on the basis of geography and partly on the basis of seniority, and then the whole matter—this is anathema to Conservative Members, but they can listen to it none the less—is put before a full meeting of the parliamentary Labour party and is subject to debate and reference back if necessary. That seems to me to be a dramatically better way of dealing with matters than Conservative Members' method.

I hope that we reach a conclusion on this matter fairly rapidly tonight. I hope that the Chairman of the Committee of Selection has learnt a few lessons from tonight and from his dual responsibilities. I hope that, when they are established, the Select Committees do the proper job of scrutinising the Government, which they will do much more effectively now that there are far more Labour Members on them.

11.25 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I rise with a very heavy heart and with considerable sadness to contribute to this important debate, which is really about the future effectiveness of this House of Commons. The Select Committees were set up to enable the House to monitor and scrutinise the Departments of government —the major Departments of government. It is indeed quite correct that the usual channels have a part to play in the allocation of chairmanships, but for the reasons advanced by hon. Members, once that decision has been taken, the usual channels should have no part whatever to play in relation to those who serve on the Committees and the person whom each Committee chooses to be Chairman from the party which has been allocated the chairmanship.

The Select Committee system is the only effective form in which this House can effectively monitor the Executive. At Question Time, one has only one question; statements, again one question; private notice questions, really only one opportunity to come back to the Minister. The only effective way to hold Ministers, civil servants and others to account is the Select Committee system, which primarily involves Back Benchers of this House.

I believe that that is very precious. In fact, I go so far as to say that the Select Committees of this House are the last bastions of the defences of the country against excessive government. Perhaps I can say that from the Conservative side of the House after nearly 14 years of Conservative government, because I believe that, year after year, government can create an arrogance which can lead to dictatorship. I believe that that is what is happening in this House.

I am afraid, too, that the Committee of Selection has been severely compromised by what has occurred during the past week. I say to the Chairman of the Selection Committee that he now lacks credibility and integrity, and the sooner he is gone the better. The Chairman of the Selection Committee is supposed to chair the Committee and decide, of all those who apply to him and to his Committee, who should go forward and be appointed. I know from the contact that I have had with the Whips Office that that did not happen. I know that a list was submitted by the Deputy Chief Whip to the Selection Committee and that that list went through undiscussed, unamended and without debate, in less than a quarter of an hour.

I can only say that the Selection Committee Chairman is wrong. He talks about those who have served on a Committee for 12 years or three Parliaments. I wonder whether he is aware that the Health Select Committee has been in existence for only two years—not 13 years or 12 years. Indeed, I say to the House, as I say to the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, that I have served on Select Committees of the House for 18 years, and I am proud of it.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), I am proud of the contribution that I have made as a member of the Select Committee. Unlike my hon. Friend, I chaired the Health Select Committee for only some 15 months, but it is an experience that I shall never forget. *[Interruption.]* If the House cannot forget it either, I have succeeded in my job.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Winterton: No, I shall not give way to my hon. Friend.

My sadness is not that, by some devious, unfair, undemocratic strategems, I and other have been deprived of our places on Select Committees. My sadness is that I have made great friends with members of that Committee over the years and I shall miss their comradeship, their support and their co-operation.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North, I pay tribute to the staff of the Health Select Committee and its predecessor Committee. I wish to name Helen Irwin, who now serves another Committee. She was a wonderful Clerk to the Select Committee on Health and Social Services. I also name the current Clerk, Paul Evans, the Assistant Clerk Fergus Reid, and the Assistant Mike Clark as well as Carol Auchterlonie, the Committee specialist assistant and researcher. They are wonderful

[Mr. Winterton]

staff. The relationship between the members of the Committee and the staff proves that the Select Committees work, and work as a team.

If I have anything to say tonight which I hope will be heeded, it is that the Committee of Selection of the House has made a real mess of the selection of people to serve on the departmental Select Committees. It has done so because it has succumbed to the blandishments and pressure of the Government Whips Office. That does no service to the House and no service to parliamentary democracy. Increasingly it appears to me that an independent view and freedom of speech are gradually being squeezed out of the House. I am sure that you, Madam Speaker, as the safeguarder of the privileges of Back Benchers, agree that that surely cannot be a good thing for the people of Britain.

I leave the House with three quotations. Two are from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, with whom I entered into correspondence in February 1991 about Select Committees, the way in which Chairmen were chosen and the interference of the Whips. My right hon. Friend said in reply:

"I was grateful to you for letting me know the terms in which you propose to conduct the Chairmanship of the Health Select Committee. I have no doubt"—

he underlined those words in his own writing—

"that you will bring your own skill, knowledge and commitment to that task and that you will do it excellently."

Clearly, knowledge and experience and doing a job well have no further part to play in this place.

My second quotation from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is important. I have about one minute to go. He said:

"Every Member of a Select Committee is free to vote for the person of his or her choice if a vacancy arises for the chairmanship. That has always been the case and will continue to be so."

I am delighted to see my distinguished Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) in his place. His Committee reported:

"Committees should be left to elect whichever Member from the designated party they see as best fitted to discharge the responsibility of Chairman".

I hope that in the future the House of Commons will exercise its authority over the Select Committees,which are its only way of monitoring and scrutinising the Executive.

11.33 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I shall make three brief points. First, I hope that the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) will forgive me for saying that I found his explanation for why the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) was serving on two Select Committees simultaneously rather unconvincing. I know that attendance in Select Committee is not always as high as it should be, but presumably they are set up with a view to trying to give Members the opportunity to attend. I should have thought that the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross will find it very difficult to do justice to both the Select Committees on Defence and on Scottish Affairs simultaneously.

I do not know how many Conservative Members wanted to serve on the Defence Select Committee. I presume that it was quite a few. I imagine that that Committee was over-subscribed. I should have thought that fewer wanted to serve on the Scottish Affairs Committee, but none the less, if the widespread suggestion that a place on the Defence Committee was the price of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross for serving on the Scottish Affairs Select Committee is true, it does the Committee of Selection no credit whatsoever.

If the Committee of Selection and the Government Whips have to go to such lengths to preserve an artificial Government majority on the Scottish Affairs Select Committee, does the hon. Member for Shipley not think that it would have been better to abandon the idea that the Government must have a majority, rather than having the ridiculous spectacle of projecting the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross on to two Committees simultaneously, as he will not be able to do either any justice?

The Liberal spokesperson, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) mentioned my second point—the rights of minority parties in the House. When the arithmetical balance was being drawn for Select Committees, the Government's numbers in the House did not justify their having an automatic majority in each Committee. They needed an extra six Government places to guarantee a voting majority on every Select Committee, their argument being that each Committee must give the Government a majority and must reflect the balance of the House of Commons.

If that argument is being pursued, there can be no defence for not having a Member of one of the six minority parties in the House on each Select Committee.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Does the hon. Gentleman not find it strange that the Democratic Unionist party, which has the same number of Members in the House as his party, has been left out altogether, even though it made strong representations to the Chairman of the Committee of Selection? Will he remember that, on the proposal of the Chairman, the House voted me and a colleague of mine off the Selection Committee? I understand that the member appointed instead attended one meeting of that Committee.

Mr. Salmond: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. The Democratic Unionist party is entitled to representatives on Select Committees. I also believe that the Social Democratic and Labour party is entitled to representatives. The amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and myself is not for any individual party, but to enable the six minority parties in the House, which collectively represent 7 million voters after the recent election, to have the basic entitlement of one representative on each departmental Select Committee. That does not seem to be an unreasonable request to make to the majority parties in the Chamber.

According to the Government's rules, if a Select Committee is to reflect the balance of opinion in the House, surely it must have a minimum of one representative from the minority parties.

Thirdly, anyone who has followed the interchange, or what has been going on in the Lobby, will know that it has been an exercise in total and utter fantasy. Two lists are available—a Government list and an Opposition list. Without exception, the Committee of Selection, chaired by the hon. Member for Shipley, has accepted those two lists, supplied either directly or indirectly by the Whips Office.

That is the reality of what we are debating. Therefore, I and the other representatives of the minority parties will take the opportunity to vote against Committees that do not have a minority representative.

11.39 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I had no intention of speaking in this debate, and I shall take up only a very short time. There are certain facts that ought to be put before the House, as there are probably 300 Members who were not here when the departmental Select Committees were originally set up in 1979-80.

The first fact is that, until that time, the Committee of Selection appointed Members only to the Standing Commitees. The membership of all Select Committees was arranged through the usual channels, and the motions were tabled in the name of the Leader of the House. It was to get away from that, to try to ensure that the Members appointed to the departmental Select Committees were representative of all sections of the House and were not nominees of the Whips, that the appointments were given to the Committee of Selection. What has happened since then is history, but it is proper that the facts of the intention of the House when the departmental Select Committees were set up should be recorded.

The second important matter, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) referred, is that once it has been decided, through the usual channels, which party the Chairman of each Committee should come from, it should be left to the Committee to decide which member of that party should be the Chairman. The appointment should not be arranged before the first meeting of the Committee. In fact, that was recorded. When the Procedure Committee was reviewing the work of departmental Select Committees it received clear evidence that this had not happened in the past. The Procedure Committee therefore made the situation perfectly clear.

Mr. Bill Walker: Would my hon. Friend care to comment on the fact that the Scottish Affairs Select Committee will have no option but to select and elect the individual nominated by the Labour party for the chairmanship, even if that person questions the right of the House of Commons to have its way in Scotland?

Sir Peter Emery: I do not wish to comment. I am merely trying to set out for the House the facts of the recommendation or of the procedure recommended. It seems to me that these things ought to be known to the House before it votes on any of the motions.

11.42 pm

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): One can be a little too squeamish about thuggery by the Whips. I speak as one who was sandbagged off a Select Committee at the beginning of the previous Parliament—a matter in respect of which I bear absolutely no malice towards my Chief Whip. We had a very pleasant conversation on the subject, and I found myself on another Committee, which was very congenial. Lest it be thought that I, like the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), am on my feet because I am not to be on a Select Committee on this occasion, let me assure the House that that was the result of further consultation with the Chief Whip.

Mr. Higgins: In an earlier intervention I sought to clarify the situation. I have made it quite clear that I did not wish to be renominated for membership.

Dr. Gilbert: The right hon. Gentleman has not been listening very carefully. What he has just said was understood by me. It is for precisely the same reason that I am not to be on a Select Committee in this Parliament.

In these matters, neither side is without blemish. I take the point that it is unfortunate that Opposition Whips are on the Committee of Selection, and it is unconscionable that the Chairman of the 1922 Committee is Chairman of the Committee of Selection. I do not endorse all the propositions that have been put forward tonight on either side of the House. There is no reason why Conservative Members should not choose their Select Committee members by rules and conventions that seem fit and proper to them. Whether they discuss the subject among themselves is a matter for them, and not for the Opposition.

Mr. Gorst: There is a big distinction between the Whips in the opposition parties having a hand in selection and the Government Whips having a part. Select Committees monitor and scrutinise what the Government do and, therefore, because we are not examining what the Opposition do, the Opposition Whips do not commit a foul. It is quite a different matter when the Government are not only the culprit, but act as judge and jury by influencing membership of those Select Committees.

Dr. Gilbert: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, which should be referred to the Committee of Selection. Realistically, the Whips will always have a hand in such matters, whether they are on the Committees or not.

I do not understand all the fuss about who should be selected to be Chairmen of the Committees. It is totally within the power of any Select Committee to choose any of its members to be Chairman on any occasion. It may change that choice during any Parliament. We can only blame ourselves if we complain that the Whips choose the Chairmen for us. It is entirely in the hands of Members on both sides of those Committees to decide who shall be and who shall remain the Chairmen of them.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Worthing about the shoddiness and ineptness displayed in the selection process on this occasion. I was totally unimpressed by the remarks of the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, and I am equally unimpressed by the half acre of green Bench where the Government Chief Whip normally sits. If he seriously thinks that he can delude the House into thinking that he has no responsibility for what has gone on in the past few days, he must take us for complete idiots. We know perfectly well what has happened and it brings no great credit to the House.

I have never thought that longevity was a reason for staying on a Select Committee. Intelligence, application, diligence and ability to prosecute a line of inquiry are far more important characteristics of a successful Committee member than experience. However, I hope that, if any rule about senior Labour Members of Committees, such as that which has been put forward by the Conservative party, were put to my colleagues, they would consider it thoroughly obnoxious.

[Dr. Gilbert]

The way in which this matter has been handled can only pander to those who take a most cynical view of our affairs. I sincerely hope that the Select Committee on Procedure will consider it with dispatch and diligence.

11.47 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): The last thing that I want to do, Madam Speaker, is to add to your burdens and duties, but it seems to me that you may have a future role to play in this matter.

The way in which the system has worked till now does not fill us with confidence. I believe that the Selection Committee should be chosen in the same way as the panel of Chairmen, who preside over Standing Committees on Bills, are chosen. The Whips do not play a part in that system. Doubtless they make comments, as they are fully entitled to do, but the choice of Chairmen lies with you, Madam Speaker, and your deputy. Because the House has total confidence in your independence and utter impartiality—if it did not, you would not be in the Chair—those whom you choose to do the job are more likely than others to share that reputation.

We must be realistic and accept that we cannot change the system until the new Parliament. However, when we go through the rigmarole again, the process should be under your jurisdiction, Madam Speaker, or, in the sad event of your not being in the Chair, your successor. If the Selection Committee were appointed by the Speaker, everyone could have total confidence in the system and the result.

11.49 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Some hon. Members are cynical about Select Committees. I used to be in that camp until I had cause to change my mind. One of the reasons for doubting whether an effective monitoring job can be done is the remarkable fact that the Committees set up to monitor the Government contain a majority of Conservative party members.

I changed my mind because it was demonstrated to me that in the process of Select Committee work—the taking of evidence, the cross-questioning of Ministers and civil servants, and the bringing of other expert voices into the House—useful and interesting things happen. The process is extremely valuable, partly because we publish the evidence. No Select Committee member likes to think that his or her report will look like rubbish alongside the evidence.

The disciplines imposed on Select Committee members work well, but the whole process is brought into disrepute by what has happened on this occasion. It is all very well for my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) to say that Tory Members are a matter for the Tory party, but I disagree, because it is a question not of the Tory party but of the Government. I do not believe for a minute that the Tory party is responsible for those machinations; the Whips acting as agents for the Government are responsible. That calls into question whether Select Committees can do an honest monitoring job in future.

It is remarkably politically inept of the Government because it gives the Opposition a weapon—to ask what is going to happen to the national health service between now and the next general election which makes the Government feel that they cannot stand honest scrutiny and must try to fix the Select Committee membership.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Will the hon. Lady explain to the House why the Labour party Whips took the chairmanship of the Transport Committee away from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) and the poor chap did not know about it until the day after they did it although the Conservatives knew about it?

Mrs. Wise: I am not responsible for any Whips. Although I may hold views about that chairmanship matter, the Labour Whips have not removed a person from a Select Committee. The hon. Members for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) will be removed from the Committee altogether. They will have no role to play because, we are told, they have served for too long. Long service may not be a sufficient qualification for membership, but I cannot believe that it is a sufficient qualification for removal either. Surely it is not a disqualification for membership.

The hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) made it seem as though the membership of those Committees is set in concrete. Anyone who has served on a Select Committee knows that vacancies frequently arise as Members resign or go on to their respective Front Benches. Those vacancies could be taken by newer Members. The hon. Member for Shipley proved that there are few long-standing Select Committee members when he said that, at the end of this Parliament, only six people would be disqualified. That is six out of a large number of Select Committee members—96 on the Government side. That surely suggests a lack of long-standing expertise rather than a surplus, so what the hon. Member for Shipley has said is—not to put too fine a point on it—baloney.

The best speech in support of the amendment was made by the hon. Member for Shipley himself, because his speech treated the House with contempt. I prefer to believe that the House does not deserve such treatment, and I hope that many hon. Members who value the role played by Back Benchers will join me in the Lobby.

11.55 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I wish to speak to amendments (a) and (b) motion 18, which stand in my name, on behalf of the Committee of Selection. It gives me no pleasure to do so.

As hon. Members will know, at the time of its proceedings last week the Committee was not aware of the long service given to the Select Committee on Home Affairs by the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler). It had been told that he had joined the Committee in 1983; only after the meeting was it discovered that he had joined in 1979. His long service is beyond price and, as he himself recognised——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM SPEAKER *proceeded to put the Questions which she was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to Order [3 July].*

Question agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr. Richard Alexander, Mrs. Angela Browning, Mr. Christopher Gill, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Martyn Jones,

Mr. Paul Marland, Mr. Eric Martlew, Mr. Colin Pickthall, Mr. George Stevenson, Mr. Jerry Wiggin and Mrs. Ann Winterton be members of the Agriculture Committee.

DEFENCE

Ordered,

That Sir Nicholas Bonsor, Mr. Menzies Campbell, Mr. Churchill, Mr. Michael Colvin, Mr. Frank Cook, Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, Mr. Bruce George, Mr. John Home Robertson, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Neville Trotter and Mr. Peter Viggers be members of the Defence Committee. —*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

EDUCATION

Motion made and Question put,

That Sir Paul Beresford, Mildred Gordon, Mr. David Jamieson, Mrs. Angela Knight, Lady Olga Maitland, Mr. Edward O'Hara, Mr. David Porter, Dr. Robert Spink, Mr. Gerry Steinberg, Sir Malcolm Thornton and Mr. Dennis Turner be members of the Education Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 44.

Division No 63] **[11.57 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Andrew F.
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyes, Roland
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fraser, John
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hague, William
Hain, Peter
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Janner, Greville
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Jowell, Tessa
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McMaster, Gordon
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Meale, Alan
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Andrew
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tipping, Paddy
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael

Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bob Dunn and
Mr. George Gardiner.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alton, David
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Bob
Dafis, Cynog
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hoey, Kate
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pike, Peter L.
Raynsford, Nick
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Trimble, and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

EMPLOYMENT

That Mr. Ian Bruce, Mr. Sebastian Coe, Mr. Ken Eastham, Mr. Oliver Heald, Mr. Greville Janner, Mr. Ron Leighton, Mr. Iain Mills, Mr. Andrew Robathan, Mr. Ernie Ross, Mr. Richard Spring and Mr. David Young be members of the Employment Committee—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Ordered,

ENVIRONMENT

That Mr. John Battle, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Mr. Barry Field, Helen Jackson, Mr. Robert B. Jones. Mr. Tom Pendry, Mr. Eric Pickles, Mr. Nick Raynsford, Mr. Gary Streeter and Mr. Roy Thomason be members of the Environment Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Ordered,

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

That Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. Mike Grapes, Mr. David Harris, Mr. David Howell, Mr. Michael Jopling, Mr. Jim Lester, Mr. Ted Rowlands, Mr. Peter Shore, Sir John Stanley, Mr. David Sumberg and Mr. Robert N. Wareing be members of the Foreign Affairs Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

HEALTH

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. Roland Boyes, Mr. James Clappison, Mr. David Congdon, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mrs. Jacqui Lait, Alice Mahon, Mrs. Marion Roe, Mr. Roger Sims, the Reverend Martin Smyth, Mr. Michael Trend and Audrey Wise be members of the Health Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Amendment proposed: (a) leave out 'Mrs. Marion Roe'. —*[Mr. Frank Field.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 147, Noes 210.

Division No. 64] **[12.10 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fry, Peter
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*

Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duncan, Alan
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Dunn and
Sir Michael Neubert.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main question agreed to.

HOME AFFAIRS

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. David Ashby, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Mr. Hartley Booth, Mr. Peter Butler, Mr. Edward Garnier, Mr. John Greenway, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Mike O'Brien, Mrs. Barbara Roche, Mr. Keith Vaz and Sir John Wheeler be members of the Home Affairs Committee—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Amendment proposed: (b), leave out 'Sir John Wheeler'. —*[Sir Giles Shaw.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 160, Noes 139.

Division No. 65] **[12.21 am**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cryer, Bob
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger

Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, John
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stewart, Allan
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
[redacted]dinnick, David
Tumble, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bob Dunn and
Sir Michael Neubert.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Ancram, Michael
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F.
Bermingham, Gerald
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Churchill, Mr
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Fry, Peter
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Harris, David
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Riddick, Graham
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Salmond, Alex
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Peter Brooke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment made: (a), after 'Mr. John Greenway', insert 'Sir Ivan Lawrence'.—*[Sir Giles Shaw.]*

Main Question, as amended, agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr. David Ashby, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Mr. Hartley Booth, Mr. Peter Butler, Mr. Edward Garnier, Mr. John Greenway, Sir Ivan Lawrence, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Mike O'Brien, Mrs. Barbara Roche and Mr. Keith Vaz be members of the Home Affairs Committee.

National Heritage

Ordered,

That Mr. Joe Ashton, Dr. John G. Blackburn, Mr. Gyles Brandreth, Mr. Jim Callaghan, Mr. Paul Channon, Mr. Patrick Cormack, Mr. Bryan Davies, Mr. John Gorst, Mr. Alan Howarth, Mr. Gerald Kaufman and Mr. John Maxton be members of the National Heritage Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Science and Technology

Ordered,

That Mr. Spencer Batiste, Dr. Jeremy Bray, Mr. Malcolm Bruce, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Cheryl Gillan, Mr. William Powell, Sir Giles Shaw, Sir Trevor Skeet, Dr. Gavin Strang, Sir Gerard Vaughan and Mr. Alan W. Williams be members of the Science and Technology Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Scottish Affairs

Ordered,

That Mr. Peter Atkinson, Mr. Eric Clarke, Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, Dr. Liam Fox, Mr. Phil Gallie, Mr. Robert Hughes, Mr. George Kynoch, Mr. Willian McKelvey, Mrs. Ray Michie, Mr. Raymond S. Robertson and Mr. Andrew Welsh be members of the Scottish Affairs Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Social Security

Ordered,

That Mr. Michael Bates, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. David Faber, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Clifford Forsythe, Tessa Jowell, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Patrick Nicholls, Mr. David Shaw and Mr. David Willetts be members of the Social Security Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Trade and Industry

Motion made, and Question put,

That Mr. John Butterfill, Mr. Richard Caborn, Dr. Michael Clark, Mr. Jim Cousins, Sir Anthony Grant, Dr. Keith Hampson, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Adam Ingram, Mr. Cranley Onslow, Mr. Stanley Orme and Mr. Barry Porter be members of the Trade and Industry Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

The House divided: Ayes 237, Noes 43.

Division No. 66] **[12. 34 am**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashton, Joe
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bayley, Hugh
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Andrew F.
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duncan, Alan
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hanson, David
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hutton, John
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Jowell, Tessa
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Andrew
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Mullin, Chris
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tipping, Paddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bob Dunn and
Sir Michael Neubert.

NOES

Alton, David
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cryer, Bob
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Macdonald, Calum
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Morley, Elliot
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Raynsford, Nick
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Welsh, Andrew

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms. Liz Lynne and
Mr. Alex Salmond.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Transport

Ordered,

That Mr. Robert Adley, Mr. Jack Aspinwall, Mr. Matthew Banks, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Terry Dicks, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Mr. Keith Hill, Mr. John McFall, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay and Mr. David Marshall be members of the Transport Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Treasury and Civil Service

Ordered,

That Ms. Diane Abbott, Sir Thomas Arnold, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Nicholas Budgen, Mrs. Judith Chaplin, Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. John Garrett, Mr. Barry Legg, Mr. Giles Radice, Mr. Brian Sedgemore and Mr. John Watts be members of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Welsh Affairs

Ordered,

That Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Jonathan Evans, Mr. Roger Evans, Mr. David Hanson, Mr. Jon Owen Jones, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Peter Luff, Mr. Rod Richards, Mr. Mark Robinson, Mr. Walter Sweeney and Mr. Gareth Wardell be members of the Welsh Affairs Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Select Committees (Interests)

Ordered,

That this House takes note of the First Report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests of Session 1990-91 (HC 108) relating to the interests of Chairmen and Members of Select Committees, and approves the recommendations of the Committee relating to declaration of interest in Select Committees (paragraphs 8 to 16), withdrawal from Committee proceedings (paragraph 24) and procedures prior to the election to a Chairman (paragraph 25).—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Business of the House

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 15th July, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Patten relating to Education not later than one and a half hours after the Motion has been entered upon; and the said Motion may be proceeded with after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Social Security Fraud

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

12.46 am

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): Little did I think, when I applied for this Adjournment debate, that it would follow such an exciting evening. I hope that my contribution can match up to the proceedings so far.

After two world wars—in particular the last—Great Britain was destitute. Rationing had become a way of life. The aim of the welfare state was to create a land fit for heroes. Today, unfortunately, it has produced a land fit for scroungers. As this country has become richer, our spending on welfare programmes has accelerated. By far the largest item of national expenditure is the £71,000 million that we spend each year on social security. For many, that sustains a gravy train that they have been riding all their lives.

The system is open to massive abuse. The head of the organised fraud unit at the Benefits Agency has said that it is easier to counterfeit a benefit book or a giro cheque than to go into a bank with a shotgun. There are fewer risks, and the returns are just as good. A criminal with 100 stolen security books could draw £8,000 a week.

Tonight, however, I shall concentrate not on elaborate frauds but rather on the routine deceptions perpetuated by millions of people every day. Throughout the country, thieves, cheats and criminals exploit the benefit system. It caters for greed, not need. By tackling the problem with forceful measures, the Government would not be kicking people who are down; rather they would be ensuring that a bigger slice of the cake was available to those who genuinely need it.

Since 1979, the Government have provided people with a multitude of incentives to work. For instance, they have reduced the basic rate of tax from 33p to 25p in the pound, and they have taken 1·5 million out of tax payment altogether. However, as well as waving a carrot, we must brandish a stick at those who scoff at such incentives and shy away from earning an honest living. It is about time the nanny state bared its teeth.

Essentially, social security fraud involves two types of criminal. The first may be called simply the layabout. At present, there are 841,000 long-term unemployed people —men and women who have been out of work for more than a year. I believe that, of those, 500,000 have no intention whatsoever of ever working again. They blatantly milk the system, and have probably not missed an Oval test match or a set at Wimbledon for years.

I am delighted that this problem is recognised even by Opposition Members. Indeed, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) recently said:

"Labour has been linked with freeloaders for too long."

Who would argue with that? The hon. Gentleman continued:

"I . . . know ordinary folk who expect rewards for hard work. They have no time for people who lie in bed when they are fit and able to get a job."

Constituents write to me and say that layabouts in their street laugh at them for going to work. They rightly resent having to subsidise their neighbours' extended leisure time. With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall quote part of a letter that I received only this week:

"Dear Mr. Evans,

The attached newspaper cut about your efforts on the

perpetually unemployed was interesting. My son, sad to say, is one of the long-term unemployed. He is 29, and he and his live-in girlfriend of like persuasion draw £150 a week for themselves and two children. He scorns people who go to work and gives this reason: a job at £3 an hour would be less than he gets now, £4 an hour would mean going to work, and £5 an hour would start paying tax."

That is the sort of scrounger I am talking about. The letter goes on:

"The rest of us in the family are workers. My wife and I retired recently from a very successful business that we ran. My daughter has simply no time for my son's life style, yet there must be a million like him."

That gentleman is absolutely right.

To help to combat the problem, the Government should offer rewards to people who shop layabouts to the authorities. The potential saving to the British taxpayer is enormous—probably £1,000 million. People up and down the country know of a least one person in their street who dodges work and claims benefit. Rewards would encourage citizens to round up these cheats. In our communities, we should have dole posses as well as neighbourhood watch schemes. That would certainly increase the prosecution rate.

There were only 4,379 prosecutions for social security fraud last year, which represented only one quarter of all the cases detected. These people, categorised as layabouts, should have to report every morning to the local authority for community work before being entitled to benefit. For each year of unemployment over two years, one week's benefit should be stopped. Alternatively, why should we not have identity cards? Why should we not be able to identify those who have a legal right to social security benefits?

The other category of social security criminal is made up of the persons—there are millions of them—who claim unemployment benefit while working. This applies not only to the black economy but to regular work also.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: I will not.

I believe that £1,000 million a year is stolen by these people. Staff in benefit offices say that these cheats even come to claim their money wearing a suit or overalls, ready to go to their place of work. They prefer to sign on early so as not to disrupt their working day. Instead of requiring claimants to call in at a set time, we should institute spot checks. Social security staff should be able to contact a claimant at a moment's notice.

Greater pressure should also be put on employers who take on people who are obviously working the black economy. In May, a racket was uncovered in Surrey, where gang masters were providing unemployed labour to fruit farmers for £5 an hour. There cannot be a cheat without a collusive employer who allows that person time off to sign on.

At present, 2,658 full-time equivalent staff are employed on duties relating to social security fraud. That number should be greatly increased and more staff should be used to weed out employers who are costing this country a fortune, lining their own pockets by using illegal labour.

Instead of sending cheats, dodgy employers and layabouts to prison—they would probably relish the opportunity to put their feet up—they should be made to undertake unsavoury community service. Alternatively, we could make them attend the Labour party conference—perhaps some of them already do. Repeat offenders should be sent to the Liberal Democrat conference—at least there are plenty of available seats. They would then think twice about swindling the taxpayer.

The tragedy is that many of the fraudsters are not ashamed of their actions, and many others in our society turn a blind eye to them. If they mugged an old lady for money, they would be condemned, but when they are indirectly taking money from pensioners via the benefit system, many do not bat an eyelid at their fraud. They are sent before magistrates, who administer little more than tea and sympathy.

The mandatory sentence for those committing fraud should be a turn on the good ducking stool in the local river—a good public flogging would be even better. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) has a good suggestion; he thinks that a ball and chain should be put on offenders—the larger the offence, the larger the ball and chain.

All things considered, it is little wonder that this country has become the focus of the European Community leisure industry. Forget EuroDisney: London is the place to have fun, all at the expense of the British taxpayer. According to figures produced by the Department of Social Security for 1990-91, some 220,000 foreign citizens came into Britain and registered for social security benefit. How many of them were genuine?

Most of them were from the EC, which is not surprising. Britain is attractive because it is the only place in Europe where claimants are entitled to unemployment benefit for a full year. They draw that benefit while working in the black economy. They can also seek housing benefit amounting to the full cost of accommodation, plus allowances. The total sum can run to considerably more than £150 per person, per week.

In contrast, an Italian claiming in Italy is entitled to 20 per cent. of his average daily wage in the four weeks preceding unemployment for up to six months. If he received no earnings in those four weeks, he gets no money.

The purpose of the single European market was to create free movement of labour. Instead, it seems to have produced free movement of cheats and layabouts, with Britain as the land of milk and honey. In common with the United States, we should refuse entry to all people from the EC unless they can prove that they have a bona fide job or sufficient funds to keep them during their stay. Why should my constituents subsidise Italian playboys on the make in London?

I have said it before and I shall say it again: I do not believe that anyone who comes to this country should receive any benefit until he has worked and paid taxes for five years.

I recognise that the Government have made considerable strides in combating fraud. I was delighted to learn that anti-fraud staff saved £416 million from fraud last year, and have set a target of £460 million this year. So my figure of £1,000 million is not too far adrift. Ministers have clearly realised that investing in detection provides a high rate of return, which is why more resources must be committed to it.

The huge army of scroungers out there must be brought to book. We owe it to the taxpayer, the staff who are abused daily in benefit offices and, above all, those who

[Mr. Evans]

genuinely require state assistance. If somebody genuinely needs our help, we shall help them. But those who work the system—no way.

I hope that the Minister will assure the House that she is aware that a social security fraud problem exists and will do even more than has been done already.

I am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on obtaining this Adjournment debate and I welcome the opportunity to talk about the Government's approach to tackling social security fraud *[Interruption.]* The frivolity with which Opposition Members have greeted this subject would not be shared by their constituents.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: No, in the traditions of Adjournment debates, I shall not.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in the debate on public expenditure—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I realise that this debate has tested Opposition Members' self-control, but I should like to hear the Minister in peace.

Miss Widdecombe: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that I shall make no further impositions on their fragile self-control.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in the debate on public expenditure on 7 May that one of his key priorities was to bear down on fraud and abuse. It is an important subject and an essential element in any social security system, but it attracts too little serious attention and perhaps occasionally attention of the wrong sort.

Why is it one of our top priorities? It is not out of any sense of suspicion towards genuine social security beneficiaries, but because social security fraud and abuse harm the very people whom social security was designed to help—people on low incomes, people in genuine need and people who have spent their life working and paying national insurance contributions in the expectation that when they retire they will receive a decent pension. Fraud and abuse harm those people by stealing the money that they pay or have paid in taxes and national insurance, reducing the resources which can go into social security, bringing social security into disrepute, and making people in genuine need think twice about claiming.

Fraud comes in any number of guises. At one extreme are the people who drift into fraud out of the misplaced belief that perhaps one small lie does not matter. Then there are determined fraudsters who work while signing on as unemployed, invent extra children, discover how to invent a fictitious identity for themselves, or fail to disclose an earning partner.

At the farthest extreme are the so-called professional criminals, who burgle offices to steal blank order books, counterfeit instruments of payment, and run rackets involving multiple false identities and many different benefit claims. Their numbers are not great, but they represent a worrying element which calls out for tough action. Increasingly, we are beginning to see violent criminals involved in that type of fraud. They prey on the naive and vulnerable by using them as runners to cash order books and take the risks.

Fraud is also a constantly changing field of action and counter-action. When we erect one barrier to fraud and abuse, the determined fraudsters will try to find a way round it. When we counter that new technique, they think up something else.

So how do we bear down on fraud and abuse? There are four planks to our strategy. There is deterrence—stopping fraud from happening in the first place; detection, to which my hon. Friend referred—finding it and stopping it when it does happen; recovery, so that we get back the money that people have stolen; and, in certain cases, prosecution—we take the most serious cases to court.

Deterrence is obviously crucial: its importance cannot be overrated. It is the most effective way of controlling fraud. We need constantly to improve our defences. By introducing the new income support computer system, we closed one avenue to fraud. People would claim income support at several different offices simultaneously; now, because the system is automated, they have to use more ingenuity and take more risks to create and maintain false identities.

More recently, we introduced a staff awareness package, "Fraud in Focus", to train staff in what to look out for and how to identify suspicious claims. My hon. Friend will be glad to know that we are working with the Post Office on a similar fraud awareness package for its counter staff, to teach them how to spot false or amended order books and giro cheques and to ascertain what evidence will verify a genuine identity.

However, as with many decisions on fraud, a balance must be struck between deterring fraud and running a social security system which allows people with genuine need to gain access to it. However strongly my right hon. Friend may feel, I am sure that he will agree that, if we turn ourselves into Fort Knox, we shall defeat the whole object of social security. Our strategy, therefore, is to put in sufficient checks and levels of verification to deter fraud, but not to be so intrusive as to deter genuine claimants.

Inevitably some people will slip through the net, and that is where detection comes in. We employ around 2,800 people to work against fraud, and most of them work on finding it and then stopping it. We have recently reorganised them to make them as well trained and effective as possible. Most fraud staff are now organised into sector teams, which are managed separately from benefit-paying operations but have a local presence. We also run regional fraud teams, which specialise in the most serious cases of social security fraud. We are developing new performance measures for our fraud staff to make what they do as effective as possible.

As my hon. Friend has pointed out, these measures are working. Last year, as he said, our fraud staff stopped some £416 million-worth of fraud—an increase of £83 million on the previous year. As he also said, this year's target is the best part of half a billion pounds, and in the first three months we are well on the way to achieving it.

When we find and stop fraud, we aim to recover the money that has been overpaid by deducting it from the fraudster's remaining benefit, or by civil recovery action. In a proportion of cases, we prosecute. We do not aim to prosecute everyone; it is a very labour-intensive exercise, and it would tie up manpower which could be used more

effectively in detecting and stopping more fraudsters. Nor would universal prosecution be necessary for its deterrent effect. The real possibility of being taken to court is the deterrent, and we are grateful to local papers which cover social security cases and ensure that word gets around.

In many cases of petty fraud, there would be little point in prosecution. Fines do not work well when a fraudster is on a low income and cannot pay them. Gaol sentences would often not be given because of the pettiness of the offence, and would in many cases leave the family on social security. We therefore aim to prosecute serious cases of fraud—taking the social, domestic and medical circumstances of the offender into account, rather than small-scale fraud. We do not, however, rule out prosecution as a last resort, if the circumstances warrant it. Last year, we took nearly 4,500 cases to court—a quarter of the confirmed fraud cases discovered—and our prosecution success rate was around 95 per cent.

As I have said, fraud is constantly changing its nature and there are always more areas to tackle. An example in the past few years has been the upsurge in abuse of the social security system by bogus asylum seekers. We have worked with the Home Office on better ways of identifying and controlling claims for asylum seekers, and we have reduced the order book period for asylum seekers from 20 to six weeks. We have also put resources into detecting multiple false claims by people masquerading as asylum seekers. We believe that, with the Home Office, we are now getting the problem under control.

There will, however, be other problems to tackle. Determined fraudsters can be very resourceful. The answer to this lies in effective ties between all the agencies involved in countering fraud—our own fraud staff, local authorities, the Department of Employment, the Home Office, and the police, with whom we enjoy an excellent relationship. It lies also in constantly learning from experience and ploughing back the lessons into training and new procedures; and it lies increasingly in information technology.

We already make substantial use of our computer systems to pick up and track fraud. The departmental central index, which holds details of claims to most social security benefits, is a very valuable resource. However, we believe that we can do a lot more to tap the full potential of this most potent asset within the letter and the spirit of the Data Protection Act 1984. In the coming years, we shall be using information technology more and more to deter fraud and to help detect it, by making it easier to cross-check details of claims and to identify suspicious claims.

My hon. Friend has spoken about abuse of the system, where people are not claiming fraudulently but neither are they making serious efforts to find work. I well understand my hon. Friend's concern. We take all abuse of social security seriously. That is why we have made it a condition of getting unemployment benefits that people must be actively seeking work. It is not enough merely to sign on every fortnight. The Employment Service interviews every new claimant in depth. It reviews all claims for claimants who have been unemployed for more than 13 weeks, and it interviews at this stage all claimants who appear to need an in-depth discussion about their efforts to get back into work.

We introduced the restart programme in 1986 to guarantee an advisory interview every six months and ensure that claimants know and get a fair share of the employment and training opportunities available in their locality. After two years, everyone has to attend a restart course. An unemployed person who refuses a job offered or refuses to go for an interview can be disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit for up to 26 weeks.

The signs are that we are winning the battle. Twenty years ago, people thought that it was smart to drink and drive. Now they do not, and even young people believe that it is morally wrong to put lives at risk in that way. A similar shift, although it is hard to detect in the attitude of Opposition Members tonight, is occurring in attitudes to social security. During the 1960s, some people began to think there was nothing wrong with abusing social security —that it was their right to live off the taxpayer if they so chose.

I believe that that attitude is now far less prevalent. Since the Conservatives have been in power, our unambiguous approach to abuse has had its effects. However, there are still those who believe that they can expect the taxpayer to support them. We need effective controls to stop those people exploiting a system designed to help genuine need.

In summary, the message that I should like to get across tonight to the vast majority of genuine social security beneficiaries and the small number of fraudulent ones is as follows. We are not a soft touch. People who are honest and in genuine need have nothing to fear and should exercise their right to claim benefit. The system is here to meet their needs. But those thinking about claiming benefit fraudulently should not do so, because we shall find them, catch them, and make them repay what they have stolen, and they risk being taken to court and fined, or being sent to prison.

I commend the measures to my hon. Friend and to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 14 July 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

SUMMER TIME

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported to the House, That its Address of 9 July relating to Summer Time had been presented to Her Majesty and that Her Majesty had been pleased to receive the same very graciously and to give the following Answer:

I have received your Address praying that the Summer Time Order 1992 be made in the form of the draft laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL

Order for consideration of Lords amendments read.
To be considered tomorrow.

GREATER MANCHESTER (LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM) (NO. 4) BILL *[Lords.]*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) (NO. 2) BILL

PRICES'S PATENT CANDLE COMPANY LIMITED BILL *[Lords]*

Orders for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time tomorrow.

RIVER HUMBER (UPPER PYEWIPE OUTFALL) BILL *[Lords]*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered tomorrow.

LLANELLI BOROUGH COUNCIL (RIVER LLIEDI) BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

NHS Trusts

1. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restrictions exist on the number of pay beds in hospital trusts.

The Minister for Health (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): It is a statutory requirement that private practice in national health service trust hospitals does not significantly interfere with the performance, by the trust, of its obligations under NHS contracts or imposed by order. The actual number of private patient beds that may be made available at any one time is for local determination.

Mr. Williams: As trust hospitals are not required by law to make contracts with the NHS, and as private insurance companies are seeking a greater use of trust hospitals to reduce their premiums, is there not a danger that the number of private beds in those hospitals will dramatically increase without anyone being consulted? If the Government want us to believe that the NHS is safe in their hands, why do they not make the 10 per cent. limit for private beds that applies to health authority-managed hospitals apply also to trust hospitals?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman's fears are unfounded, not least because the local population is protected by the purchasers who are responsible for purchasing health care on their behalf.

Ms. Harman: Is it not the case that the more hospital trusts such as Guy's hospital in London concentrate on private patients, the longer NHS patients like the Slennet family, whose case was reported recently in the newspapers, have to wait? The longer NHS patients must wait, the more they are forced to go private. To protect NHS services and justify the Minister's claims that trust hospitals are not about privatisation, will he impose a strict and specific limit on the proportion of private work that NHS trusts can do?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Lady should be aware, better than most, that common waiting lists for urgent or seriously ill patients exist in all hospitals and that those arrangements were agreed with the medical profession. She should be aware also that there is a statutory requirement that private practice in hospital trusts must not interfere, to a significant extent, with performance under NHS contracts. The hon. Lady is trying to scare patients unnecessarily.

2. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether special considerations can be applied to health units or organisations wishing to seek trust status in very rural areas; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. Each application for trust status is measured against four main criteria: that the establishment of the trust will give clear benefits and improved quality of service to patients; that management has the necessary skills and capacity to operate independently;

that senior professional staff, particularly consultants, are involved in the management of the unit; and that the trust will be financially viable.

Mr. Kirkwood: But is there not a case for giving special consideration to small health board, district and regional health authority areas providing health care in disparate rural communities and, where they are performing well already, leaving well alone? In particular, what guidance is being given to those authorities in rural areas on the purchaser's ability to keep in touch with local communities so that they can deliver the kind of services that those communities seek?

Dr. Mawhinney: That is a perfectly fair question. I assure the hon. Gentleman that all purchasers have the responsibility to assess health needs and the preferences of the local population. That is true in both rural and urban areas. Given the distance that some patients may have to travel, purchasers in rural areas need to have particular regard to accessibility of services. Let me encourage the hon. Gentleman by giving him one example: a purchasing project in North Yorkshire, not far from the hon. Gentleman's constituency, covering about four and a half former districts, has developed 25 natural communities around which it has planned the sort of health care that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

Dame Jill Knight: Does my hon. Friend agree that when trust status is conferred on a hospital, the local people virtually run the hospital themselves and they, after all, know best?

Dr. Mawhinney: As is so frequently the case, my hon. Friend is exactly right.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Then how would the Minister explain the situation that has arisen in my area, which has a large rural contingent, where one fund-holding general practitioner can distort the provision of health care by demanding that the practice's patients go ahead of those of every non-fund-holding general practitioner?

Dr. Mawhinney: I have to say to the hon. Lady what I said to her last time, which is that I am not prepared to accept her interpretation of events. If the health authority has such a problem, it is perfectly free to get in touch with me.

3. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have now achieved trust status.

14. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the national health service trust programme.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): A total of 156 national health service trusts are currently operational and 151 applications have been received from hospitals and other units to become operational from April 1993 in the third wave of NHS trusts.

Mr. Martin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the result of the general election, particularly in Portsmouth, has led directly to applications for trust status there? As the British Medical Association has withdrawn its misguided opposition to that sensible policy, is it not high time that the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats followed suit and stopped misrepresenting it as privatisation?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is exactly right. Since the election, a great many people have said that the future lies in NHS trusts, which provide a better form of management. I was delighted to hear that the BMA chairman said:

"The reforms exist. Our task must be to ensure that, for the sake of our patients, we do everything we can to make them work."

I visited the hospital where he works, which has become a trust, and was most impressed with its progress. I know that hospitals in my hon. Friend's constituency are applying for trust status in the next wave, with the warm support of the clinicians. I hope that the Labour party will be able to adopt a similar approach.

Mr. David Shaw: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that trust hospitals result in reduced waiting lists, an improved number of patient treatments and an improved quality of service? Therefore it is not surprising that Dover and Deal hospitals are applying for trust status to deliver to my constituents an even further improved quality of service.

Mrs. Bottomley: Trusts are cutting their waiting lists, improving the quality of service and increasing the number of patients treated. They are also a good place for the staff to work. There are overwhelming reasons for devolving the management of health care to the level nearest to that at which decisions on clinical work are undertaken. NHS trusts are the model for the future and provide important new freedoms. They are better for staff and for patients.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Secretary of State will be aware that among the 151 third wave applications, there is one jointly made by the two Coventry hospitals, which want to become a single trust. Is she aware of fears that that will result in the closure of the Coventry and Warwickshire hospital and of the refusal by the management at either site to give any assurances? Will she ensure that there is full consideration and that the assurances sought are given before trust status is approved?

Mrs. Bottomley: I give the hon. Gentleman a clear assurance that the most important criterion for agreeing trust status is better service for patients. A trust must certainly be financially viable and there must be good management—under which clinicians and managers work closely together. The criterion for the future is improved services to patients and that is the basis on which decisions will be made.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: Does the Secretary of State agree that the Guy's and Lewisham Trust is so strapped for cash that it is moving more and more towards private medicine? What reassurances can she give Lewisham families that they will not be forced into private health care, as was the Slennet family in my constituency so that they could have their child treated in a hospital?

Mrs. Bottomley: I have no time for the politics of envy, in which criteria for the success of the health service are judged against the work of the private sector. Frankly, that is immaterial. I want ever-greater improvements to the national health service. I ask the hon. Lady to re-examine

the situation at Guy's, which is paying its low-paid workers an extra £6 a week, is tackling junior hospital doctors' hours a year ahead of schedule, has made excellent inroads into waiting times and is treating more patients. Improved patient care, not the criterion of redundancies, should measure the national health service's success.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend recall a survey undertaken among trust patients at the beginning of this year, which showed that seven times as many thought that services had improved as a result of trust status as those who noted a decline? Does she agree that such noticeable gains should be spread further and wider throughout the health service?

Mrs. Bottomley: How much I welcome my hon. Friend's remarks; as ever, she hits the nail exactly on the head. We ought to consider the effect of trust status on patients and others who use the service. An independent survey published earlier this year showed that 96 per cent. of patients were very satisfied or quite satisfied with the quality of service that they received from NHS trusts.

Personal Social Services

4. **Mr. Stevenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to discuss its concerns regarding the personal social services.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tim Yeo): My hon. Friend the Minister for Health and I met representatives of the local authority associations, including the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, on 1 July.

Mr. Stevenson: Will the Minister acknowledge the continuing concern that is felt in Stoke-on-Trent and elsewhere about the Government's intentions for the funding of community care? What progress has been made in the Government's discussions with the AMA on the principle of ring-fencing community care resources? Given that these are the last health questions before the recess, will the Minister state clearly when an announcement will be made about the transfer of resources for social security purposes, and not allow human community care to be sacrificed on the altar of council tax, as it has been under the poll tax?

Mr. Yeo: The Government have made it clear on several occasions—and I gladly do so again—that community care policy will be fairly resourced and that local authorities will be given adequate money to implement it. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about ring-fencing. Staffordshire county council's record is a prime example of why ring-fencing might be needed. Throughout the 1980s, social services spending in Staffordshire was consistently below the level indicated by the Government's grant-related expenditure assessment. In the eight years from 1982 to 1990, its cumulative underspend was almost £50 million. Any shortage of resources in Staffordshire is nothing to do with the Government, who provide adequate and generous resources, but has everything to do with the county council's decisions.

Mr. Rowe: When my hon. Friend met representatives of the AMA, did he discuss the crucial importance of increasing opportunities for volunteers in the personal social services? There is no doubt that volunteering not only provides a remarkable service but prevents the many volunteers who have a valuable and important task to perform from becoming a charge on the personal social services themselves.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is quite right. Indeed, he is a well-known expert in the field. We want to encourage all local authorities to maximise opportunities for volunteers which are useful to the volunteers themselves and to those whom they seek to serve. We are very concerned about the attitude of a few Labour-controlled local authorities, which are obstinately reluctant to increase usage of the independent sector.

Mr. Rooker: In view of today's devastating report from the Policy Studies Institute, which shows the total collapse of the Government's inner-city policies over the past 13 years, will the Minister join me in congratulating social workers on their work in inner-city areas? They sometimes enter unlit blocks of flats in dangerous circumstances to try to settle disputes of which they know nothing beyond what they have been told in a telephone call, and sometimes emerge with injuries. It is they, not Members of Parliament, who are on the front line.

Mr. Yeo: I gladly pay tribute to a number of local authority employees who work in inner-city areas. Their major handicap is the fact that too many inner-city local authorities are controlled by the loony left.

NHS (Expenditure)

5. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the proportion of the national income which is spent on the national health service has changed since 1979, and over the periods *(a)* 1974 to 1979 and *(b)* 1970 to 1974.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The share of gross domestic product spent on the national health service from all sources has increased from 4·7 per cent. in 1978-79 to an estimated 5·8 per cent. this year—a rise of more than 1 per cent. Figures for the earlier period are not available on the same basis, but show a similar 1 per cent. increase in the share of GDP spent on the health service between 1970 and 1974. Between 1974 and 1979, however, health spending as a proportion of GDP rose by only 0·3 per cent.

Mr. Day: Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations—and, I believe, those of the whole House—on that record of achievement under Conservative control? Such a record was never matched or even dreamt of by the so-called friends of the NHS on the Opposition Benches.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that performance in the NHS can be measured not only by the amount that is spent but by the return in terms of health benefit? Does she feel that her recent White Paper will help to produce further achievements?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. Indeed, the purpose of our latest White Paper, "Health of the Nation", is precisely to maximise the health gain that is achievable for the nation. Inevitably, any Secretary of State must achieve best value for money, but

real health gains can be achieved through concentration on disease prevention and health promotion as well as on the delivery of services. We are in the business of health as well as health care.

Mr. Robin Cook: Before the Secretary of State disappears in a puff of complacency about her expenditure, may I invite her to report on her income? Will she admit that, since 1979, the rate of increase in charges to patients has been double the rate of increase in spending; that the increase in prescription charges has been eight times the rate of inflation; that pay bed charges have risen tenfold; and that, on top of that, any dental patient who seeks treatment must pay three times more —provided, of course, that he or she can find a dentist to provide treatment? If the Government really want us to believe that they are committed to the NHS, will they stop turning it into a pay-as-you-go service?

Mrs. Bottomley: Charges have been part of the NHS since its early days. We must ensure that we maximise its ability to provide high-quality services. We have never provided such good dental care; we have never immunised so many children; life expectancy has improved over the past 12 years. On a number of criteria, health has been improving through the achievement of good value for money.

I worked in the health service when the Labour party was in power. Then, it was not a case of putting cash before care; it was a case of cash-free, care-free national health service. Expenditure was cut in real terms.

Patients, Barnet

6. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital patients were treated in the Barnet health authority in 1991-92.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I understand from locally provided figures that Barnet health authority purchased in-patient and day care treatment for 39,814 patients in the year 1991-92. This represents an overall increase of 3·4 per cent. over the previous year.

Mr. Marshall: Will my hon. Friend join me in thanking the staff, nurses and doctors who made that record achievement possible? Will he also note that one of the hospitals that made that achievement possible was the Royal Free trust hospital which, in its first year as a trust, treated 6 per cent. more patients and cut waiting lists substantially? Is my hon. Friend aware that the hospital waiting lists in Barnet are much better than those laid down in the guidelines in the citizens charter?

Mr. Sackville: I certainly join my hon. Friend in that. I remind him that on 1 May no one was waiting for more than two years for in-patient treatment in Barnet health authority, that the number of patients waiting between one and two years was down by 66 per cent. and that the health authority's aim by December 1992 is to reduce the maximum waiting time to nine months for general surgery and several other specialties.

Health Education Budget

7. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her budget for health education for 1992-93; and what is the change since 1991-92 in real terms.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have provided £33·9 million for the health education authority in 1992-93, a real increase of 5·2 per cent. on the previous year. This is more than matched by health education of literally incalculable value throughout the national health service, sustained by the successive real increases in funding provided by the Government.

Mr. Foulkes: Is not that a paltry sum compared with the £72 million spent by the tobacco industry each year on recruiting new customers to take the place of those whom it kills off? Will the Government reconsider the question of an advertising ban and ensure that shopkeepers who sell cigarettes to children are prosecuted?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman must focus his mind on the ends and not the means to the ends. The ends are that cigarette consumption in this country has decreased substantially over the past few years. The targets that we set in the White Paper suggest that tobacco consumption will drop even further in the years ahead. We have made that commitment. The means to achieve that end will be reviewed constantly, to ensure that it is achieved. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not know that the Children and Young Persons (Protection From Tobacco) Act 1991 addresses precisely the concern that he expressed.

Mr. Sims: Does my hon. Friend recall that at the time of the scares about salmonella and listeria there was criticism of his Department for lack of action and of any sense of urgency, yet when he issues a White Paper pointing out to people the need to pay particular attention to sensible drinking and a balanced diet and to cease smoking, he and our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health are accused of interfering and nannying? Will he ensure that adequate resources are made available so that although people remain free to make their own choices in these matters, they can make informed choices?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government have a responsibility to set before the public information on which they may wish to draw in making individual decisions about individual lifestyles. We are not in the business of nannying. However, we are in the business of discharging our responsibilities to put before people the sort of information that we believe they need and which would give them, if they were to follow it, a better quality of life.

Mr. Robin Cook: Does the Minister recognise that the end that the tobacco industry hopes to achieve by advertising is to encourage people to take up smoking? Why does he not adopt, as one of his means, the banning of tobacco advertising? Is not the real reason to be found in Rothmans' annual report, out this month, which shows that Rothmans gave £100,000 to the Tory party in this election year? Can we really expect the Tory party to take on the tobacco barons so long as they are taking their money?

Dr. Mawhinney: If they were the ends of the tobacco companies, measured against the fall in the consumption of tobacco in the past few years, they have not met those ends—on the contrary. The Government will meet the ends that they have set out by way of targets in the White Paper. It is a matter of great sadness that on his last appearance at the Dispatch Box—almost certainly, dealing with these matters—the hon. Gentleman will not commit the Labour party to achieving the same ends, which will benefit the health of the whole nation.

Education Nursing Service

8. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the education nursing service under the health service reforms.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just written congratulating the profession on the centenary of the education nursing service. In "The Health of the Nation" White Paper we emphasise how important the establishment of healthy lifestyles in childhood is to health promotion. School nurses have much to contribute here—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I hope that hon. Members on the Opposition Benches below the Gangway will allow us to hear what the Minister has to say.

Mr. Sackville: School nurses have much to contribute here and we will be monitoring their vital involvement in the implementation of our health strategy.

Mr. Winterton: May I advise my hon. Friend that, despite what he may hear, I shall be taking an increased interest in health matters. Having just told the House how important the education nursing services are to education and to the health service, will he tell us who will pay for the vital services under the new provider-purchaser system —the Department for Education or the Department of Health?

Mr. Sackville: May I have the honour of congratulating my hon. Friend on his years of service on the Select Committee on Health? I look forward to his many further contributions.

I stress the importance of the education nursing service. It is up to health authorities to provide adequate cover for the monitoring of school children's health. We must accept that the number of school nurses has remained constant against a background of massive extra GP provision as well as special child surveillance clinics, and the fact that the overall health of children has markedly improved in recent years.

Patients

9. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated in national health service hospitals in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what were the comparable figures for 1978.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A record 8·8 million patients were treated as in-patients and day cases in 1990-91 compared with 6·5 million in 1978. That represented a 34 per cent. increase.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the figures provide strong evidence of the improvement and expansion of the national health service since the Government came into office? Will she confirm that the increase in the number of patients treated has been faster since the national health service reforms were introduced?

Mrs. Bottomley: Indeed, I can confirm that. I have already made it clear that the rate of increase in the number of patients treated has doubled since the Government came to power, as opposed to when the Opposition were in power. There has been an increase of something like 7 per cent. since the introduction of the NHS reforms. There can be no doubt that, on any test, the NHS reforms have resulted in improvements to the quality of health care.

Mrs. Golding: Is the Minister aware of the unacceptable delays occurring yet again at the Birmingham children's hospital? Is she aware that Andrew Brown, a 10-year-old boy in my constituency, has been waiting more than a year for serious open heart surgery? Having been told to prepare himself to go into hospital tomorrow for surgery, he received a message yesterday that he could no longer go in. Two days' notice was given of the cancellation. His parents are distraught as they have been preparing him for weeks. When will we learn to treat our children properly? When will we do something about the Birmingham children's hospital?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Lady illustrates exactly why it is so important for us to tackle waiting times, and why the achievements of the last year, with the number of those waiting more than a year falling by one third, are so important. All the cases are individual cases like the one to which the hon. Lady refers. That is why the achievement of reducing those waiting more than two years from 51,000 to under 2,000 has been so important. With regard to the individual case that the hon. Lady mentioned, I shall make inquiries myself on her behalf. She has mentioned one case: we are anxious to ensure that all NHS patients are seen as swiftly as possible, and we have made real progress in achieving that.

Heart Campaign

10. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has had about the Look After Your Heart campaign.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Look After Your Heart campaign, jointly funded by the Department of Health and the Health Education Authority, is one of the largest and most comprehensive coronary heart disease prevention programmes in the world. It includes a wide range of preventive activity. I am not aware of representations on a large scale on any particular aspect of the programme.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should use our heads to look after our hearts? Will the congratulate Bolton health authority on its pioneering initiative to promote the sale of fresh fruit and vegetables through cut-price co-ops. Should not others follow that example?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am sure that my hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have heard about the project not only from him but from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, and I am happy to commend those who have taken that important initiative.

Patients Charter

11. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the progress being made within the national health service to put the patients charter into practice.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service has made substantial progress in implementing the patients charter, which came into effect on 1 April.

NHS staff at all levels have given the patients charter a warm welcome. Their response and commitment to providing a high-quality health service as embodied by the patients charter is to be applauded.

Mr. Cummings: Does the Minister really believe what he has just told the House? If so, how does he square his remarks with the case of the 19-year-old youth in my area who has had his operation cancelled four times since March, on the last occasion at three hours' notice? Will he now admit to the House that his charter is a con trick and a sham?

Mr. Sackville: The more I hear Opposition Members trying to denigrate the patients charter, the more confident I am that we are very much on the right track. In the case of operations that are cancelled—often unavoidably, as a result of emergencies and so on—we have given specific guidance in the patients charter to the effect that all such operations should be given priority wherever possible.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that GPs themselves will play an important role in pursuing the patients charter? Is he aware that, in my constituency, no less than 78 per cent. of the population will be dealt with by GP fund holders by the end of this year? Is not that an example of the way that doctors are taking advantage of the Government's health reforms to provide better services for their patients?

Mr. Sackville: I agree with my hon. Friend. GP fund holding gives an opportunity to respond directly to patients' needs.

Ms. Lynne: The first right in the patients charter is the right to health care based on clinical need, regardless of ability to pay. Given that there are only 55 salaried dentists in the country, will the Minister explain how the Government can meet their obligation if there is a mass exodus of dentists from the NHS?

Mr. Sackville: I should like to make two points. First, family health services authorities have a responsibility to provide an NHS dentist to anyone in their area who needs one. Secondly, I remind the hon. Lady of the fundamental review announced in the past two days, which will ensure that we shall not arrive at this situation with dentists again.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I recognise the excellence of the patients charter, but does the Minister agree that patients and their families have an obligation to ensure that public money is well spent and that many operations are delayed because patients do not turn up—either to an appointment or for the operation itself.

Mr. Sackville: We have made it very clear through the patients charter that we believe that it is a two-way street: the patients have responsibilities as well as the health service. The public can do many things to improve health.

Community Care

12. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the preparations of the national health service for its role in the provision of community care services after April 1993.

15. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the preparations the national health service has made for its role in the provision of community care services after April 1993.

Mr. Yeo: The national health service is working closely with local authorities to play its part in ensuring the successful introduction of the "Caring for People" reforms.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Minister tell the House who will pay for the extra community nurses who will be needed to care for the ill and frail elderly people who are being sent out of hospitals too soon by doctors who are under pressure from administrators who want to increase their bed-throughput to achieve the targets required by the Government's new market economy in health care?

Mr. Yeo: As an important plank in our community care reforms, we have made it clear that all health authorities must agree with social services departments robust arrangements for the discharge of patients and that a care plan in respect of each patient who is about to be discharged must be agreed. With regard to resourcing, as we have made clear on many occasions, there will not only be a transfer of resources from the Department of Social Security to increase resources available to local authorities, but continuing increases in the nearly £5 billion of personal social services expenditure available to local authorities every year.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister take time to study the report by the Royal College of Nursing entitled "A Scandal Waiting to Happen"? Will he assure the House that he intends to act on some of that report's recommendations, not least in respect of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), about the inappropriate discharge of elderly people into a community which does not have the resources to care for them?

Mr. Yeo: We have studied the report to which the hon. Lady refers. I can assure her that we will certainly take into account the nursing needs of all elderly people in residential and nursing home care, when decisions about that care are made and when the local authorities enter into contracts for the arrangement of such care.

Mr. David Atkinson: Can my hon. Friend confirm that after 1 April next, every mentally ill patient and schizophrenia sufferer discharged from hospital can be guaranteed a package of care in the community best fitted to their needs? In that event, should we tolerate older hospitals for the mentally ill being kept open for a minute longer?

Mr. Yeo: I am aware of my hon. Friend's very close interest in mental illness and schizophrenia. I am glad to be able to inform him that from last April, under the care programme approach, all health authorities are required

to initiate individually tailored care programmes on the basis of a full assessment for all in-patients about to be discharged from mental illness hospitals.

Information Disclosure

13. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received about the employment protection of national health service staff who disclose information about internal affairs within the national health service, other than information related to patient confidentiality.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Representations have been received recently from hon. Members, staff representative associations, and national health service employees. These have concerned both the general principles governing expression by NHS staff of professional concerns about health service issues, and the personal cases of some NHS employees.

Mr. Fatchett: Is the Secretary of State aware of the case *[Interruption.]*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I should be much obliged if the House would settle down. It is impossibly noisy and very hard work for hon. Members who are trying to ask questions and for Ministers who are trying to reply.

Mr. Fatchett: Is the Secretary of State aware of the case of Dr. Chris Chapman, a biochemist who faces redundancy tomorrow at the Leeds general infirmary? His only offence was to tell the truth about scientific fraud and financial irregularities. While Dr. Chapman is to be sacked, those who have committed the frauds and financial irregularities will remain in their jobs. They prosper and have been promoted. They include Mr. Stuart Ingham, the £90,000-a-year chief executive of the Leeds General Infirmary Trust. Will the Secretary of State now agree to set up a full public inquiry into Dr. Chapman's case? Or is she just happy to see a man of integrity lose his job, pension and livelihood while those responsible for his sacking remain in their posts and prosper?

Mrs. Bottomley: The matters to which the hon. Gentleman refers have, of course, been investigated by the independent auditors, and any new evidence has also been referred to them. It would be quite inappropriate for me to instigate an inquiry into an individual case where there are already statutory rights of appeal. Dr. Chapman has the right to take his case to an industrial tribunal. He has a right of appeal under the Employment Protection Act 1975, which I understand he has not yet exercised. Until he has done so, it certainly would not be appropriate to discuss the matter in the House.

Immunisation

16. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards reaching national targets for immunisation against the major childhood diseases.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am pleased to say that the latest estimates show that we have passed the national immunisation coverage target of 90 per cent., which was set in 1985.

Mrs. Gillan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the GP contract which the Labour party opposed has been remarkably successful in improving the rate of child immunisation?

Mrs. Bottomley: It has been remarkably successful, and GPs are to be congratulated on 90 per cent. of them reaching targets and 70 per cent. reaching higher targets. This might be the last moment for the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) at health questions to say that he was wrong when he said that those targets were too heroic. The GP contract has led to benefits in the services delivered by general practitioners. They have done excellently in immunisation; they have done excellently in cancer screening and that bodes very well indeed for our strategy under "Health of the Nation".

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that some people have still not learnt the lesson that real and lasting growth can come only with an economy that is based on low taxation and low inflation? Is not that the reason why last week's figures were so good? Will my right hon. Friend keep at it and ensure that his election pledge to lick inflation is fulfilled?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right about that. I want to ensure that our record on inflation in the 1990s exceeds that of the 1980s, that we get inflation down to the lowest possible level and that we keep it there. Economic policy is geared to that end.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister recall his promise in the election that a Tory victory would provide the spark to ignite recovery? Will the Prime Minister now admit that no such ignition has taken place and that there will be no real recovery as long as he continues with the policies that have already brought us two full years of recession?

The Prime Minister: I shall turn to the right hon. Gentleman's point in a moment, if I may, for this is the last occasion that we will be able to exchange comments over the Dispatch Box in this fashion. We have done so on many occasions in the past 20 months. We have often disagreed, sometimes we have agreed, but I should like to thank the right hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: He's going to resign."] That is quite wrong; I am staying.

I should like to thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support at times of crisis, for his strong support throughout the Gulf war and for the support that he has given us throughout the difficulties in Yugoslavia. On many occasions when he and I have had to deal privately with matters, without exception he has respected the

confidences of those occasions. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to thank him for that and to do so publicly and with warmth.

In direct response to the right hon. Gentleman's question, he will know the view of the OECD and of the London business school, both of whose latest surveys forecast that recovery will be under way from the second quarter of this year. We share that view.

Mr. Kinnock: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for his kind remarks. I consider it a great honour to have been able to serve my country in the way that I could. I know that he shares that vocation, and I hope that the country and its people can achieve greater success in the future.

I put it to the Prime Minister that his strategy of perpetuating recession, combined with high unemployment, in an attempt to suppress inflation, has all the features of the slump of the 1930s. For the sake of our country, I put it to him that he should now recognise that continuation of those policies will not achieve durable or sustainable recovery, and will certainly not put our country at ease with itself.

The Prime Minister: I respect the view that the right hon. Gentleman expresses, but I say in all sincerity that I cannot agree with him. The recovery—the jobs, the prosperity and the security—that everyone in this House wants for all our citizens can be based only on sustainable growth and low inflation. Unless we have low inflation as a base, we shall not get a form of growth that is sustainable. I realise that it is not easy, that it is uncomfortable and that it is frustrating when growth does not appear immediately, but I know of no other way to ensure the medium and long-term growth and prosperity of the nation, and I am determined to stick to the policies that I believe to be in our medium and long-term interests.

Mr. Kinnock: May I say to the Prime Minister, with equal sincerity, that, after two years of recession, there is a very great danger that continuation of the present policies will risk driving the economy down so far as to make the prospect of recovery recede by years. I hope that the Prime Minister will use this summer to think again about the course of that policy and will adopt different policies that can give this country and its people the chance of jobs, growth and success, which we have not enjoyed in the immediate past.

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition and I agree about what the objective is, but I regret that we do not agree about the basis that is necessary to achieve it. One needs to look at what is happening. The volume of exports was at a record level in May; our volume share of world trade has recovered, after being in decline for many years; car sales are increasing; producer price inflation is at a very low level indeed. The ingredients are there. I return to the independent view of both the OECD and the London business school that recovery will be under way in the second half of this year. And it will be recovery based on a rate of inflation that is far lower than anyone in this House predicted 18 months ago. It is from that base that we shall get the growth that we all wish to see.

Sir Michael Marshall: In a week that marks the 75th birthday of the British space pioneer Arthur C. Clarke and his visit to the House of Commons will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity of assuring the House that during our presidency of the EC Her Majesty's Government will make every effort to take initiatives in the space field to improve the quality of life and assist British industry?

The Prime Minister: I think I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. I welcome the visit of Mr. Clarke to the House. We shall continue to take initiatives, within Europe, internationally and in other forums, in pursuit of space priorities. We are particularly interested in the development of Earth observation systems for the monitoring of the environment and of climate change.

Q2. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: May I take this opportunity to register the thanks of the Ulster Unionist party to the Leader of the main Opposition party for the leadership he has given to Her Majesty's Opposition. It has been a privilege to work with him in recent years.

Now that the inter-party talks on Northern Ireland have advanced to strands 2 and 3, in which Her Majesty's Government are no longer in the chair but are equal partners with the other participants, may I ask the Prime Minister whether he recognises that progress towards real understanding, recognition and mutual respect in the island of Ireland depends upon the removal of articles 2 and 3 from the constitution of the southern Irish republic? Will Her Majesty's Government take the opportunity available to them in strands 2 and 3 to request the Dublin Government to remove their constitutional claim over that part of the United Kingdom known as Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that articles 2 and 3 are important ingredients in the progress that has to be made. I welcome the talks at Lancaster House last week and I look forward to further substantive talks in Belfast later this week. This is an historic opportunity. I have made that clear to the Taoiseach. I think that he shares that view. He was generous enough to do so in a joint message just a few days ago. It would not be helpful for anyone to say a great deal about the talks while they continue, not least because the participants have agreed on the vital importance of confidentiality. But the talks have gone further than many imagined. The position is more hopeful than it has been for many years. We must all hope that the talks can make further progress.

Q3. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: In the light of the harrowing plight of the children of Sarajevo, is there any immediate prospect of medical assistance being sent or provided to help with the terrible suffering which is occurring there?

The Prime Minister: Some progress has beeen made this morning. I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that a team of eight doctors and nurses from the South Manchester accident and rescue team is assembling its emergency supplies. Subject to the necessary clearance from the United Nations, which we expect to receive shortly, the team will fly out to Zagreb later today or

tomorrow. It will link up with the United Nations and United Kingdom medical teams already in the area. It will be there both to offer immediate medical assistance as required and to report back to me with an on-the-spot assessment of the best way in which we can help those tragic children.

Mr. Ashdown: In view of the Prime Minister's previous statements, can he deny that unemployment will be at or through 3 million by Christmas?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, no Minister of any Government has made projections of unemployment. I do not intend to start. We shall have some more figures later this week. The right hon. Gentleman will be able to make his own assessment.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does my right hon. Friend recall the words of the former leader of the Labour party that "inflation is the father and mother of unemployment"? Does he agree that inflation is a social as well as economic evil that has dogged this country for a generation? Does he accept that he has wide support in the country in his determination to seize the opportunity that we have now to defeat inflation decisively?

The Prime Minister: I believe that my hon. Friend is right. I well recall the quotation that he uses. We have the headline rate of inflation down to 3·9 per cent. and the underlying rate of inflation effectively down to 4·8 per cent. Both are falling. That is very welcome news indeed.

Q4. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cummings: Is the Prime Minister aware that tens of thousands of chronically sick and disabled people are awaiting the determination of their application for disability living allowance? Is he further aware that, following a period of 10 months, the family of a late constituent of mine received a determination two days after the lady died? What does the Prime Minister intend to do about that disgraceful state of affairs?

The Prime Minister: We seek to process such applications as speedily as possible. The Benefits Agency is examining the difficulty and putting in staff to address it as speedily as possible.

Q5. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Devlin: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the great pride in the north-east of England that Britain is shortly to become once again a net exporter of cars? Is not that a tribute to both the motor industry in general, which has restructured in the past few years, and to the Government's success in attracting inward investment to Britain?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I believe that the attraction of inward investment is very important. Among other things, it relies on very low inflation and stable economic policies which do not change and are well understood. There is no doubt that the British car industry has made excellent progress in improving competitiveness and significantly reducing the balance of payments deficit on trade in the automotive industry. In welcoming that, I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of inward investment, most notably, in that instance, in the motor car industry from Japan.

Mr. Turner: Is the Prime Minister aware that his notion of the freedom to choose is an empty gesture to millions of people in this country? When they have paid their electric, water and gas bills, they find that they have nothing left for the simple pleasures of life. When will he do something to help those people, instead of helping the better off whom his Government have always helped?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that that is the invariable view of people who would call themselves better off. Of course we are concerned to help people who find themselves in such difficulties, and our policies have done so consistently during the past 12 years. What the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends do not like is choice itself. That is why they did not want to sell council houses, why they did not want people to choose what schools they have, and why they do not like choice in health. The truth is that when people choose, they choose conservatism and not socialism.

Madam Speaker: I should be obliged if those hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber would do so quietly or resume their seats, as we have a statement.

British Rail (Privatisation)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John MacGregor): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the Government's proposals for the privatisation of British Rail, which are set out in a White Paper published today.

Under Conservative Governments, there have been many examples of the benefits which privatisation has brought to former nationalised industries. It has taken different forms in different industries, but common objectives have been the harnessing of the management flair and enterprise of the private sector, the application of the disciplines and incentives of the marketplace, the opportunities for private finance and for greater competition and choice which privatisation brings, all to provide better services for the public.

The Government believe that it is now time to extend those benefits to the railways. British Rail is dependent on substantial subsidy from Government and makes large losses so it is not possible to sell all of BR, either as a single entity, or as separate businesses. But our objectives, of improved efficiency, of new incentives for operators to provide the services which the customer wants, and of new opportunities for the railways can all be achieved in other ways than a single outright sale, and that is the purpose of our proposals. Altogether, they comprise the most radical changes to Britain's railways since 1948, but our flexible and practical approach to change will ensure that they are workable and realistic.

First, our proposals provide a variety of opportunities for the private sector. For passenger services, the Government have decided that the most effective way is through franchising, enabling private sector companies to bid for the management and operation of passenger services, in return for grants where necessary. Franchisees will be required to meet specific standards of service, which will be set out in their contracts.

Franchising will be carried out progressively and flexibly. The Government intend that in due course all BR's existing passenger services should be franchised to private operators. The establishment of local or regionally based franchises will help to revive local pride and identity.

Secondly, BR's existing freight and parcels business will be sold to the private sector. Thirdly, we will additionally provide a new right of access to the rail network for private operators of both freight and passenger services. We want as much freight as possible to be carried by rail rather than road; these new opportunities should help to bring this about.

Fourthly, to facilitate those new arrangements there will be a new structure for the railways. BR will be divided into two separate parts. One will become a track authority —Railtrack—with responsibility for all track and infrastructure. The other will become a residual operating company responsible for operating the passenger services which are not yet franchised. When franchising is complete, BR's sole function will be as Railtrack.

Fifthly, we will set up two separate independent authorities responsible to Government: one, a new franchising authority responsible for negotiating, awarding and monitoring franchises; and the other, a new rail regulator to oversee the application of arrangements for track access and charging, to promote competition, prevent abuse of monopoly power and promote the interests of customers.

Sixthly, we will provide opportunities for the private sector to purchase or lease stations, which will bring benefits to passengers, operators as well as to others. Finally, we will substantially alter and improve grant arrangements. At present, a single grant is paid to BR to provide supported passenger services. Under the new franchising regime, by contrast, grants will be made for individual services or groups of services. This will be more transparent and will enable the taxpayer to know precisely what services his grant is buying.

The Government will introduce legislation to implement the proposals later in the year. In the longer term, the Government would like to see the private sector owning as much as possible of the railway. We therefore propose to take powers in the legislation to allow the future privatisation of all BR's track and operations.

There are a number of other vital points I should stress. In developing the proposals, safety has been of paramount concern. The Government are committed to ensuring that their proposals will not lead to any weakening of the high standards of safety on our railways. Operators will have to meet strict safety requirements overseen by the Health and Safety Executive. I have been advised in the framing of the proposals by the Health and Safety Commission, and it will be making detailed recommendations for the appropriate safety arrangements.

We fully recognise the importance of regional and commuter services to the people who depend on them. The Government have throughout made it clear that we are committed to continuing support for socially necessary passenger services. The statutory procedures for any closure proposals will be retained.

British Rail has made significant improvements in recent years. Investment in the railways has greatly increased. The productivity of the British Rail work force is among the highest of any European railways. I pay tribute to the considerable efforts of everyone in British Rail in bringing that about. Private sector involvement will help develop the quality and quantity of rail services even further. There will now be new opportunities for those who work in the railways and I want to ensure that they are able to benefit from them. The existing work force will be able to transfer to new companies when they are established, and there will be opportunities for employees to take a stake in their industry when they are in the private sector. Management-employee bids for franchises will be encouraged and assistance will be given to staff seeking to make such bids. Pension rights and entitlements to concessionary travel for present employees will be safeguarded.

The detailed proposals I am now putting forward are based on our election manifesto commitments. I look forward to working with the chairman of British Rail, with whom I have agreed new objectives for him to implement; and all those in the industry to bring about the changes I have outlined. Our aim is simple: to improve the quality of railway services for the travelling public and the freight customer. Improved quality of service will make the railways more attractive, improve their competitiveness, and enable them to take full advantage of the new opportunities open to them. I commend the proposals to the House.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): This White Paper has been subjected to more delays and cancellations than the average commuter train on the Government's rail services. After 10 years of ideological rhetoric from numerous Secretaries of State for Transport, we have a White Paper that reflects a clash of reality with rhetoric. Its 20 pages are concerned more with presentation than with substance.

It appears that we can be thankful that the White Paper rejects past solutions and that there is to be no wholesale sell-off of British Rail, no regional break-up and no sell-off of the passenger sectors. But unfortunately, there is no recognition of the way in which a modern railway system can meet the transport needs of an economy which is increasingly plagued with mounting congestion and environmental costs.

The White Paper is no passengers charter, judged even by the Government's limited standards. It is more a cherry-pickers charter—ripe for exploitation by property speculators, by route operators bribed by public subsidies and, inevitably, by Tories' City friends growing fat on commissions and fees—*[Interruption.]*—resulting from the disposal of public assets. That has been the real record of the privatisation of every public utility under the Conservatives—higher prices and higher profits, all paid for through higher prices paid by the consumer.

The White Paper is irrelevant to the requirements of the railways for financial support, an adequate infrastructure and rolling stock investment, as evidenced by the excellent publicly owned railway systems in Europe. They have shown not only that sufficient financial resources are needed but that investment can produce a modern railway system, even when owned by the state. It is equally irrelevant to the needs of the economy, with millions of people unemployed, the nation diving into deeper recession, a collapsing infrastructure and a declining investment base.

The White Paper takes Britain in the opposite direction to that of our European partners, which in the last 10 years have invested billions of pounds in their railways' rolling stock and infrastructure, allowing for sufficient financial support, while we, over the same period, have reduced support by billions of pounds, providing a more costly railway system of lesser quality. That is the reality of 10 to 13 years of Tory railways policy.

I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State acknowledge the recent *Economist* intelligence unit report, which made a comparison between British Rail and railway systems in Europe. It revealed the levels of efficiency and productivity and placed British Rail among the top three in Europe. Everyone should acknowledge the contribution made by the workers and management to achieve that position.

That report showed that quality and reliability of service had been achieved through the resources provided by other European countries for investment in their railway systems. It also pointed out that the sums available for the railways from the private sector, by way of private loans or leasing, made an important contribution to the quality of their railway services.

Will the Secretary of State say, as he is considering a leasing arrangement for private operators, whether British Rail will be allowed to lease its trains, as is the case in most European railway systems? Is he aware that, if he does not allow that to happen, it will be felt that there is an ideological prejudice against British Rail, and that that will prevent our system from being improved?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that bus deregulation and privatisation, on which much of the White Paper is modelled, has led to a reduction in the number of passengers travelling by bus, to a lowering of services, to older vehicles being in service because of a failure to invest, to the need for heavier subsidies and to increased fares? Is that what the right hon. Gentleman intends for our railway system? Does he think that that is the way forward to create a modern railway system for Britain? Is it not a fact that a reduction in standards has resulted from most privatisation exercises?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the evidence of conflict between a business-led railway and the high safety standards necessary for passengers, a point emphasised by safety inspectors in their conclusions following inquiries into terrible railway tragedies that have occurred in this country, connected directly to a lack of resources in the railway system?

Will he now accept that the new Health and Safety Executive authority, about which he talks in the White Paper, should become totally independent of the Department of Transport? Will he assure the House that he intends to make it totally independent rather than answerable in the last resort to his Department, as it is now?

What will be the total cost to the taxpayer of the extra personnel and bureaucracy in the various authorities that he is to establish to discipline the market? Will the estimated £10 billion that could be raised from the sale of British Rail stations be made available to British Rail to invest in its track, rather than simply go to the Treasury, as has happened in previous privatisations? What are the Government's estimates of the investment needed in the infrastructure in the next five years? Does he accept British Rail's chairman's statement that he still needs, even under those plans, at least £1 billion from the Government each year for the next 10 years?

The White Paper will not increase our railway services, but will cut the rail network. It will not modernise the railways but will privatise bits of it. It will not produce new trains but will mean new paint on old trains. It will not integrate our rail and other transport systems but will disintegrate them through competition and selling off profitable parts. Furthermore, it will not help to reduce the massive congestion and environmental damage that a modern railway system in a modern economy can contribute to reducing.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall take as many of those points, one by one, as possible.

Since the election, there have been no delays in bringing forward the White Paper. We made our position clear during the election and the proposals are based on our manifesto. It is nonsense to say that the White Paper is presentation rather than substance. The hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) well knows that it contains a great deal of detail, but I am the first to acknowledge that, in working through some of the proposals, it is clear that much more work remains to be done. Naturally, we must have a Bill, which will take a considerable time to pass through both Houses, and it will

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be possible to go into much more detail then. The White Paper has the full support of the Cabinet, and the entire Cabinet is fully behind the proposals.

May I deal with one of the hon. Gentleman's critical points and return to his rhetoric at the end? He put much emphasis on finance, and I agree that levels of efficiency and productivity in BR have greatly improved thanks to many of the steps that we have taken, as well as those that the BR management board and employees have taken. I have accepted that, and have already said so. However, as most passengers and potential freight operators would acknowledge, that does not mean that there is not scope for much more improvement, which is what our proposals are designed to achieve.

The hon. Gentleman makes a great mistake by putting the entire focus on expenditure. He said that, if only we would spend more, everything would be all right. Substantial investment is and has been going into British Rail. There is now a record level of capital investment of more than £1 billion, which is the highest in real terms since 1962, when the network was much more extensive. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that. We spent more than £1 billion last year, too. The answer to one of his last points is that, as he knows, we operate only within the confines of the public expenditure White Paper, but it is clear that the current White Paper contains considerably more investment.

It is not only additional money that matters but how that money is used to ensure more effective value for money and better services that are more oriented towards the customer. That is what our proposals are designed to do. The hon. Gentleman implies that the Labour party would have spent much more on British Rail, whereas we know perfectly well from comments by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) that the hon. Gentleman would not be permitted to spend more from public resources on British Rail. The hon. Gentleman pretends that he would spend more and criticises us for not spending more, when he would not spend more.

The hon. Gentleman tries to get out of that by saying that private sector finance can be additional. But there too, as I have tried to point out to the hon. Gentleman, and as I have no doubt his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East will point out to him, he runs into a trap. It is perfectly reasonable to have a lease from the private sector if that leasing company is private-sector financed, but if it is public-sector money in the leasing company, or in any borrowing, it is public-sector money borrowed from the private sector that is effectively at risk. That has to be included within the overall public sector expenditure total. At the end of the day, there is a Government guarantee that that money will be repaid. Sometimes the debt is written off, so there is a real cost to the public purse; and there are also high financing charges.

The hon. Gentleman gave France as an example. At present, SNCF has a debt of about £9 billion after a recent debt write-off of £3·8 billion——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): So what?

Mr. MacGregor: "So what," the hon. Gentleman says. That is a direct cost to the taxpayer. That compares with a debt for British Rail of about £2 billion.

Mr. Prescott: That is nonsense.

Mr. MacGregor: It is not nonsense. The hon. Gentleman clearly does not understand. He would happily remove all controls over public sector finance and let it rip. No wonder the electorate rejected him at the election.

Another factor is the annual interest payments for financing that ever-increasing debt. As a percentage of turnover, the annual interest payment in SNCF is 20 per cent.; for British Rail, it is just over 2 per cent. Somebody is paying the high cost of that high borrowing by SNCF.

If the hon. Gentleman is looking to some of those other financing arrangements as a way out, he is barking up the wrong tree. That is why our proposals will put genuine private finance into the operation, genuinely done.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the conflict between safety and privatisation. I see no conflict because we shall insist on strict safety standards, just as we did on the privatisation of British Airways. There is no reason why such safety standards cannot operate equally on the rails.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the extra cost of the authorities. I can assure him that I intend to keep them as slim as possible. I do not yet have a figure forthe cost, but we shall be developing that during the months ahead.

The hon. Gentleman talked about British Rail stations, and quoted a figure of £10 billion. In terms of the likely return of proceeds in the comparatively near to medium-term future, that figure is way over the top. We must be realistic about the level of proceeds from the sale or leasing of stations, and I do not think that it will be anything on that scale. Finally, the hon. Gentleman talked about the infrastructure over the next five years, and I have already dealt with that.

The old rhetoric comes not from the Conservative but from the Labour Benches. The hon. Gentleman no doubt said the same in 1979 about what privatisation would achieve in the 46 major state industries which have been privatised. We all know what a success those have been and how they are copied by many countries, and I believe that other member states in the Community will be looking with great interest at what we are now proposing for British Rail.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Front-Bench spokesmen have taken almost 25 minutes in their exchange, and Back Benchers have so far had no opportunity to intervene. I ask them to give me support and ask one or two brief questions, and I ask the Secretary of State to reply briefly. This is a Back-Bench occasion, and I want as many Back Benchers as possible to intervene.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today, representing as I do a constituency which has the worst commuter line in western Europe—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"]—the Uckfield line—as his proposals could attract new financial capital for investment which has been much neglected by British Rail. Can my right hon. Friend give us an assurance that, when bidding for such a franchise, the line will not be fleeced by British Rail?

Mr. MacGregor: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. The rail regulator is designed to ensure fair access to the track and fair competition between those who operate on it. I hope that we will attract more private finance, but that will partly depend on the terms and

conditions of franchises. I intend to be extremely flexible in that regard. My hon. Friend will acknowledge that not only private sector finance but different management and skills, added to that which is already in British Rail, will provide a strongly customer-oriented service.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Will the Secretary of State guarantee that the money raised from franchising will go back into the railways? Will he think again about the long-term objective of allowing the track to pass into the private sector, and instead regard it as an asset that the new freight and passenger operators can use in competition with their road rivals?

Mr. MacGregor: It is not an objective of privatisation that it will yield large proceeds for the Treasury—nor is that expected. That is not its purpose. I indicated that substantial publicly financed capital investment of about £1 billion is currently being undertaken by British Rail. British Rail's external financing limit this year is some £2,000 million. I am not sure that British Rail would get a particularly good deal from the kind of approach that the hon. Gentleman suggests. As to the track authority's longer-term situation, I expect that it will be some considerable time before matters develop to the point at which they should be considered. It is, however, right to include all the possibilities in the legislation.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): I also warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on a step which I am sure will have all the advantages that he set out in his statement, and which will be widely welcomed. Will there still be control over fare increases on Network SouthEast, and will he undertake that there will be no extra delays in the provision of rolling stock on lines even worse than that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith)—such as that linking London, Tilbury and Southend?

Mr. MacGregor: One franchise condition will be controls over the maximum level of fares, because clearly there will be continuing public subsidy of any particular franchise in Network SouthEast. It is not possible to answer my right hon. Friend's second question in relation to an individual line, because much will depend on the private sector operators who come forward and the offers that they make in respect of particular franchises. However, it is certainly the intention to get a lot more private sector finance into the system.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Secretary of State explain to my constituents—who saw what happened with British Rail Engineering Ltd. —the advantages to them of selling off the assets of a system that is already under-capitalised? They know that for them it will mean loss of income, jobs, and pension benefits, and a much worse system for the customer.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made a brief mention of pension benefits, which are also spelled out in the White Paper. There will be no loss of pension benefits, as the hon. Lady suggests. In the sale or long leasing of stations, there is considerable potential for better commercial exploitation, which is another good reason for the proposals that we have made. I do not share the hon. Lady's view that a single, monolithic nationalised industry can provide better services than one that embodies all the impetus and management skills of the private sector, competition, and choice. I could quote so many privatisations in which there has been a reduction in real terms in charges—

Mrs. Dunwoody: And in jobs.

Mr. MacGregor: There has of course been some slimming down, because some of the former nationalised industries were extremely inefficient. That is not a good way of making use of the nation's scarce economic resources. Those privatisations also resulted in better services to the customer.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Can my right hon. Friend give a reassurance about the protection of small stations —particularly those along major lines—and that one will continue to be able to purchase tickets for the network from any one station?

Mr. MacGregor: If there are to be any station closure proposals, the procedures will be exactly those followed until now. We hope to improve their administration, but the principle will remain entirely the same. In the past 10 years or so, there have been many fewer station closures than there have been reopenings or the provision of new stations. The White Paper contains a paragraph on through ticketing. We acknowledge its benefits, and we will ensure that it is maintained.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask a question about paragraph 85 of the White Paper? By what means will the Government

"encourage employees to take a direct stake in the future of the franchised or privatised businesses in which they will work"?

Will the issue be discussed with the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers at an early stage?

Mr. MacGregor: I very much hope that it will be possible to make arrangements to ensure that employees have a direct stake. That has happened in other privatised industries when there have been bids for franchises and private-sector companies have been involved, or there have been buy-outs. We shall develop such arrangements over the months ahead. I wrote to the general secretary of the union today offering talks, which I hope will take place in September.

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his progress in fulfilling our election manifesto commitment. How does he propose to ensure the continuation of a national timetable throughout the system?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That will be a matter fundamentally for Railtrack, but discussions will take place about the timetable with the franchise operators and, of course, the regulator. When difficulties or disputes arise over the timetable, or over access to train paths generally, it will be for the regulator to resolve them.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Bearing in mind the example of Tiger Rail—a private company operating on British Rail which has gone bankrupt—how will the Government ensure that, when the franchisees go into liquidation and finish up bust, services for both passengers and goods will continue? Is not the position summed up by the action of the Industrial Bank of Scotland, which

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refused to provide leasing money for the Leeds-Bradford electrification scheme, saying that it was too dangerous with privatisation around the corner?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that the hon. Gentleman has interpreted that last development very strangely and inaccurately.

Mr. Cryer: I know about it.

Mr. MacGregor: I know quite a lot about it, too.

Let me deal with freight and passengers separately. As the hon. Gentleman will know, a number of freight services have been withdrawn in recent years, and I am keen for them to be built up again. I am anxious for more private sector operators to come onto the track as freight operators, either in respect of groups of service or in respect of particular services for their own companies. It will be for them to develop those services.

As for passenger services, where there is a franchising operation, the franchising authority will be responsible first for establishing the financial status of any bidders, and then for monitoring it throughout. If—this is entirely hypothetical, but I am responding to the hon. Gentleman's point—a franchisee runs into problems for any reason, he will be able to return to the franchising authority to discuss the terms and conditions of the contract. In the unlikely event of a failure on the part of the franchisee, it will be for the franchising authority to find alternative operators for the franchise.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his aim of improving the railways so that they are used more. He will know of my involvement with the British Transport Police Federation. He rightly referred to the need to ensure safety standards; does he envisage a continuing role for that nationwide force, which specialises in dealing with the problems of policing people in the operating environment of a railway, especially at times when terrorist threats are being made?

Mr. MacGregor: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's interest in the matter, and I am grateful to him for raising it: he has enabled me to pay tribute to the work of the British Transport police. In the White Paper, we have made it clear that the Government have no plans to end the arrangement whereby the British Transport police are responsible for security and the enforcement of law and order on the railways. We have also said that we shall consult interested parties about appropriate future arrangements. I think that the talks are scheduled for September.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Exactly which parts of British Rail does the Secretary of State not intend to privatise? Does he agree that it is a disgrace that ScotRail is not mentioned once in the White Paper? What will happen to it, and, especially, to the highland and rural areas in Scotland? Will the Government make available additional resources for the running of those essential services, or will the railway system end at Edinburgh and Glasgow?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will find that an awful lot of areas of the country that have rail services are not identified. That is because there is no need to do so on this occasion. However, there is a clear reference to continuing subsidies for socially necessary lines. The current level of subsidy to regional railways is clearly spelt out. It is about £645 million—a very high figure. The hon. Gentleman's point is covered by the proposals we have put forward in the White Paper.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): I understand that my right hon. Friend is to leave to the British Railways Board the individual decisions about allocation of capital, but unless the British Railways Board does commit more capital to the modernisation of the commuter lines that run through Sussex, it will be very difficult indeed to attract franchisees to this very good area, simply because the underlying conditions—the infrastructure—will not be good enough for franchisees to commit themselves to running an efficient and punctual service.

Mr. MacGregor: I know that my hon. Friend will agree with me that there have to be limits to the level of public expenditure in any year. I am sure that he also wishes us to have the right order of priorities. In 1991-92, the grant to Network SouthEast amounted to £345 million, so a very substantial subsidy is going into that network. A large part of it has in the end to be directed to investment. Considerable investment is being made in rolling stock at present.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the Secretary of State able to clarify whether franchising can take place on a piecemeal basis for InterCity? Can he give an assurance that the socially necessary passenger services to which he referred will be safeguarded by way of finance if franchising takes place piecemeal in certain areas? Can the Secretary of State guarantee that the InterCity services in Wales between north Wales and London, south Wales and London, and north Wales and Cardiff can be guaranteed under this set-up?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give guarantees for all time, but I have said that British Rail has been looking at individual services and changing the arrangements between InterCity and the feeder lines. I would not wish to give a guarantee for all time, but we have said very clearly that we expect the national network broadly to be maintained. It is not our intention to franchise InterCity services as a whole. We intend to seek franchises for individual parts of it, the exact arrangements for which will depend on the responses we get from potential bidders.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): While I welcome this gradual approach to introducing private sector competition, will my right hon. Friend make it clear that, with the creation of the safety executive, private sector operators, as well as British Rail, will be subject to the most stringent safety criteria in order to protect the interests of the travelling public?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, indeed. I have already said that the Health and Safety Commission has approved proposals that we have made today from the safety point of view. I have asked the commission to make detailed recommendations for the arrangements that we shall be making in due course. It is absolutely crucial, in the interests of passengers and in the interests, if one is a franchisee, of ensuring that one attracts passengers, that, just as with individual airlines, the highest standards of safety are provided—not only for the reasons that we all understand but also from a commercial point of view. It

will certainly be crucial that Railtrack operates to the highest safety standards. All those who are providing the track and operating on the railway will have to conform to the stringent standards that will be put forward as a result of the advice that we receive.

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): Can the Secretary of State name a single London commuter service that is likely to be affected by his franchising proposals over the next four years? Can he identify any direct benefits at all as a result of his plans for the London railway network, the busiest in the world? Is not this White Paper a monumental irrelevance for the hard-pressed London commuter?

Mr. MacGregor: No, it certainly is not. Every London commuter believes that the service can be improved, so the White Paper is certainly not a monumental irrelevance. I do not want to specify particular lines today, because it will not be possible to start the arrangements for making franchise contracts until the franchising authority is set up, and the franchising authority cannot be set up until we have received parliamentary approval to do so. There is a good deal of time for potential bidders to develop an interest in individual franchises. From approaches that have already been made, we know that a considerable number of companies are interested in taking up the possibilities.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): In view of the relatively poor level of public satisfaction with the railways in the past 40 years, does my right hon. Friend agree that, provided of course that there is proper regulation of safety and timetabling, a better future for the railways lies in the injection of additional and alternative management, new ideas and, hopefully, new finance?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I very much agree with my hon. Friend, and I am grateful to him. One of the parallels in transport is British Airways. Its prospects have been transformed in financing, in the way it has expanded its services and in its competitiveness since it was privatised.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Paragraph 36 of the White Paper refers to the east coast main line. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm the definition of the east coast main line as being Aberdeen-London and London-Aberdeen? Does the White Paper bring the electrification of the Edinburgh-Aberdeen line nearer or push it further away?

Mr. MacGregor: It does not make a difference, because the arguments for the electrification of particular lines and the priorities will depend on the financial and cost-benefit analyses, which would be undertaken anyway. I hope that some franchisees of a particular line may wish to contribute to the track infrastructure investment but, at this stage, it would not be possible to say where, and the franchisees must make their own financial appraisal.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, the reference in paragraph 36 to the east coast main line is an example of the way in which we believe the franchising of InterCity services will take place. We are not giving specific definitions today, for the simple reason that it is important to discover what the potential franchisees want to bid for, and there will have to be a process of negotiation and discussion between them.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): My right hon. Friend rightly enjoys good will throughout the House, and we hope that his intentions are justified and will produce a better railway service. Will he bear it in mind the fact that 16,000 trains are run daily by British Rail, that for most of the passengers they are an essential part of daily life and that a few more Sock Shops on platforms and a few gaudy carriages will be no substitute for an essential service? Is there any set timetable in his proposals under which British Rail is being forced to dispose of its assets? Finally, will he also bear in mind that perhaps the last and most significant statement made in his place by a Conservative Minister was by Mr. Marples, and it spawned Dr. Beeching?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the kind words in his opening comments. Let me reassure him that we are talking of operations which range a good deal more widely than Sock Shops on platforms and gaudy carriages. I am sure that he will agree that there is absolutely nothing wrong with the private sector operations or British Rail itself seeking to market their services better and to find more attractions for their customers.

The timetable is flexible. I have made it clear that I want to pursue a flexible, workable and realistic approach, but I can say that, once the Bill has Royal Assent, we intend to proceed as quickly as possible with the freight and parcels businesses. I expect and hope that such arrangements will be made next year. As for franchises, we need first to set up the franchising authority and then to get the response from the marketplace and, I believe, management-employee bids from British Rail. Effectively, that will mean that we shall be thinking in terms of franchises from about April 1994 onwards.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Minister recall that he said a little earlier that pensions and concessionary fares would be safeguarded? Does he further recall that, when we considered the British Coal and British Rail (Transfer Proposals) Bill, he said that he would not write such safeguards into legislation? Unless he includes provisions governing pensions and concessionary fares in legislation, there will be no guarantee that, if any of the franchises are sold on later to another bidder, those entitlements will be safeguarded. Will he give a guarantee that pension and other entitlements will be written into the legislation, and that there will be no regional pay?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman must await the publication of the Bill. That issue will be discussed when we consider the Bill, but the position is as follows: the pension rights of existing contributors and past employees will be properly safeguarded on the privatisation of British Rail. After privatisation, employees will be entitled to preserve pension rights already accrued in the BR schemes. Alternatively, they will have the opportunity to transfer their accrued pension into a broadly comparable scheme in their new employment.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Will my right hon. Friend spell out how the proposals will help to resolve the long-running saga of the privatisation of British Rail's Isle of Wight line from the end of Ryde pier to Shanklin, as every proposal that we have advanced in the past has run into the old buffers of the British Rail management?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall have to consider that proposal in detail, but I would think that, under the Government's proposals, the line may well be capable of being franchised

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and ultimately sold. I repeat that I shall need to look at the details, and stress that, in the end, it will be for the franchising authority to draw up the arrangements for individual franchises.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): The Secretary of State will be aware of the extremely poor rail provision on the west coast of Scotland, and especially to the Stranraer port. What assurance can he give us with regard to the future of links between Stranraer and Glasgow, bearing in mind the fact that, last year, 1·8 million people moved between the Stranraer and Larne ports?

Mr. MacGregor: As I have said, we intend that the national network will be broadly maintained. Whether that line will be a candidate for franchising will depend on whether potential bids come forward from franchisees and on whether proper franchising arrangements can be drawn up.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware of my interest in these matters. Can he confirm that the integration of bus and rail services in remote areas of the United Kingdom, including parts of Scotland, will be a factor that is taken into consideration?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, that may well be part of the arrangements for the franchises. I am well aware of the interest that my hon. Friend takes in these matters, and I know that he will agree that there are considerable possibilities for open access for new operators to the British Rail network, in respect of both freight and passengers.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Can the Secretary of State give any guarantees on the continuity of standards and security of employment for railway staff under the new fragmented franchise set-up? Can he say something about the future of passenger transport executives in local authorities in operating local rail services under the proposals?

Mr. MacGregor: PTEs will remain, and there will be the opportunity to franchise the services to which their subsidies at present apply. I should not wish to say that that will be within precisely the same boundaries as those within which passenger transport authorities currently provide grant. In some cases, there may be groups of passenger transport authorities, for the simple reason that a franchise arrangement may look rather different from the present arrangements. We would expect PTAs to make their subsidy contributions if they wish to do so in the same way as the Government will be making theirs, and we have already had discussions with them.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of many commuters in my constituency who use the Liverpool Street and Fenchurch Street lines every day, who view with great anticipation the possibility of the trains running as frequently and being as cheap and as clean as many buses in our area? Is my right hon. Friend aware that seven of those bus companies have already expressed interest in taking over the Fenchurch Street line because they think that they can make a big success of it? Will he assure my constituency commuters that he will seriously consider selling off the line lock, stock and barrel, possibly to the many commuters who have expressed an interest in buying shares in it?

Mr. MacGregor: I am very interested to hear what my hon. Friend has to say about the possible prospects for franchise bids. We certainly look forward to making more of the details about franchising arrangements available over the months ahead as we complete our work on them. I am sure that the people to whom my hon. Friend referred will want to consider those arrangements, and they will then have to discuss them with the franchising authority when we have the appropriate parliamentary consent to go ahead.

With regard to sale, I must state that our first objective is to get the franchises set up. I have already made it clear —and the Bill will make it clear—that outright sale could be a prospect in due course.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that there is already intense pride in the railways in my constituency of York and in many other constituencies? We do not need to break the railways up into regional fragments to install that pride. Given that the bus-building industry virtually collapsed after bus deregulation, what guarantees can the Secretary of State give to the 1,700 men who build railway trains in my constituency that their jobs are secure? What job guarantees can he give to the 3,000 people working at British Rail's eastern region headquarters in York?

Specifically, as 25 men who worked at the BREL works in York in the 1950s and 1960s have died from asbestos-related diseases, and sadly, it is likely that more will die, and given that BR has continued to maintain responsibility for compensating the families of the men who died, even though——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must have questions. The hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber earlier when I said that I wanted direct questions to the Secretary of State so that I might call a number of Back Benchers.

Mr. Bayley: Who will pay compensation in future in such cases? Will it be the track authority or the residual BR operating authority?

Mr. MacGregor: I would obviously want to look into the latter point. I imagine that, for some time to come, it will be the BR board. However, that is a very precise detailed point that I would like to look into. Perhaps I can write to the hon. Gentleman about it.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's request for guarantees for jobs, it simply is not possible for me to guarantee for many years ahead the jobs of people in a manufacturing industry: the hon. Gentleman will be aware of that. The best guarantee is that we continue to expand the railways; that we have a significant level of capital investment, such as we have now; and that, through that operation and through successful completion of the capital investment programme, we attract more customers.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on establishing a balance between reassuring the public on safety grounds by creating the track authority and on introducing competition by what one can call gradual privatisation. The remarks about possible management and employee buy-outs were encouraging. Will my right hon. Friend go a little further

and give them a little more encouragement by saying that they will receive treatment similar to that which is likely to be offered to employees in municipalised bus companies, which are also contemplating privatisation?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I share his desire that we should encourage management-employee buy-outs. The precise arrangements by which we should do that have still to be completed, but I have noted my hon. Friend's interest. The White Paper fills out a considerable number of the details and all the broad approaches that we will be taking to privatisation and to the Bill itself. However, there is still quite a lot of work to be done on many details between now and Royal Assent.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Having rightly paid tribute to the contribution of railway workers in the United Kingdom, does the Secretary of State accept that the proposals in the White Paper directly contradict the recent reorganisation of BR, conducted at a cost to public funds of at least £150 million? Does he accept that that damages the morale of those who work in the railway industry? Will the new private owners of railway stations, big or small, be allowed to propose the closure of those stations and the disposal of the assets once they accrue to them?

When will the Government acknowledge the inherent unfairness of the investment criteria that are applied to our railway system compared with our road network? Will the newly privatised lines or services be expected to deliver an 8 per cent. return on investment, unlike the proposed toll roads that he has proposed for the west midlands?

Mr. MacGregor: On the first question, of course I recognise the benefits that have come from the reorganisation. British Rail is not alone in facing the fact that further changes take place in organisations after 10 years of reorganisation. I strongly believe that there are additional benefits to come from these proposals. It will, of course, mean a further process of change for British Rail —I recognise that, and the chairman of British Rail recognises that. I have been very keen to ensure that the transition and the changes are managed properly. That change should take place is a feature of life at present. I have said that I believe that, in terms of morale, there are big opportunities for British Rail staff.

On the closure of stations, it will be a condition of any sale or long lease that the operation of the track and the station aspect will be secured.

On the hon. Gentleman's question about investment, as he will see from the White Paper when he gets a chance to read it, there are quite a number of references to investment in the track. Time forbids me to mention them all, but the view is sometimes around that there is unfair treatment between the level of capital investment in the road programme and on rail. In fact, the level of capital investment in the trunk road network and in motorways this year is about £2 billion. British Rail's extra financing limit is £2 billion.

Mr. Prescott: What about the different criteria?

Mr. MacGregor: The criteria have been referred to. No doubt we will be able to examine that matter in more detail later.

There is also the suggestion that, somehow or other, the playing field is not level, because those who operate on the road pay much less towards the infrastructure than those on rail. The contribution from fuel duty and other vehicle taxes is about two and a half times the annual programme of expenditure on the road construction programme.

Tilbury-Gravesend Ferry

4.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific, important and, above all, urgent matter.

For 900 years, a ferry has plied between Tilbury in Essex and Gravesend in Kent. For many years, it was run by British Rail before the ferry was privatised. At 9 am tomorrow, that ferry will cease. It will stop not because of under-use but because of the precipitate and unreasonable instruction of the Crown Estate Commissioners who control the ancient rights of ferry. That decision by the Crown Estate Commissioners, who are unelected, unaccountable and highly favoured establishment figures, jeopardises that ancient ferry and puts at a substantial disadvantage the good people of Essex and of Kent, and it raises a number of urgent issues.

The Minister has been aware for some days that the ferry is in jeopardy, but he has declined to take any action in safeguarding that public service. That is reprehensible and an example of double standards. The ferry is used daily by 300-odd passengers, and it is important to workers, industry and commerce and shops at Gravesend. They now face serious disadvantage, because the alternative will be a 45-minute trip by road instead of a five-minute trip by ferry.

The Minister should reconsider his action and use the remaining hours until 9 o'clock, perhaps with the support of the House, to intervene and use his good offices to persuade the feudal barons who run the Crown Estate to think again.

If British Airways were to decide, or was instructed, to halt the shuttle between London and Belfast or Edinburgh, there would be an almighty row in this House, and the Minister would intervene. But because we are dealing here with Essex, and because the passenger-carrying capacity is relatively small, he has shown a marked disinterest in this ferry and in the passengers it carries between Essex and Kent. I believe that that is not abdication by the Crown but abdication by the Minister in the face of the Crown, because the Crown is involved here. I hope that people will decide——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will understand that his time is now up. All the same, I have listened very carefully to what he has said. As he knows, I have to give my decision without giving a reason. I am afraid that I do not consider the matter that he has raised to be appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20. Unfortunately, therefore, I cannot submit the application to the House at this stage.

Points of Order

4.30 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I wonder, Madam Speaker, whether you can give us any guidance on the protection of the rights of Back Benchers. The lists of Members' names relating to the Division that took place at 12.10 last night will not be published in *Hansard* until tomorrow, so I refer to sheets from upstairs.

The Division to which I refer relates to the amendment concerning membership of the Health Committee of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). These are Back-Bench Committees, whose purpose is to look into and oversee departmental functions. In the same Division Lobby opposed to the nomination of the hon. Member for Macclesfield were a majority of the Cabinet, including the Secretary of State for Health, the head of the Department that the Health Committee will inquire into. She went into the Division Lobby with the other members of the Cabinet to oppose a certain hon. Member's retention of his membership of the Committee.

Does not this make a mockery of the way in which these Back-Bench Committees are set up? What protection can we have? There is supposed to be a free vote, and the Government deny that there is any whipping, yet it has come to my notice that the Government Chief Whip sent all Ministers, senior and junior, a letter asking them to be present.

Madam Speaker: I must refer the hon. Gentleman to column 830 of the *Official Report* of yesterday. He raised this point with me, and I gave a ruling, in which I said:

"In answer to the hon. Gentleman's point of order, it is a matter entirely for the House and for every individual Member of the House, whether a Minister, Back Bencher or whatever, to make up his or her mind".—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1992; Vol. 211, c. 830.]

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Wise: On a new point of order.

Madam Speaker: May I just finish?

The way in which hon. Members vote in this House has nothing whatsoever to do with the Chair.

Mrs. Wise: Is not the point that we—and I am sure you, Madam Speaker—want Members to make up their own minds and to be free to do so? Is it not clear that some hon. Members were under a very serious constraint not to make up their own minds but to follow instructions? Is not that an abuse of the House?

Madam Speaker: Having been in this House for some time, I understand that from time to time disciplines are exercised by people called Whips. It is not for the Speaker to know whether a Whip is issued in respect of a certain matter. I would not be aware of that. It is not the business of the Speaker.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Does not a contradiction arise here? As has been made absolutely plain, the Select Committees were established to oversee the Government,

and they were to be constituted in such a way that the Whips' Office would have no power or control over them. In this regard, I quote——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is simply continuing last night's debate and points of order with which I have already dealt. The House should accept the rulings that I have given. I cannot allow continuation of a debate that took place when I was in the Chair. I have heard it all before.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is it a different point of order?

Mr. Dalyell: It is a variant on the point of order. Should there not be a code of behaviour for senior Ministers, not least the most senior, in voting on the composition of Select Committees? You say that it is not a matter for the Speaker, but it is at least a matter for the code of behaviour of each Member of Parliament. Some of us might think that we have been rebuked for far lesser things than voting on matters in which we have a definite interest.

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue that point, I am sure that it may well be pursued with the Procedure Committee. He cannot pursue it with the Chair at this stage.

Water Charges

4.35 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to enable water companies to vary charges in order to assist retired, disabled and unemployed people, those on low incomes and those in full-time education, and to allow an abated charge for single-person households; to amend the Social Security Act 1986 to permit payments made to certain persons in respect of charges levied on them by water companies to be income-related benefits; and for connected purposes.

The Bill seeks to redress a considerable and widespread wrong. I seek to assist the most needy in our society to meet payments for a utility which is a basic daily need. It is, in the words of the Roman poet Pinder, "the noblest of elements". I seek to assist retired, disabled and unemployed people, those on low incomes and those in full-time education with their water bills by amending the Social Security Act 1986 to permit payments made to certain persons in respect of charges levied on them by water companies to be made through the income-related benefit system. I also seek to enable companies to vary charges to allow an abated charge for single-person households.

Between 1980-81 and 1992-93, water charges in Wales have risen by 80·3 per cent. in real terms. That is a truly astonishing figure. Unfortunately, the trend is ever upward and water charges are evidently becoming more and more of a burden on families each year. The privatisation of the industry was strongly opposed by my party and others in the House. We now see the effects of a policy which created a damaging monopoly in the provision of water and environmental services so utterly important to all of us. We still believe that water should be a public service.

The water companies have made fantastic profits—for example, Welsh Water made a profit of £128 million two years ago and £138 million last year—yet the upward curve in charges continues relentlessly. The sum of £138 million is a fantastic return on a turnover of £293 million. The last increases in charges were twice the level of inflation.

I am mindful of the large burdens which have fallen on the water companies in the form of long-awaited environmental work which should properly have been undertaken and paid for by central Government, but the astonishing fact is that each household now pays £130 per annum directly to Welsh Water's profits. I am sure that the figure compares with those for all water companies. I find that position utterly intolerable and unacceptable. It amounts to taxation without representation.

We all know only too well of many thousands of good, honest people who simply cannot pay their water bills. The principle of fair play appears to be markedly absent. The Government acknowledge the important principle of ability to pay. That principle appears in the law courts daily in connection with the unit fines system.

Indeed, so important is the principle that it has been thrust from above upon magistrates courts as if it were a commandment, and no cogent contrary argument existed. The principle is even enshrined to some extent in the odious community charge and will apply to the council tax when it eventually sees the light of day. I venture to suggest

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

that it is a vital principle and a most welcome one, particularly in the context of a utility and of all-important resources such as water and environmental services.

The report of the Office of Water Services last year referred to the fundamental aims of charging policies. It said that the policies must achieve

"fairness and equity to ensure that customers in similar circumstances pay similar charges; and that, where they face different bills, the differences in charges properly reflect relevant differences in circumstances."

The current position is certainly not fair and equitable. During the past 12 months or so, I have had dozens of complaints from people in my constituency about the high level of water rates and, more importantly, their sheer inability to meet them. The point was forcibly driven home to me recently by a retired lady in Bala, who was in tears as she showed me her water rates bill.

That lady was in debt for the first time in her life. She was a shining example of a person who lived by the possibly outmoded work ethic. She lived in a modest flat, with one bedroom. To my alarm, I found that her water rates were £248 per annum—only a few pounds less than mine. We are a family of four with a larger house, and I have a teenage daughter, who spends a substantial portion of her waking hours in the shower. There can be no justification for that, since it is painfully obvious that the old lady is paying too much in comparison with my situation. I am not seeking a change that would result in remaining consumers having to pay more, but I strongly urge that that lady's plight is answered, and that of the tens of thousands like her.

During the election campaign, that was one of the most prominent issues that I heard on doorsteps. Time and time again, I found that people living alone were paying disproportionately for water and environmental services. I also found that those people most in need in our communities received no help, and were slipping into debt, frequently for the first time in their lives.

When I discussed this Bill with a Conservative Member, I was told that he accepted the position and that it needed redressing, but he went on to say, quite flippantly, "Why stop there? Why not television licence fees, and telephones next?" Some pensioners pay reduced television licence fees, and rightly so, but that misses the point completely. Water is a utility. We could not exist without it. The argument that if the Bill became law it would somehow set a precedent is too facile for words.

Welsh Water is a league leader for disconnections in the United Kingdom. That gives me no pleasure whatsoever. Possibly it does not give it pleasure either. The main issues involved are debts and disconnection. The crisis was highlighted last week when Ofwat met at Aberystwyth and urged upon Welsh Water the need for a reappraisal of the methods of payment, and a more sensitive approach to disconnection. I reiterate that there is a crisis in Wales, and I suggest that the situation is also serious elsewhere.

What is a person whose water has been disconnected to do? As Aristotle put it "When water chokes you, what are you to drink to wash it down?" [HON. MEMBERS: "Wine."] Thanks for the suggestion.

I seek two changes. First, I want a 25 per cent. reduction for single-person households. That would be practicable and straightforward to operate, as the data will be freely available under the new council tax structure, which provides a similar 25 per cent. reduction for such householders.

Secondly, people on low incomes, including the retired, disabled, unemployed and those in full-time education, need direct help. Assistance could be given to those people by introducing a water charges benefit, which would operate as an income-related benefit. Again, the database is readily available and the solution is simple and straightforward. It would require an amendment of the Social Security Act 1986, but I venture to suggest that such an amendment would be easily achieved and simple to introduce and to operate.

Theoretically, income support takes into account the cost of water, but there is evidence that the shortfall of years up to 1991 was not made good. That is the contention of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and I am sure that it is right. Historically, we in Plaid Cymru have always taken an active interest in the provision of water. Some say that it is one of our pet subjects. Pet subject or no, there has never been such an urgent need for reform. That is reflected by the fact that my Bill is sponsored by hon. Members from four parties in the House.

To quote from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux' June report:

"water is a vital service, and immediate action must be taken to ensure that it remains available and affordable to vulnerable members of the community".

If we merely stand by and take no action, we are failing thousands of our constituents. I therefore commend my Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Andrew Welsh, Mr. Alex Salmond, Mr. Allan Rogers, Mr. Paul Flynn, Ms. Liz Lynne and Mr. Alex Carlile.

WATER CHARGES

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd accordingly presented a Bill to enable water companies to vary charges in order to assist retired, disabled and unemployed people, those on low incomes and those in full-time education, and to allow an abated charge for single-person households; to amend the Social Security Act 1986 to permit payments made to certain persons in respect of charges levied on them by water companies to be income-related benefits; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time, and ordered to be read a Second time upon 22 January 1993 and to be printed. [Bill 59.]

Orders of the Day

Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 3

RESTRICTIONS ON TIME SPENT AT SEA—APPEALS

'After section 4 of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 there shall be inserted—

"*Restrictions on time spent at sea—appeals.*

4AA.—(1) For the purposes of performing the functions conferred by this section there shall be a tribunal to be called the Sea Fish Licence Tribunal.

(2) If—

(a) a licence under section 4 of this Act contains a condition restricting the time which a vessel may spend at sea, and

(b) no licence containing such a condition has previously been granted in respect of that vessel,

the person to whom the licence is granted may make an application to the tribunal requesting it to review the time which according to the condition the vessel may spend at sea.

(3) The Ministers shall by regulations make provision as to—

(a) the manner in which and the time within which applications under subsection (2) above are to be made, and

(b) the principles on which the time which vessels may spend at sea is to be arrived at;

and the quorum and procedure of the tribunal on dealing with an application shall be such as may be determined by or in accordance with regulations made by the Ministers.

(4) On an application under subsection (2) above the tribunal, consistently with the principles referred to in subsection (3)(b) above, may—

(a) dismiss the application, or

(b) determine that the licence should be varied either by increasing or by reducing the time which the vessel may spend at sea.

(5) If the tribunal makes a determination under subsection (4)(b) above, the Minister who granted the licence shall vary the licence so as to give effect to the determination, and shall make a corresponding variation of any other licence in force in respect of the same vessel.

(6) The tribunal shall consist of members appointed by the Ministers, and the number of members shall be such as the Ministers may determine.

(7) The Ministers shall make such provision as they think fit as to—

(a) the remuneration of the members of the tribunal, and the reimbursement of their expenses, and

(b) the staff and accommodation of the tribunal;

and any expenses reasonably incurred by the tribunal shall be defrayed by the Ministers.

(8) Regulations under this section shall be made by statutory instrument, which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament."'.

—[Mr. Curry.]

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.45 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Janet Fookes): With this it will be convenient to consider the following: Government new clause 4—*Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992.*

New clause 2—*Licence appeal tribunals*—

'. The following Schedule shall be added after the Schedule to the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967—

"SCHEDULE

LICENCE APPEAL TRIBUNALS

1. The Ministers may by order made by statutory instrument appoint up to five licence appeal tribunals for each of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

2.—(1) Each tribunal shall consist of a chairman and two assessors, appointed by the appropriate Minister, and shall be supported by a secretary and such other staff as the Minister may appoint.

(2) A chairman shall be an advocate, barrister or solicitor of not less than ten years' standing.

(3) An assessor shall be a person who appears to the appropriate Minister to have practical experience of the catching sector of the fishing industry.

3.—(1) The Ministers may by regulations make provision for the procedure to be followed in appeals to a licence appeal tribunal.

(2) Regulations under this paragraph may include provision—

(a) as to the time within which any proceedings before the committee are to be instituted;

(b) for requiring persons to attend and give evidence and produce documents; and

(c) as to the manner in which any decision of the tribunal is to be implemented.

4. With the leave of a tribunal or of the appropriate Minister, an appeal shall lie from any decision of that tribunal—

(a) in England and Wales, to a Divisional Court;

(b) in Scotland, to the Outer House of the Court of Session; and

(c) in Northern Ireland, to a Judge of the High Court."'.

Amendment No. 6 in clause 1, page 1, line 16, at end insert—

'(6C)(a) The skipper, owner or charterer of a vessel named in a licence may appeal to a licence appeal tribunal on the grounds that a condition imposed under subsection (6)(c), or provision made under subsection (6B) above, is unfair or unduly restrictive, provided that not more than one appeal may be made in respect of any one licence in any period of twelve months.

(b) Schedule *(Licence Appeal Tribunals)* shall have effect.'.

Government amendments Nos. 9 and 11 to 13.

Mr. Curry: In Committee, I undertook to table a Government amendment to introduce a system of statutory tribunals to hear appeals against allocations of days at sea. The new clause establishes a tribunal, which is to be known as the Sea Fish Licence Tribunal. Its purpose will be to consider appeals from fishermen against their initial days at sea allocations. It will not cover licence suspension or revocation.

Ministers will be empowered to make regulations to specify the time during which applications can be made, the principles on which time at sea allocations will be adjudicated and the procedural arrangements for the tribunal—for example, what will constitute a quorum.

The tribunal will be empowered to dismiss appeals that are not valid and to increase or reduce allocations. The

[Mr. Curry]

tribunal's decisions will be binding on Ministers, who will be required to amend licences in accordance with its findings.

Ministers will appoint the members of the tribunal and make provision for their remuneration and for the reimbursement of expenses. They will also provide staff and accommodation for the tribunal and reimburse expenses.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is typical of the haste with which the Bill has been pushed forward that we should be considering a complicated new clause such as this. If the Minister is making provision for the pay of tribunal members, why is he not making provision for compensation for the fishermen who will have to give up fishing to appear before the tribunals, and will waste considerable time at them?

Mr. Curry: If the hon. Gentleman had spent less time talking and more time listening in Committee, he would know the answer to that question. We intend to take the tribunals to the fishermen. We have made it clear that they will meet in the major fishing ports, and we intend to establish a number of fishery tribunals. There might well be a dozen or even 15 tribunals, and their job will be to listen to the cases put to them by the fishermen. They will be modelled on the dairy quota tribunals, which worked extremely well in the dairy sector. We envisage a three-man tribunal—as happened with the dairy quota tribunals—which should be presided over by someone from the legal profession. There should also be a lay member and someone with expert knowledge of fisheries.

The tribunals will be placed under the supervision of the Council of Tribunals, and that is provided for in new clause 4, which is consequent on the measure establishing independent statutory tribunals. I have tabled a new clause which fully honours the commitment that I gave in Committee, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): I had intended just to intervene rather than to make a speech now, but I shall turn that intervention into one.

I welcome the new clause. Will my hon. Friend explain what criteria and rules would lead the tribunal to give an extra allocation to someone who applied to it? I know that my hon. Friend will make the regulations, but can he tell me how they will govern how the tribunal works?

A fisherman in my area might fish for white weed, which was not recorded in the number of days that he spent at sea in 1991. Would the tribunal be asked to take such activity into account before deciding that fisherman's allocation for 1993 and other years?

My hon. Friend will be aware that, in my part of the Thames estuary, when the stocks of sole are low, many fishermen spend a lot of time fishing for white weed, which is a type of white coral. I am not asking my hon. Friend to say whether my fishermen would win in a tribunal, but whether such activity is the type of thing to which the tribunal would be bound to pay attention before deciding on what the allocation should be to individual fishermen.

Mr. Curry: The answer to my right hon. Friend's question is yes. If it was clear that those boats were not seeking fish, but seeking a different product, it would be perfectly possible for the tribunal to adjudicate on that. Similarly, in other areas, boats may ferry equipment to oil rigs in the North sea or they may take people around a bay. It would be perfectly possible for the tribunal to adjudicate when there is a sharp distinction between fishing and unrelated activities carried out by those boats. However, we intend that that is precisely the type of non-fishing activity that we would take into account when setting the original number of days at sea. We therefore hope that fishermen would not feel obliged to go to a tribunal, because we hope to accommodate such activities at a much earlier stage in the process.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): May I move new clause 2 now?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is perfectly permissible for the hon. Gentleman to speak to that new clause, but we deal with one new clause at a time.

Dr. Godman: In that case, I shall speak to new clause 2 and offer a couple of comments on new clause 3.

I was pleased to hear the Minister talk about local tribunals, because, as I specify in new clause 2, that is an important factor.

Given the type of decisions that will be taken on whether fishermen should continue fishing or be denied the right to go to sea, where they have traditionally sailed, it is important that the appeals tribunals should form an integral part of the legal systems of our countries. That is why I emphasise in new clause 2(1):

"The Ministers may by order made by statutory instrument appoint up to five licence appeal tribunals".

The Minister proposed between 10 and 15, which goes well beyond my suggestion.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman's new clause and mine are similar. We envisage setting up sufficient tribunals to deal with the volume of appeals as expeditiously as possible. There is a legal unbrella for those tribunals—the Council of Tribunals. The most sensible thing to do is to ensure that the licence appeal tribunals fall within the jurisdiction of that supervisory body in the same way as tribunals in other sectors. We have therefore deliberately brought the licence appeal tribunals under that framework, and a separate, consequential new clause has no other purpose but to put those tribunals under the legal umbrella of the Council on Tribunals.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention and for what appeared to be a back-handed compliment to new clause 2.

New clause 4 refers to the Tribunals and Inquiries Bill, which is now going through the House. It makes good sense for the licence tribunal and the appeal tribunals to be covered by that Bill. I am pleased to note what the Minister said about the legal status of the appeal tribunals.

Paragraph (2)(2) of the schedule in new clause 2 states:

"A chairman shall be an advocate, barrister or solicitor of not less than ten years' standing".

I was anxious to ensure that those tribunals follow the traditional practice adhered to by social security appeal tribunals, medical appeal tribunals and others.

Paragraph (2)(3) states:

"An assessor shall be a person who appears to the appropriate Minister"—

that could be the Minister with responsibility for fisheries in Scotland or Northern Ireland—

"to have practical experience of the catching sector of the fishing industry."

I am pleased that the Minister has acknowledged the importance of such experience, because the decisions reached by those tribunals will have a profound effect upon the lives not just of the fishermen, but of their families and, in some cases, their communities.

Paragraph (4) states:

"With the leave of a tribunal or of the appropriate Minister, an appeal shall lie from any decision of that tribunal . . . in Scotland, to the Outer House of the Court of Session".

I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland would agree with that. An appeal on a decision taken by a tribunal sitting in Campbelltown or Fraserburgh could finish up in the Outer House of the Court of Session. Perhaps I could be given a judgment on that point later. Similarly, an appeal in Northern Ireland could go before a High Court judge.

It is absolutely essential for our fishermen to know that, notwithstanding the fact that they will receive a fair hearing before a tribunal—composed of the people that the Minister and I have suggested—they have the ability to make a challenge.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will outline the Scottish circumstances, but in England and Wales a fisherman would have recourse to judicial review. If a fisherman is not satisfied with the outcome of a tribunal, he has further legal recourse. If the tribunal was not a statutory one, the fisherman would appeal to me or other Ministers with responsibility for fisheries. However, because it is a statutory tribunal, legal recourse will be sought through a judicial review of the verdict.

Dr. Godman: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for another helpful intervention.

It is essential that the tribunal should be located as near as possible to the fishing ports. It appears that a number will be set up in England, and obviously a similar number, or even more, should be set up in Scotland. In view of the size of the Scottish fishing fleet and the way in which it is scattered around the coastline and islands, it is essential to establish tribunals that are as local as possible to the fishing communities, which are often remote.

5 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I will not lose the opportunity to welcome—it will not happen often this afternoon—a change in the Bill by the Government. We appreciate the Minister moving the new clause in response to a new clause moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) in Committee. Indeed, the Minister said at the time that he found himself in an unusual position and that it was rare for him to be able to invite my hon. Friend to withdraw his proposal because he intended to table a similar provision at a later stage.

If the tribunals are so busy that there is a queue of fishermen wanting their cases to be heard in 12 or 15 ports, that will be a demonstration of how fiercely the Bill is biting into the livelihood of fishermen. While we need an appeals procedure to deal with grievances, we do not want the measure to operate so harshly that it removes the livelihood of fishermen.

My hon. Friends and I would rather the Bill was not brought into effect, or was at least subject to later amendment which ensured that it did not come into effect unless the circumstances changed significantly. Frankly, if the situation develops in the way that I described, the one line of opportunity for fishermen will be to seek places on the tribunals for people with experience of the fishing industry. That will be about the only way to make an honest penny out of one's experience of the industry. There will not be much other chance of using that knowledge.

There is even a danger, from the way in which the new clause is drafted and the regulations are likely to be drawn, that the time spent by fishermen attending tribunals could affect their entitlement to days at sea in subsequent years.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): It could have an effect on a fisherman's track record.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman is right: having to attend a tribunal could have an effect on one's track record.

The tribunals procedure, necessary and welcome though it is, represents only a tiny alleviation of some of the most unfair consequences of what, in any event, will be disastrous for many people in the fishing industry. We are glad that it is in the Bill, but we would rather it was not needed, or had to be used only rarely.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: This is a bad Bill, which is not made much better by having regional tribunals. I am glad that the Minister has accepted the principle of tribunals and that, even at this late stage, he has introduced the new clause.

I echo what has been said about the need for tribunals to be localised. In the context of Humberside, where does the Minister envisage the tribunal being established? We have the two major ports of Hull and Grimsby. The overwhelming majority of the fishing fleet is in Grimsby. May we have an undertaking that the tribunal will be there?

I fear that the Minister is opening a Pandora's box by establishing tribunals. If milk licensing is anything to go by, the tribunal system will be enormously complicated and time-consuming, so we must have an undertaking that the people who compose the tribunals know the fishing industry. We do not want a legalistic framework with a pedantic formula of rules which will dazzle and baffle the fishermen. We need people on the tribunals who are from the fishing industry and who know how it works and about its problems.

The Minister must also give an undertaking that there will be compensation. The tribunals will not be out on the fishing grounds, which means that fishermen cannot carry on fishing while attending tribunals. Days at sea will be lost appearing before tribunals. The system will not be akin to milk licensing tribunals. The cows are milked while the farmer appears before a tribunal and has his complaint heard. It is not the same with the fishing industry. Fishermen cannot appear before a tribunal and fish at the same time, so there should be compensation for the fishing time lost.

Mr. Morley: While we welcome the tribunal concept, it is sad that, in the context of the Bill, such tribunals are necessary. Once the measure becomes law, there will be a queue of fishermen wanting to attend tribunals to ascertain their track record and see how the Bill applies to them.

One of our main objections to the Bill is that it adds yet another tier of bureaucracy and more expense to fisheries management. That money could be used in more

[Mr. Morley]

constructive ways, such as for gear options and support of that type. I hope that the Minister will respond to the sensible points that my hon. Friends have made, which were made by us in Committee and featured in Opposition amendments dealing with the concept of tribunals.

Dr. Godman: I had intended to refer to the need for tribunals to hear cases quickly. A common complaint that we receive at our surgeries is about constituents waiting for cases to be heard by, for example, medical and social security tribunals. I hope that fishermen will not have to wait an inordinate time before having their cases heard.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes an important point, especially as people's livelihoods are being threatened because of a reduced number of days fishing at sea. There will be a tremendous initial rush of people wishing to appear before the tribunals. The Minister said that a sufficient number of tribunals will be available in the ports. We need to be assured just where the tribunals will sit and how the Minister will deal with the initial demand. Will there be enough tribunals or some sort of flexible arrangement to meet the undoubted peak? Unless adequate arrangements are made, fishermen will be waiting a long time for tribunal decisions on matters affecting their livelihood.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I welcome the Minister's positive response in recommending the establishment of tribunals. While they will not overcome the apprehensions of the fishing industry about the Bill, they represent a step forward.

I am reminded of the problems we had when milk quotas were allocated after 1985. There were then separate panels for different parts of the United Kingdom. For example, we had a Northern Ireland panel because quotas were allocated to Scotland, Northern Ireland and the other regions.

For the fishing industry, it seems that there will be one tribunal, or one set of tribunals, dealing with the whole of the United Kingdom. I am not against that in principle, but I trust that there will be consistency in the decisions made by the various tribunals. That will be achieved if only a small number of people are involved, allowing consistency to apply in decision making throughout the United Kingdom. We do not want disparity in such matters.

Where will the tribunals sit? Most fishing ports in Northern Ireland are remote from the main centres of population. Transport facilities are not good, and the public transport system is not favourable in terms of our fishing ports. So I hope that the tribunals will meet in the fishing ports. I hope that, in terms of Northern Ireland, the tribunal will not meet in Belfast. It should meet in the main fishing port of Northern Ireland, which is Portavogie. I do not want my fishermen to have to spend all day travelling on bad roads to and from Belfast. Will the Minister explain his thoughts on the location of the tribunals when they sit to examine applications?

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The fishermen in my part of the world already have to travel considerable distances to find harbours large enough from which to work. I share the hope of other hon. Members that the tribunals will inject at least some justice in to what will otherwise be a position of chaos and considerable injustice.

I am spurred to take part in the debate by the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who referred to the membership of the milk quota tribunals. I recall that the chairman of the milk tribunal in Scotland was Mr. David Miles, who was given that job shortly after losing his seat as a Conservative Member of Parliament. I wonder whether Chris Patten or Chris Chope—at least his constituency was on the sea—will end up as chairmen of the tribunal. The mind boggles.

It is important that the tribunals should be manned by people who know what they are talking about.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Surely we can have no fears in that regard after the speech of Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, who seemed to give an absolute assurance that the Government would stop stuffing committees with Conservative placepeople. Has the hon. Gentleman no confidence in that assurance?

Mr. Home Robertson: Precious little.

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend laughs at the intervention by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) but it is an important point. I am sure that my hon. Friends agree that there must be no political patronage, which is why I emphasised during our discussion of new clause 2 that the chairman should be an advocate or lawyer of 10 years' standing. That might provide work for Lord Fraser.

Mr. Home Robertson: My hon. Friend fills me with even more alarm. We could end up with the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn), who already has two jobs on the Scottish Select Committee and the Defence Select Committee.

The matter is serious. The tribunals must be seen to be credible and fair, and manned by people of standing who have credibility in the fishing industry and the wider community. The Government do not have a good track record in nominating people to run such establishments. I have already cited the example of the milk tribunal. The tribunals have an important job to do and had better do it well.

Mr. Curry: I wish to reassure the House on almost all of those points. I have responded in interventions to the points made by the hon. Member for Glasgow and Port Greenock (Dr. Godman). I do not know how many tribunals there will be because we shall institute the tribunals in function of the work load. Therefore, if the work load is heavy we shall have more. I shall not lay down a maximum number of tribunals. It is important that they get off the ground quickly and we intend to bring them into existence at the earliest possible moment, once we have secured the Bill. They will then be in a position to operate immediately and we shall invite them to look at the most severe cases first, so they would prioritise their cases.

They will be three-men tribunals, and the chairman of each tribunal and the overall president of the system would come from the legal profession. I am sure that they would be of sufficient standing to meet hon. Members' concerns.

We shall ensure that the criteria are consistent and the tribunals will be peripatetic. We do not intend to establish them in a particular port and tell them not to move from it. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) is

right to say that the tribunals would be United Kingdom-wide. They would go to where they were most useful and meet in the principal fishing ports. We aim to take the tribunals to the fishermen.

The House agrees that this is a sensible move. It fulfils an undertaking that I gave in Committee, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 4

TRIBUNALS AND INQUIRIES ACT 1992

'In Schedule 1 to the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992 (tribunals under the general supervision of the Council on Tribunals), in Part I, after entry No. 40 there shall be inserted—

"*Sea fish (conservation)*

40A. The Sea Fish Licence Tribunal established under section 4AA of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967.".'—*[Mr. Curry.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 5

SUPPLEMENTARY REGULATIONS

'After section 4A of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 there shall be inserted—

"*Regulations supplementary to sections 4 and 4A.*

4B.—(1) The Ministers may by regulations make provision as to—

(a) the manner in which a licence under section 4 or 4A of this Act is to be granted, or a variation, revocation or suspension effected, and

(b) the time when a licence, or a variation, suspension or revocation, shall have effect.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) above, regulations under this section may include provision—

(a) for documents to be delivered, or notices given, to the nominees of person to whom licences are granted;

(b) for documents or notices to be treated as delivered or given if they are posted or otherwise communicated in accordance with the regulations;

(c) for notices to be given by publication in newspapers;

(d) as to the transitional effects of variations.

(3) Regulations under this section may make different provision for different cases.

(4) Regulations under this section shall be made by statutory instrument, which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.".'—*[Sir Hector Monro]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Chairman: With that it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 14, in clause 1 page 1, line 19, at end insert—

'(4A) After subsection (7A) there shall be inserted—

"(7B) In any proceedings in Scotland commenced on or after the coming into force of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 for an offence under this section, any—

(a) entry in any logbook kept, under an enforceable Community obligation relating to fishing activities, by the master of a vessel;

(b) declaration made, under such an obligation—

(i) by the master of a vessel or by an agent, as to fish landed; or

(ii) by the master of a vessel, as to trans-shipment;

(c) information required to be provided under—

(i) any condition imposed under subsection (6) above, by the master, owner or charterer (if any) of a vessel, or by an agent;

(ii) subsection (7) above, by the master, owner, or charterer (if any) of a vessel,

shall be received in evidence without being produced or sworn to by any witness and shall be sufficient evidence of the matters stated therein.".'.

No. 15, in clause 2, page 1, line 29, at end insert—

'(2A) After subsection (8) there shall be inserted—

"(8A) In any proceedings in Scotland commenced on or after the coming into force of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 for an offence under this section, any—

(a) declaration made, under an enforceable Community obligation relating to fishing activities, by the master of a vessel;

(b) information required to be provided under—

(i) any condition imposed under subsection (6) above;

(ii) subsection (7) above,

by the master, owner or charterer (if any) of a vessel, shall be received in evidence without being produced or sworn to by any witness and shall be sufficient evidence of the matters stated therein.".'.

5.15 pm

Sir Hector Monro: New clause 5 is a measure to reinforce the workings of the licensing system, which is necessary as we are to rely on that system for administering days at sea limits.

The issue of a licence, the variation of that licence and, if necessary, suspension or revocation are functions undertaken to apply conservation measures. At present, fishermen sometimes deploy the argument that because they were at sea when a licence variation was delivered to their address, they cannot be bound by its terms. Towards the end of last year, when fishermen became aware that the closure of the haddock fishery was imminent, a large portion of the fleet went to sea and stayed out as long as possible, thus maximising their catches before they had to admit that they knew that the fishery was closed. Such behaviour is unfair on law-abiding fishermen who stop fishing as soon as they hear on the radio that the fishery is closed. It is unfair and cannot be allowed to continue.

The new clause will enable us to overcome the problem. The Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 empowers Ministers to grant licences but does not specify how they should be granted. The new clause will enable Ministers to spell out in regulations how a licence or a notice of its variation, suspension or revocation will be granted, whom it should be delivered to and when it will take effect. We intend to specify that a licence will have been granted, and therefore take effect, once it is delivered.

We also intend to require licence holders to nominate a person with a United Kingdom address to whom the licence should be delivered and to specify that as far as the law is concerned, delivery to that nominee's address will be regarded as the same as delivery into the hands of the licence holder. That will overcome the problem of the licence holder being at sea at the time of delivery. It will also ensure that vessels that spend much of their time operating from foreign ports are on a par with those from United Kingdom ports. It will be up to the licence holder to make suitable arrangements for ensuring that the nominee passes the information contained in the licence on

[Sir Hector Monro]

to him if he is at sea. Obviously, one must be flexible because it may take a day or so for that to happen, particularly if a boat is in foreign waters.

Regulations will also be able to provide for notices of licence variation, revocation or suspension to be given by means of publication in newspapers where necessary.

Amendments Nos. 14 and 15 provide that, in any proceedings for an offence under sections 4 and 4(A) of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967, it will be unnecessary for a witness to speak to the documents listed or for those documents to be corroborated by other witnesses. They will accordingly be admissible as proof of what they say, unless and until the contrary is proved.

The House may find it helpful if I describe how fishermen record their activities, the additional information that will be required to monitor days at sea, and how that leads to the need for the two amendments. On each trip, a fisherman is required to keep a record of his activities in his EC logbook and, on returning to port, send a copy to my Department, keeping a copy for himself. The logbook records when the vessel left port, when it fished, what it caught, when and where it returned to port and various other details.

Dr. Godman: The Minister is now talking about the logbook and said "when the vessel was fishing". If the vessel cannot fish for a day or two because of bad weather, would that be taken into consideration in terms of days spent at sea? When a vessel is on the fishing grounds but the gear is fastened down because of severe weather, will allowances be made?

Sir Hector Monro: All those matters are part of a vessel's track record. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said on the previous amendment, all those matters are taken into account when days at sea are accounted for. What the skipper puts in the logbook will be important information.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for showing his characteristic courtesy. Does he agree that, in winter, there could be a pronounced distinction between days spent at sea and days fishing?

Sir Hector Monro: I am well aware of that. As a fellow Scot, I know the hostile conditions that many of our fishermen face in the north, particularly in the far north.

Similarly, a landing declaration is required to confirm the quantities of various species caught once they have been measured accurately in the course of landing and selling the fish.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister will remember that, under the iniquitous eight-day continuous tie-up regulations in Scotland, when it was days in port that were being counted, provision had to be made for when a boat was caught in a storm and could not return to its home port. Will provision be made in this legislation to deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), when a boat cannot fish because of the prevailing weather conditions at sea? The Minister will appreciate that the issue of fishing safety arises if boats are forced to fish in all conditions, about which people from fishing communities feel strongly.

Sir Hector Monro: I accept that fishermen feel strongly about that, as they did about the tie-up rule. However, the hon. Gentleman knows that he is pushing me pretty far towards saying that, if the weather is bad, it does not count as a day at sea. One must be cautious about that, because it is particularly difficult to say when and at what time the weather turns so perverse that the nets have to be brought in and fishing cease. All the information on the log must be taken into account when drawing up the track record.

To monitor days at sea, we shall need additional information so that records are available for time spent at sea on trips which did not involve fishing and fishing trips where the EC does not require a logbook to be completed —for example, trips of less than 24 hours in duration where the vessel is less than 17 m in overall length. Both my Department and the fishermen will keep copies of the log book, landing declarations and returns on long fishing trips. We shall thus be able to monitor how many days at sea a vessel has done in a year.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State has described how procedures followed by Departments plus an independent appeals tribunal will ensure that the allocation of days is fair. So that the whole system is fair, we must ensure that we can prevent people from going to sea for more days than those to which they are entitled. The amendments are required to ensure that offences under the Bill can be effectively prosecuted in Scotland. They will ensure that crucial documents such as logbooks and landing declarations are admissible in Scottish ports as proof of what they say without the need for any witnesses to speak for them.

It will be open to fishermen to bring evidence before the court if they dispute the provenance or content of a log sheet, and in such instances the Crown will have to lead its own evidence of the authenticity of the documents. It is in everybody's interests that, if a case involves 50 or more log sheets which are not disputed by the fisherman, those can be introduced into evidence as simply as possible.

Fishing is unusual in that it is an activity which is necessarily tightly controlled by the law in order to conserve fish stocks, yet it takes place in remote places where, despite all the efforts of our protection services, there is usually little evidence beyond the documents that the fisherman himself provides. It is therefore entirely reasonable that, unless there is evidence to the contrary, the fisherman's own records of his activities should be accepted.

Amendment No. 14 introduces the arrangements that I have described for the generality of documents kept by fishermen, and amendment No. 15 does the same thing for documents relating to the transhipment of fish from one vessel to another. The amendments address issues that arise in Scottish courts, and I commend them and new clause 5 to the House.

Mr. Salmond: I cannot help feeling that the Minister's introduction of the new clause and the amendments reinforces the view that many of us have that we are seeing the addition of a new layer of bureaucracy on to an already complex position within the industry.

The Minister may recall that on Second Reading I detailed at some length the hugely variant and different standings for which boats within the white fish fleet could be fishing, depending on where they were fishing and what their historical track record had been, whether they were on tied-up days or what their mesh size was. There are

already five different standings for the white fish fleet. In pursuance of the Bill, the Minister seems to be adding another maze of regulations.

Having heard the Minister, I can well understand why the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, could not give an estimate of the duration or even the number of sittings of the tribunal which the Government are proposing to establish. The Government have not taken on board the full complexity of the regulations that they are trying to enforce.

Members of Parliament representing fishing communities would like to know whether safety at sea and bad weather conditions will be taken into account and be a significant factor in adjudicating whether a boat has been fishing at sea or has merely been at sea sheltering from bad weather. The Minister may consider it almost impossible to make such a distinction, but what he has already outlined seems to be impossible in bureaucratic terms.

Dr. Godman: I want to follow the remarks of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on amendment No. 14 and logbook entries. The Minister opened up a chink of light in terms of the need to be concerned with our fishermen's safety with his responses to my interventions and to one made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan.

The Minister will recall that I gave an example from my brother's experience of a vessel having to sail into wind during severe weather conditions off the west coast of Greenland, far outside the province of the Bill. That vessel was on the fishing grounds but unable to fish for almost eight days. I do not envisage such a problem arising in Shetland waters, the Pentland firth, off the west coast of Scotland, in the channel or off the east coast of England, but it is essential that the appeal tribunals recognise, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said, the need to pay due cognisance to the safety requirements of fishermen and fishing vessels.

We should be aiming by way of the logbook entries and the appeal tribunals for a position where the skipper of a vessel on the fishing grounds can say, "Hey, lads, the weather is worsening. We are now coming up to a force 8 and we should not be shooting the gear, so we shall bring it in or tie it up and go in for a bit of dodging. We won't suffer because we have had to dodge for one or two days." During a severe winter, those one or two days could add up to a number of days lost as a result of the severity of the fishing conditions.

I shall be looking to the appeal tribunal to take serious notice of weather conditions if skippers make appeals on that basis. They may have been unable to fish for as many as 20 days in a period of two or three months, despite the fact that they were on the fishing ground, because of the severity of the weather. Had they shot the gear they might have endangered the lives of the crew. That must be taken into account by the regulations and, perhaps more importantly, by the appeal tribunals.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I welcome the establishment of the appeal tribunals, but will a skipper be required to provide evidence that, for example, his boat suffered engine trouble when applying to the Department for a longer licence, or would he apply direct to the appeal tribunal for a licence to be granted?

5.30 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor: The amendments relate specifically to Scotland and to its separate legal system, and it was difficult to follow the Minister's explanation. If they are approved, will they create a situation similar to that which currently obtains in England, Wales and Northern Ireland —or will they offer some advantage to fishermen in Scotland that will not be enjoyed elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): A brave and hardworking group of my constituents earn their living out of Shoreham harbour, by fishing in the English channel. The life of a fishermen is dangerous enough, and I would not wish any regulations or legal powers in the Bill to make it even more dangerous. In exercising any powers that Parliament may see fit to give the Department, I hope that it will give paramount consideration to the safety of our fishermen.

Mr. Morley: No one could disagree with any measure concerning licence variations that is designed to apply fairly and equally to the whole fleet. The Minister mentioned boats operating from foreign ports. On occasions, our own vessels do that for all sorts of reasons. However, a number of foreign boats that fly under a British flag operate exclusively from foreign ports, and fish on British quota. How will the regulations be enforced in the case of boats that spend most of their time outside this country, who will enforce them, and what will be the cost?

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) spoke of the "bureaucracy" of the new arrangements, but he must accept that, throughout agriculture and fishing, anything to do with Europe involves a great deal of bureaucracy. When the regulations for the new common agricultural policy are introduced in the not-too-distant future, the hon. Gentleman will see how much additional administration will fall on farmers. As we all know from our daily postbag, there is noticeably more administration involved in keeping up with the modern world.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) related bad weather conditions to the work of tribunals. The track record will be based on the year 1991, when many boats fished in bad weather or had to hove to and bring up their gear. That will be allowed for when licences are considered.

On the good side, fishermen may find that the Department is able to offer even more days at sea than they expect. It is wrong to imagine that everyone is on the starting blocks, waiting to run to a tribunal. We must wait to see how the Department operates the arrangements throughout the United Kingdom. I do not believe that they will prove to be as complicated or as severe as hon. Members suggest.

In the examples cited by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), the skipper would apply first to the Department. It wants to be as helpful and as flexible as possible. A fisherman would refer to a tribunal only if he felt that the Department's decision was unacceptable. I am certain that the Department will be able to resolve problems such as that mentioned by my hon. Friend.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) asked about the provision's implications for Northern

[Sir Hector Monro]

Ireland fishermen. New clause 5 covers the whole of the United Kingdom, but amendments Nos. 14 and 15 specifically ensure that Scottish law is covered. They will not affect Northern Ireland. New clause 5 and the amendments will prove helpful in effectively implementing the regulations, and I commend them to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

RENEWAL OF POWERS UNDER SECTION 4(6)(c)

' . In section 20 of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967, after subsection (2), there shall be inserted—

"(2A) Section 4(6)(c) of this Act shall cease to have effect at the end of each period of twelve months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed unless before the end of that period—

(a) the Ministers have laid before each House of Parliament a statement of their intended exercise of the power conferred by section 4(6)(c); and

(b) that statement has been approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.".'.

—[Mr. Trotter.]

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take the following: New clause 6—*Consultation prior to making orders*—

' .—(1) Section 20 of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 (which makes provision as to orders) shall be amended as follows.

(2) At the beginning of subsection (5) there shall be inserted the words "Except as provided by subsection (5A) below".

(3) After subsection (5) there shall be inserted—

"(5A) A statutory insutrment containing an order made under section 4 of this Act shall be of no effect unless

(i) a draft thereof has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament and

(ii) before the laying of such a draft—

(a) the Ministers have consulted with such persons and bodies as seem to them to be representative of operators of fishing vessels and their employees,

(b) the Ministers have laid before both Houses of Parliament a report upon the effect upon operators of fishing vessels and their employees of restricting the time which such vessels may spend at sea, and

(c) any report laid under paragraph (b) above has been approved by resolution of both Houses of Parliament.".'.

Amendment No. 4, in page 2, line 13 [*Clause 4*], after 'Act', insert ', except section 1(2),'.

Amendment No. 22, in page 2, line 13 leave out from 'shall' to end of line 14 and insert

'not come into force until similar measures are adopted throughout the European Community.'.

Amendment No. 26, in page 2, line 13 leave out from 'shall' to the end of line 14 and insert

'not come into force until a commencement order has been laid before Parliament and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.'

Amendment No. 5, in page 2, line 14, at end insert—

'(1A) Section 1(2) of this Act shall not come into force until a statement by the Ministers of their intended exercise of the powers conferred by this Act has been approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

Amendment No. 18, in page 2, line 14, at end insert—

'provided that at that time provisions equivalent to those contained in the amendments made by this Act to the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 have the force of law in each member state of the European Community and that the application of such provisions is not to the disadvantage of British owned and registered vessels; or

(b) on such later date as the Ministers may by order made by statutory instrument appoint, provided that the condition in paragraph (a) of this subsection has been fulfilled.'.

Mr. Trotter: On Second Reading, I and almost every other speaker—and certainly all those closely involved in the fishing industry—expressed concern at the way in which the Bill's powers were extending into the industry's future to an extent that I have not experienced in my time in the House. Those powers can accurately be described as draconian in the way that they could be implemented. That has created unity from one end of the country to the other—to an extent that those of us who know the industry well find remarkable. It was exemplified by the enormous rally held in central hall a few days ago.

I had hoped that the Bill would be amended in Committee to counter those concerns and to make it acceptable, but that did not happen. While I certainly welcome some amendments—such as the appeals procedure—more amendment is needed if the Bill is to be acceptable.

Everyone connected with the industry is well aware of the problems of over-fishing. There has been commendable co-operation in employing technical measures. Some say that, if more time is given to their application, those techniques will go a long way to deal with the problems. However, we must accept that they will not on their own be effective in the time scale that we must consider. Stocks are becoming so depleted that the industry will be not just harmed but destroyed. Major further steps must be taken.

I cannot accept that there is a need for the Bill's powers to be as extensive as they are—hence the reason for new clause 1 and my amendment No. 5. The Bill's powers would enable the Department to say that the whole fishing industry will tie up except on Christmas day. I readily accept that my hon. Friend will not use the power in such an absurd way, but he is nevertheless seeking to take such power for the future without parliamentary scrutiny. Under this power, he could order any boat to be tied up at any time, or all the boats tied up all the time. After the Bill is passed, that will be the end of it, and he will have ultimate power over the whole industry. That cannot be right. I believe that the Minister should be required to give the House details of his proposals on an annual basis: he should be required to demonstrate responsible stewardship of his power to deal with a problem whose existence we all accept.

One of the Bill's peculiarities is the way in which it anticipates what may happen in Brussels—indeed, what will happen there. We all know that the European Community fishing policy is a shambles; many of us would apply the same description to other aspects of Community policy as well, but the fishing policy is a particularly good example, and there is no doubt that it will be reviewed in the months ahead.

What I find it hard to understand is why we are anticipating that review, and seeking powers now to penalise our industry in the expectation of what will presumably happen to the industry in other Community countries. An image is being portrayed of our boats being tied up while their foreign competitors continue to fish outside the harbour entrance. That must be countered, and I hope that the Minister will give us the assurances that we require.

I consider it essential for Parliament to subject such draconian powers to regular scrutiny and the House should have some knowledge of the way in which the Minister intends initially to implement the great power that he is seeking.

Mr. Morley: I support what the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) has said. I believe that such far-reaching measures need some accountability. I urge the House to support amendment No. 18, in the light of some of the points made by the hon. Member. If restrictions are to be placed on fishermen, they should be applied fairly and reasonably across the European Community.

I pay tribute to Conservative Members who have put their names to amendment No. 18. It is not intended to score political points; we recognise that a serious problem exists in the fishing industry, and we have consistently said in our many fishing debates that we accept the existence of conservation difficulties and the need for difficult decisions. We do not wish to duck those decisions, and we are prepared to support the Government in that regard. Such decisions may be hard for the fishing industry to accept, but they are necessary none the less.

We are not convinced, however, that forcing British fishermen to tie up in port while their competitors are free to fish outside the ports concerned is fair reasonable, or, indeed, an effective conservation measure. Last week—on 7 July—3,000 fishermen came down to London to take part in a demonstration organised by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and supported by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. Many hon. Members attended the demonstration, and many were lobbied by fishermen who had taken a day off work to make their case known.

Those who saw the demonstration were left in no doubt of the strength of feeling in the fishing industry about what the Bill will do to livelihoods and communities. There is almost a feeling of betrayal: our fishermen alone will face restrictions that will not affect their European counterparts, and that seems hard to justify.

I am sure that many hon. Members will have received a great many letters from fishermen's organisations all over the country. The National Federation of Fishermen, which speaks for many English and Welsh fishermen, said in a letter sent to every Member of Parliament:

"Why is it that only British fishermen are subject to unilataral restrictions when other Europeans are not? The bitter truth is that flag of convenience vessels will have the ability to land abroad unchecked, and the only fishermen suffering the restrictions will be British fishermen, not Spanish, French, Dutch or even the Republic of Ireland."

The Cornwall sea fisheries committee wrote:

"Most importantly, there is no mention of similar restrictions on foreign vessels fishing in British waters. Fishermen feel aggrieved that, whilst their activities will be curtailed, foreign vessels will be free to fish in our waters . . . Many vessels, particularly the smaller ones, will simply not be able to earn a living under the Bill's restrictions."

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The North East Fishing Forum, a combination of local government and fishing communities over a wide area, wrote:

"Local authorities are concerned that there will be grave damage to local interests. Small inshore fleets such as those operating between the Tyne and the Tweed could be particularly disadvantaged by a system based on past performance, because of the tradition of voluntary restraint already practised."

The South Eastern Fishermen's Protection Association also wrote to say that the measures were unfair and unilateral, and that they discriminated against our fishing fleet.

There are many more examples from around the country. All that shows that the industry has never been so united by a single issue, which is an achievement in itself. The reason why the industry is so united—an industry that has traditionally operated in different sectors, whose members have not always co-operated as well as they might have done—is that every fishing community in the country faces a severe threat.

We shall discuss other amendments which present alternatives to days-at-sea restrictions. I hope that, even at this stage, the Minister will be willing to accept that the fishermen's organisations are anxious to co-operate with him and his Ministry to introduce workable measures that will deal with the problems of over-capacity and the need for conservation without the introduction of draconian powers.

The main thrust of many of the amendments in the group—especially amendment No. 18—is this. If there is an argument for forcing fishermen to remain in port for a certain number of days per week—we can debate that—it is only right and proper for the measure involved to be implemented through the Council of Ministers and the European Community, and to apply to every fishing fleet in the Community and every fishing fleet that is part of the common fisheries policy.

I do not believe that that is the way forward; I feel that we should have a proper decommissioning scheme, allied to a package of measures to deal with the problem. It is important, however, for the many hon. Members who are present tonight representing their constituents—local fishermen and their families, and the industries that depend on fishermen—to make one thing clear. If there is to be fairness, and if restrictions are to carry any credibility —it is generally accepted that they will have a drastic effect on fishermen's livelihood—those restrictions should apply across the board. In its present form, the Bill does not allow for that.

The amendment gives the House an opportunity to decide that, if the Minister has made a case for the restrictions and gets the Bill through, it should not be enacted until other members states have introduced similar measures. Any restrictions that we impose should be applied equally and fairly to every EC fishing fleet. Our fishermen must not be put at an unfair disadvantage, as they will be if this measure is passed without amendment.

Mr. Iain Sproat (Harwich): I support strongly the new clause that has been moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter). A fishermen's delegation came to see me last Tuesday. Its members expressed deep concern and deep hostility to the Bill. The

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fishermen of Harwich are totally opposed to the Government's proposals. I was deeply impressed by the strength of their arguments.

The fishermen of Harwich recognise, as do fishermen in all parts of the country, the need for conservation. They all accept that fish stocks must be conserved. They do not, therefore, object to conservation. They object, however, to the way in which the Bill proposes to enforce conservation. They followed, as I did, in detail the consideration of the Bill in Committee. Not a great deal of what happened in Committee has convinced them that they ought to change their minds.

The fact that the Bill came before the House while consultations were still going on with the industry did not help. I know that the Government will say that merely the details were discussed, whereas the Bill is concerned with the principle. However, fishermen's minds were not put at rest. They felt that the result of the consultations would not lead to the Bill being amended.

The fishermen in my constituency fear a huge and drastic cut in their income. They fear, too, that many families who have been fishing for generations will be forced to leave an industry that they love and that the decommissioning funds are pitifully inadequate. As the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said, they cannot see the justice, fairness and rightness in these measures being imposed on British fishermen while all the other European Community fishermen are unaffected by them. They believe that foreign vessels will not be bound by any conservation measures that are introduced, with the result that the British industry will soon be decimated. Foreign vessels will then take over what was once the British fishing industry.

I hope that the Minister will be able to provide some assurance that all the other member states of the European Community will speedily introduce measures that lead to the imposition of similar conservation requirements on their fishing industries.

I share my constituents' fears about the Bill. That is why I strongly support what my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth said. The very least that the Government can do in an attempt to assuage the fears and concerns of the fishermen is to say that they will look again at this question in a year's time and that, if the fishermen's fears are proved to be correct and have substance, the House will be given the opportunity to amend the clause.

Mr. John D. Taylor: When I spoke on Second Reading I stressed why we were concerned about the implications of the Bill. I mentioned that it was not just the Bill that caused us concern but the powers that we were giving to the Minister to exercise without our approval. The purpose of the new clause is to give back to the House the power to approve what the Minister does as a result of this measure. It is tremendously important that all hon. Members should have a say in the implementation of the Bill.

I find it difficult to accept many of the Bill's provisions. One relates to the mandatory fine of £50,000 if fishermen are found to be in breach of the measure. That fine would not be affected by the new clause. It would stand. That is one reason why I do not like the Bill.

The second reason why I do not like the Bill was mentioned by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley)—that the provisions of the Bill do not apply to other European Community fishermen. We in the ports of Kilkeel, Portavogie, Donaghadee and Ardglass have a particular concern in this respect when it comes to Republic of Ireland boats. I was glad to see that at the beginning of this week the fisheries spokesman for the Social Democratic and Labour party, the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), aired his concern in an article in *Irish News*. He expressed great concern about the fact that, if the Bill is passed, the fishing fleet in Northern Ireland will be seriously threatened by fishing fleets from the Republic of Ireland.

There is no way in which I can support the Bill unless the Minister can assure the House, especially the fishermen of Northern Ireland, that he has already held consultations with the fishing authorities in Dublin to ensure that they implement similar legislation that will apply to both Irish boats and British boats in the Irish sea fishing areas.

We hear a great deal about the Anglo-Irish Agreement. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that has brought about stalemate in Northern Ireland since 1985. At last we are beginning to make political progress in Northern Ireland. Discussions are now being held between Dublin and London. I hope that the Minister can therefore assure us that he has been in discussion with Dublin, has brought to its attention the measures which are to apply to the United Kingdom and those which will apply specifically to Northern Ireland and that Dublin will therefore agree to introduce identical measures to apply to Irish vessels. If he cannot do so, there is no way that I can support the Bill.

I mentioned also on Second Reading the day on which fishermen will not be allowed to fish. How will that day be decided? Will there be a different day for different ports? Will there be a different day, depending upon the type of fish that fishermen try to catch, or will there be a different day according to region of the United Kingdom? There is already one day in Northern Ireland upon which most of our fishing fleets do not fish. It applies to parts of Scotland, too. That day is Sunday.

If there is to be one day on which we cannot fish, that day must continue to be Sunday for us. If it is to be any other day, it means that we shall be unable to fish on two days of the week. Therefore, we want the Minister to clarify whether it will be one standard day throughout the whole of the United Kingdom or whether that day will vary according to region.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but if he looks at the lead clause he will see that it has to do with the timings, not with the days when one may or may not fish. It relates to how long the legislation will last before it is brought back here for renewal, or otherwise. The hon. Gentleman must address that point.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As the selection list incorporates a number of other amendments, including the nature of the restrictions to apply within the United Kingdom and to other European Community countries, is it not in order to dwell upon the nature of the conditions as well as the timing referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) in new clause 1?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It will be in order provided that hon. Members relate the issue strictly to one of the

group, but it was my understanding that the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) was dealing with the new clause only.

6 pm

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Like other hon. Members, I welcome this proof of the Government's commitment toconservation and especially to the conservation of fish stocks. It is remarkable—other hon. Members have remarked on the fact—that fishermen also welcome it.

Worries arise because of the nature of the Bill. It is an enabling Bill and, like all such Bills, it leaves many questions unanswered. When questions are unanswered, worries exist and may be magnified. I certainly found that to be the case in my conversations with fishermen in the port of Newhaven. Although we have had good discussions and although I provided them with as much information as I could to try to explain the details of the Bill, which may have allayed some of their fears, there still remains considerable worry in their minds. fishermen's worries are magnified by the lack of direct information in the Bill about how it will bite.

In my short intervention, I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you will allow me to dwell on all elements of the amendments selected. I hope that the Minister can at least give some information to allay some of the worries, especially those mentioned by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor). How will the fishing day restrictions apply? How will they be chosen? How are they to apply to different fishing areas if they are to be differentiated in various parts of the coast of the British isles? How are they to apply to different sizes of boat? Questions are left unanswered even on that detail. In what circumstances will action be taken under the Bill's enabling powers?

As the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) stressed, the overriding concern is for an even playing field. Can one refer to an even playing field when talking about fishing? That may be mixing metaphors, but that is what we are talking about. We are seeking even-handedness between the fishing fleets of all the nations of the European Community.

For the sake of the continued support of our fishing fleets and fishermen for the principle of conservation, it is imperative that they feel that their efforts to conserve are matched by the efforts of others and that any actions taken to make it necessary for them to act in a way in which they might not like will also be imposed on other fleets.

With that menu of comment ringing in his ears, may I ask the Minister for some reassurance on those terribly important points? If such reassurance is not given, I fear that it is highly unlikely that fishermen will support the Bill or obey any orders made under its enabling powers, and we do not want to pass such legislation.

Dr. Godman: I promise to be brief. I support the new clause and was pleased to hear the intervention by the hon. Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat).

With regard to amendment No. 18, the Government could have avoided some of the problems into which they have sailed if, under Standing Order No. 94, they had agreed to the setting up of a Special Standing Committee which would have met no more than four times. Such a Special Standing Committee can take evidence from interested parties, and I think that it would have greatly helped our fishermen if it had been set up. However, the Government chose another route, which is unfortunate for all involved.

I have been around the fishing industry almost all my life, and I believe that, given the urgency of the need to conserve the dwindling fish stocks, our fishermen would have accepted the draconian measures if they were to be applied uniformly throughout the whole of the European Community. As I said in Committee, it has been said ad nauseam that there are too many fishermen chasing too few fish, and our fishermen know that as well as anyone else. I believe that they would be willing to accept the measures if they were to apply as rigorously to Irish or Spanish fishermen or to others.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) said that he hoped that the Minister would speak to his counterpart in Dublin. It is much more important that he speaks to the Spanish Fisheries Minister because——

Mr. Rathbone: And the Belgian Minister.

Dr. Godman: And the Belgian Minister but, without sounding too ethnocentric, the Spanish punch holes in any Communitywide regulations. Anyone who knows anything about the Spanish fishing fleets knows that, which is why amendment No. 18 is so important. The Spanish fishing fleets and their operators encourage their skippers to break the rules. We know about the insurance clubs of skippers and owners in Vigo. If a skipper is caught off the west coast of Scotland or Ireland and hauled in and fined in the sheriff courts or in an Irish court, the fine will be met from the moneys in the club barrel in Vigo.

The hon. Member for Harwich was absolutely right to say that the measures must be uniformly applied throughout all the fishing nations of the European Community. If they are not, there will always be resistance among our fishermen. If there is uniformity, I genuinely believe that our fishermen, from Shetland to Cornwall, will accept them, but they must apply across the Community. Failure to ensure that will mean that our fishermen should challenge the legislation if it is passed.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): While fully agreeing with what the hon. Gentleman said and standing on the principle of absolute uniformity across all nations, I must say that the menace of the southern Ireland fishermen to the Northern Ireland fishermen is greater. While the Fisheries Minister from the Republic was prepared to close a blind eye to what was happening in northern waters, the northern authority—the Secretary of State—was quick to try to make every fisherman from Northern Ireland conform. We need not only uniformity but a power to ensure conformity.

Dr. Godman: If I dare say so in your presence, Madam Deputy Speaker, "closing a blind eye" is a very Irish expression. I take the hon. Gentleman's point that there are discrepancies between north and south. I assure him, however, that, for all their skills, the Irish have nothing on the Spanish fishing vessel skippers—and owners, because the skippers are encouraged by the owners to punch holes in the regulations.

On this occasion, we may need to fly in the face of article 3 of the mortally wounded Maastricht treaty, which argues for subsidiarity in these matters. If we are to have regulations that severely restrict our fishermen's incomes, and if the only way to ensure uniformity in the policing of

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fishing activity in EC waters is to have the rules applied by Brussels, so be it. If a domestic Parliament cannot control all the fishing activities in its waters, let us give Brussels the power to do so.

I believe in regional policing. This Parliament ought to be able to stipulate who can fish when and where in United Kingdom territorial waters. But, if that is not to be the case, and if we are to have uniformity in the policing of our fishermen's activities, the regulations must be applied throughout the Community without fear or favour.

This is a bad Bill. It imposes harsh restrictions on our fishermen in advance of the deliberations that will take place concerning the mid-term review of the common fisheries policy. I am not a lawyer, but I believe that, if the Bill goes through, our fishermen or their associations will eventually be able to challenge it at the European Court of Justice because it discriminates unfairly against them. The House should support new clause 1 and amendment No. 18.

Mr. Stephen: I have no doubt that the fishermen of the United Kingdom accept the need for conservation—indeed, their livelihood depends upon it. It is essential, however, that conservation measures are seen to apply fairly, as between them and their counterparts elsewhere in the European Community.

The principle of conservation must depend for its effectiveness on a large number of fishermen cutting down their effort a little, not on British fishermen cutting down their effort a lot, allowing all the others to continue to fish at the same or at similar levels. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to give me an assurance that, in exercising the powers that he seeks today, his Department will have careful regard not only to the legislative provisions applying to the fishermen of other member countries but to the extent to which those provisions are enforced on those fishermen by the authorities of their own member states.

6.15 pm

Mr. Salmond: I propose to refer to new clause 6 and amendment No. 22, standing in the names of members of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru.

The hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) certainly put his finger on an important point in tabling new clause 1. It would be remarkable if we had to write into a Bill a measure to enforce consultation but, given the present circumstances of the fishing industry, that is the stage that we have reached.

In new clause 6, we seek to do the same thing but to cast the net wider and to make the procedures rather more rigorous. The proposal would ensure that no statutory instrument containing an order could or would be enforced until certain procedures had been undertaken by Fisheries Ministers. A draft order would have to be laid before both Houses of Parliament for approval and could not be approved until Fisheries Ministers had carried out certain tasks, the first of which would be to consult the industry properly about the proposals.

I repeat that it is remarkable that we should have to seek to write that into legislation. I do not know whether fisheries Ministers are aware of the bitterness that they have engendered by proceeding with primary legislation during a consultation period. We have had much experience in recent years of so-called consultation. I know that the Under-Secretary will understand an analogy with the hospital opt-out legislation for Scotland, in respect of which many of us felt the consultation process was no more than a matter of form—a process to be undergone before the Government took the decision that they had always intended to take. But I cannot recall another occasion on which primary legislation has been proceeded with before the formal consultation period has ended.

For the fishing community, that adds insult to injury. So devoid of sensitivity have Fisheries Ministers been that we have reached the stage at which the provision of proper, effective and thorough consultation throughout the industry should be written into the legislation before greater powers are conferred on Ministers.

The second duty that Ministers would have to take on board under the terms of new clause 6 before being seeking to exercise draconian powers would be the obligation to conduct an analysis of the economic impact of their proposals on the fishing community. There is a major divergence of view between the Government, who believe that the impact of the enabling legislation will be marginal —I have even heard official sources argue that, because fishermen are so boxed in by quotas anyway, it does matter about the days-at-sea restrictions—and fishermen, who believe that the Bill will constitute another serious imposition on them and will have a serious impact on their ability to make a living from the sea.

Let us contrast the fishing and farming, to which the Under-Secretary referred. We lack the net income statistics for the fishing industry which are available for agriculture which would enable us to judge the impact of any measure or series of measures on fishermen's livelihood. We know what the overall net catches are and we know their value, but we do not have net income figures, which are important in judging whether a measure such as this can be borne by the fishing communities.

I hope that those who support new clause 1 will not be fobbed off by vague assurances that Ministers will occasionally turn up in the House and make statements on the fishing industry—no doubt late at night, at a time inconvenient to hon. Members. The hon. Member for Tynemouth should ensure that we bind and gag those Ministers by placing a statutory duty on them rather than relying on assurances which may not, in the end, amount to much.

Amendment No. 22 is similar to amendment No. 18, which stands in the name of Labour Members. That amendment goes to the very heart of people's concern about the Bill. I cannot think of any other United Kingdom industry that the Government seem so determined by their actions to place at a disadvantage in relation to its European counterparts.

I have already said that the lack of consultation, and the decision to go ahead during the consultation process, has provoked great anger in the fishing community. What outrage, then, was provoked by the decision to impose on the United Kingdom a draconian and potentially punitive measure that was not to be imposed on other EC fleets? That goes to the heart of the questions that hon. Members representing fishing communities have to ask about the Bill.

I hope that I will not do the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), an injustice or embarrass him when I say that, if we had been discussing the Bill a year ago, I have no doubt

that the fishing communities would have been able to rely on his vote in the Lobby this evening. In the past, they could have relied on the support of Alick Buchanan-Smith, the late right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside. I somehow doubt whether the current hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) will carry out his responsibilities towards the fishing communities with the dedication shown by his late predecessor.

We have seen the transformation of the hon. Member for Dumfries from a Back-Bench Member from Scotland, concerned about the fishing community and prepared to match that concern with his vote in the Lobby on many occasions, to a Minister who, I am certain, has grave private doubts about the scope of the Bill and the manner in which it is being introduced. He must also have real concerns about the anger and frustration that the legislation has provoked in fishing communities. I hope that Conservative Members who represent fishing communities will bear the trials of the Minister in mind when they vote on these criticial amendments.

It is essential that hon. Members do not simply respond to pressure in the fishing communities by turning up in the Chamber and making a speech. The issue will come to the crunch shortly in the Lobbies. I hope that all hon. Members who are genuinely concerned about the future of the fishing industry will match that concern with their behaviour in the Lobbies.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): My opposition to the Bill is pretty well known. I believe that I have been joined by an increasing number of my colleagues who, perhaps rather late in the day, have woken up to the significance of the measure. Three Conservative Members voted against the Bill on Second Reading. In this debate, sufficient hon. Members have spoken to voice their own deep unease and the passionate anger felt by the fishermen against the Bill. That anger was demonstrated in last week's mass lobby to which reference has already been made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) has done the industry, the House and the Government a great service by tabling his new clause. The other amendments in the group have been similarly beneficial. I believe that the House will be in difficulty later this evening. Clearly, the Government have listened to many of the representations that many of us have made with some vigour over the past few weeks and days and, literally, over the past few hours.

I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will approach the group of amendments in a helpful and constructive mood. That will present difficulties, because we will have to take a decision bearing in mind what he says. We must decide whether we accept his undertakings or whether we will support the new clause. I will say only that I will listen with the utmost care to what my hon. Friend says, in the same way that I have listened to what right hon. and hon. Members have said during the debate.

I am absolutely convinced that the Government have got the message from the Conservative Back Benches, from the Opposition Benches and from the industry, that the Bill in its present form is absolutely and utterly unacceptable. The reasons why it is unacceptable were rehearsed by myself and others on Second Reading, but they are to a large extent encapsulated in this group of amendments.

The Bill is unacceptable because of the unilateral nature of the action that the Government propose to take. There is also what I regard as an affront to parliamentary practice and scrutiny. If the Bill is not amended, the Government will have a blank cheque. Elsewhere, I have used the analogy that the proposal in the Bill is rather like the Chancellor of the Exchequer desiring to take powers in a mere enabling Bill to raise tax to any level that he saw fit without further recourse to Parliament.

When my hon. Friend the Minister of State replies to the debate, I hope that he will address some of those criticisms. At this stage, I will say only that I will listen to him with the greatest care and interest.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I support new clause 1, but I want to address my remarks to amendment No. 18. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) mentioned the problem of Irish fishermen competing with their southern Irish colleagues. Welsh fishermen also compete with their southern Irish colleagues. On the day of the mass lobby, I spoke to shell fishermen from Milford Haven and the west coast of Wales. They share their fishing grounds with their Irish colleagues. They lay their pots virtually alongside those of their Irish equivalents. They wanted to know how the Government could justify their being prevented from carrying out their lawful business when their Irish colleagues were allowed to fish on the same grounds. They believed that that was nonsense.

Undoubtedly, the Bill is discriminatory between the Welsh and Irish and, as other hon. Members have said, between the British, French and Spanish. It was very interesting that, the day after the mass lobby, the skipper of a French trawler was arrested in the western approaches off Milford Haven and his vessel brought into a Pembroke dock. He was fined £2,000 for fishing with undersized nets. That was his second offence; he was cautioned the first time. Although that skipper was prosecuted in a British court, he was prosecuted under EC regulations. The level playing field or nice mill pond applied, and it was accepted that there was no discriminatory element in that case.

We must ask whether the Bill is fair, whether it is reasonable and whether it will be effective. The answer to those questions is no in every case. It is not fair to the Welsh shell fishermen who compete unfairly with their Irish colleagues. It is certainly not reasonable to expect British fishermen to try to earn a living when their continental colleagues regularly catch what is basically the British fishermen's livelihood. It certainly will not be effective because, as we heard today and in Standing Committee, there will be an intensification of effort.

My shell fishermen have told me that they currently work eight or 12 hours a day before returning home. However, if they are to be restricted, they will work 24 hours a day or for 48 hours on the trot before returning to port. The reduction in effort will not be effective.

I remind the Minister that, although I am sure that the Government received correct legal advice at the time of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 in which, with the general support of the House, they tried to outlaw the quota hoppers, the legal advice was that the legislation was not discriminatory and that the Government would be able to get it through the European Court. However, that was proved to be wrong. The European Court found the legislation to be discriminatory because it stated that the Spanish, French or Belgians could not own British fishing boats without those companies having a majority of

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British directors. It was therefore discriminatory. I have not sought legal advice, but I try to be logical about such matters. Surely the Bill is discriminatory because it says to British fishermen, "You can't do that, but your Irish, French and Spanish colleagues can." That is why it is a bad Bill, and this is why we shall support amendment No. 18.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I have in my constituency 88 miles of Devon coastline, probably one of the most beautiful areas in the country. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) was good enough to come down to Brixham port and say some helpful words. I am grateful to him for that. That coastline supports not only Brixham fishermen who are beam trawlermen but fishermen from Dartmouth and Salcombe who are involved in the crab and lobster industries. I speak as a Member who has been following the deliberations very closely.

I pay great tribute to my hon. Friends the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who have been extremely courteous and have considered every possible way to help me and the fishermen of south Devon. I should like publicly to record how grateful I am to them for their help and assistance in respect of a difficult Bill.

On Friday, I tabled two amendments, which have not been selected but which would have slotted in between amendments Nos. 26 to 28. They would have had an effect similar to that of new clause 1 and would have delayed the operation of the legislation for two months rather than one month. My amendments insisted that the House had an opportunity to delay an affirmative order by a further month, which would have given enough time for the other countries concerned to get their house in order.

My concern is twofold. First, I do not believe that action on our Government's part should in any way damage any fishermen's livelihood unless we are satisfied that the French, Spanish and Dutch have done something not identical but similar, which fits into the package that the Bill proposes. Secondly, no fishermen should have his boat tied up and be told that he cannot fish on certain days unless something similar happens in France, Holland and Spain. Unless the Minister of State can say something on those two points, Conservative Members will be placed in serious difficulties.

My hon. Friends have given me every opportunity to explain my problem to them, and I again pay tribute to their courtesy and the time that they have spent trying to explain their problem to me. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will satisfy the House on both points. If he does so, we shall be delighted, because he will have achieved a tremendous victory. If he cannot do that, he will place many Conservative Members in some personal difficulties. I hope that the message is loud and clear to my hon. Friend.

6.30 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I sense a carefully stage-managed situation arising. Conservative Members have been so shocked by the pressure of their fishermen's hostility to the Bill that they are now having to stage an elaborate scene by putting demands to the Minister, some of which he might or might not grant, so that they can then go away and say, "We have won a great victory; great concessions were made."

That will not be enough, because the principle of the Bill is bad. The Bill will not work. It will not be accepted by the industry. Indeed, it is a dictatorial imposition on the industry. It is not good enough for Conservative Members to manufacture a synthetic crisis to put pressure on the Minister and then say that they are satisfied with small crumbs that they might get from his table.

New clause 1 is a sensible measure, but it does not go far enough, because the principle of annual renewal allows us to bring pressure on the Minister between annual renewals to do what he should have done in the first place and take other measures which would more effectively reduce pressure on fish stocks. It is only if that is the basis of operations on new clause 1 that it is acceptable.

The heart of the matter is quite simple. The Minister is imposing that dictatorial measure on the fishing industry because of his failure to introduce a decommissioning scheme. He has denied that, but the July-August 1992 issue of "France-Eco-Pece" states that Commissioner Marin himself says:

"the British face the problem that their fishing grounds are badly depleted and Britain is the one country in the Community that has the worst problem with too large a fishing fleet. Had they only reduced their fleet, say five years ago, as did many other countries, the situation would not be so critical today."

Had the Government introduced a decommissioning scheme when we were asking them to introduce one, they would not have had to impose the measure on the industry. The new clause might be useful if it allows us to press for an improvement in the decommissioning scheme —a bigger and better decommissioning scheme—which will act urgently on the problem. The one that the Minister has produced as the quid pro quo for the measure is not good enough and will not have a substantial enough effect on the size of the fleet.

The next point that the measure allows us to argue for is more technical conservation measures. It is important to know that they are the best way of approaching the conservation problem. They are far more effective in conserving stocks, which is what the Bill is supposed to be about—it will not have that effect, but it is supposed to.

It is important to note that the industry has been pressing more energetically for technical measures and proper conservation than the Department itself. The list supplied by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations includes the increased selectivity of nets, the one-net rule, bans on the twin-rig trawl, bans on the French dredge, restrictions on the shape of nets to ensure the escape of juvenile fish, bans on industrial fishing, and a licensing scheme for shellfish. The industry even wanted a higher mesh size in the Irish sea—namely, 80 mm—than the 75 mm that the Government imposed.

The industry has been at the forefront of pressing for those technical conservation measures, which are far better. Let us have an advance down that path, because it will apply far more directly to the cause of the problem than the overfishing that is decimating stocks by catching fish that are too small. Let us therefore have the power to press for that every year through new clause 1. It allows us to advance those two causes, which are far more important than the Minister's Bill. The measure is not enough; therefore, we need to go to the extent set out in amendment No. 18.

It is a bad Bill. It will be acceptable only if it is felt to apply fairly to all competing fishing industries. It is no use stopping British fishermen going to sea if stocks are to be pillaged by effectively controlling efforts by competitor countries in the EC. What answer is that to the conservation problem if it just leaves the ground open to fishing fleets which have not applied the same effective technical measures as our industries? They have been backward in that respect.

I hope that if the Minister makes a minor concession Conservative Members will not go away feeling that they have done something for the industry. The only concession that will be acceptable—the only concession that their fishermen will accept—is an assurance that there is to be a level playing field, or a level fishing ground. Amendment No. 18 would provide for this measure to come into effect only at the same time as similar measures to restrain fishing fleets competing for the same stocks and, in the process, over fishing. That is the only thing that will satisfy the fishing industry, which demonstrated in force in London last week to impress on Members of Parliament, on both sides of the House, the concern from fishing constituencies.

Our legislation must come into force at the same time as similar measures introduced by our European competitors. The Minister himself has said that there can be proper conservation only with the consent and support of the fishing industry. Well, this Bill does not have that consent and support; it has the total hostility of the fishing industry. It will secure the consent of the fishing industry only if that industry feels that it is fair, if similar provisions apply to other people who are doing far more damage because of the lack of effective control in their home ports.

What about the clashes between French fishermen and British fishermen in the south-west? What about the clashes between Grimsby fishermen and Dutch beam trawlers in the North sea? Are we to say that our only answer is to prevent our vessels from putting to sea, so that they will not be attacked by French and Dutch vessels? Is it the Government's case that, if there is no competition, the problem will go away? That is no answer. It is not even a proper means of securing conservation.

If the Minister is to make the case that the Bill will help conservation, let him see that that is done in the only effective way—by ensuring that such measures apply to all. That is why amendment No. 18 should be supported. If Conservative Members who have uttered such professions of attachment to and support for the fishing industry have any guts or principles, they will support it. That is the only way to make the Bill acceptable to the industry, which regards a days-at-sea limitation as a dictatorial imposition. No such provision applies to any other industry, and in this case the proposal is to apply without compensation. It is very unfair. Only agreement to what we are proposing will make this Bill acceptable as a last, desperate measure.

6.45 pm

Mr. Keth Mans (Wyre): I do not want to rehash the arguments on new clause 1 and amendment No. 18 that we have heard already, except to say that they relate to the two parts of the Bill that concern me most—the wideness of its powers, and the fact that the other European Community members who are involved in fishing will not necessarily have to abide by the same rules.

The latter point relates particularly to the situation in Fleetwood. The majority of vessels fishing in the Irish sea belong to fleets that are not British. Thus, any measures that we might take to control our efforts by way of a time scheme will be much less effective there than in the North sea and elsewhere. That fact alone makes the measure even less acceptable to British fishermen, particularly those from my port of Fleetwood. They know that, even if they put up with the restrictions, the conservation effect will be very much reduced by the fact that many other member states use other methods, which, according to the evidence of the specialist advisers to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, are less effective. For that reason alone, we need to do more, and amendment No. 18 and new clause 1 go quite a long way down that road.

We need a statutory procedure by which vessels on which this Bill will have a detrimental effect can appeal against the Minister's decision. In addition, any provisions for restrictions over and above those that the fishing fleet, particularly vessels off the west coast, had to endure during 1991 will have to be introduced by way of amendable affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament. That is the only way forward. That is the only way of ensuring that we can see for ourselves the detailed proposals of Ministers to deal with the problem of conservation. I agree with many hon. Members on both sides of the House that the powers in the Bill are far too wide.

If we go down this road, we shall give our own Ministers a bit more leverage in Brussels. We shall be able to insist on equivalent action by other member states fishing in our waters and nearby. I refer, for example, to the Spaniards, the French and the Dutch. We shall be able to say to the Commission that we are prepared to reduce our effort, but only if we see that others are taking equally effective measures. Without a commitment of that sort, I cannot see how the objective—the conservation of stocks—will be achieved, especially in the Irish sea, where the majority of fish are taken by foreign vessels.

New clause 1 and amendment No. 18 have a lot going for them, and I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure us along the lines I have suggested. In fishing matters, we and other European member states must be treated on an equal footing. Before the provisions of this Bill are enacted, we must have some idea of the particular proposals that the Government intend to bring forward.

Mr. Steen: My hon. Friend has mentioned the British register of ships. Is he aware that it includes Spanish, French and Dutch ships catching our quota? Does he have a view on that?

Mr. Mans: I am fully aware of that fact. We shall have to find a way of ensuring effectiveness if those vessels decide to tie up in foreign ports. If our quota is to be effective in the case of vessels from other countries fishing that quota, we shall have to find a means of ensuring that those vessels abide by the same rules.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The lobbying by fishermen from all over the country demonstrated the depth of real anger and concern in the industry about the provisions of this Bill, and it has met with some success. As the fishermen see the concern being expressed by Conservative Members—much of it not expressed on Second Reading—they can feel that they have achieved something, and to that extent they can congratulate themselves.

[Mr. Matthew Taylor]

However, expressions of concern are not the same as delivery of the goods. We shall wait to hear the Minister's reply—what it is that has caused the buzz of excitement on the Government Benches. Or is it a buzz of concern as Conservative Members feel trapped in a dilemma somewhere between career and action?

I fear that the Minister will simply offer reassurance. Yet we need to have measures included in the Bill to guarantee that the actions for which we have asked will be taken. The fishermen I have met will not be reassured by anything less than measures written into the Bill. We shall see what the Minister has to say.

Anyone who attended the rally in central hall and saw the black and gold Cornish rugby shirts spread across the audience will appreciate that the concern in Cornwall about the Bill probably generated the greatest show of strength in London on an issue of this nature since the tin mines were threatened and the tin miners marched through the streets of London. The attendance from Cornwall was extraordinary, and I shall explain in a moment why the fishermen, particularly from Cornwall, turned out in such numbers.

The new clauses and amendments in this group will not achieve changes to the Bill that would lead me to vote for it on Third Reading. They do not tackle the basic inequity of the Bill or its basic faults, but at least they would provide a moment at which the Executive could be made answerable to the House on their detailed proposals. That is better than simply giving Ministers powers to go away and act without ever having to answer to the representatives of fishermen—or, indeed, the fishermen themselves.

The Bill provides for no effective consultation. Indeed, there was no effective consultation about it. The measures in the Bill were published even before the consultation period was complete, yet the Minister resists having to come back to the House when the detailed measures are introduced.

The Bill contains no effective conservation measure. It will lead to more intensive fishing. It will certainly lead to other countries stepping up their fishing effort. The Bill will not be effective as a conservation measure. If the Minister believes that it will be effective, he should come back to the House and explain it when the detail is before the House.

The Bill will bankrupt many in the industry. It will bankrupt many owners of small boats, who have fished for generations. I understand that, in Mevagissey in my constituency, many of the boats are already up for sale. The fishermen do not believe that the boats can be viable or that they can earn an income. That is in an area where there is literally no hope of alternative employment for the great majority of the men who at present go out fishing. Yet the Minister is not prepared to come back to the House to justify the detailed measures which those men believe could put them out of work and make them no longer able to support their families.

There is a lack of measures comparable to the days-at-sea regulations in other European countries. The fishermen feel that they will simply surrender their livelihood to fishermen in other countries. They feel that they will surrender, not preserve, the fish stock. Yet the Minister is not prepared to come back to the House to debate in detail the provisions that he will seek to make in future.

Amendment No. 18 contains the further proviso that none of the conservation measures makes sense unless other European countries do the same, and therefore the Government should not take them. I understand that the Minister will seek comparable action from other European countries. I make it clear that it would not be acceptable to the industry or the House if by comparable action the Minister meant conservation measures such as decommissioning or gear changes. It would not be acceptable if other countries took such measures while we imposed the days-at-sea regulations.That would not be comparable. The impact on individual fishermen would be to bankrupt fishermen in Britain but help those in other countries. I hope that the Minister will be clear about what he means by "comparable" internationally.

The Bill will never meet the needs of the industry, conservation or equity, but new clause 1 and amendment No. 18 will at least provide a chance of equity between countries and enable the House to bring the Minister to book on the detailed proposals. New clause 1 and amendment No. 18 are important. If the Minister seriously intends to take a big step towards achieving the aim of the amendments, he should undertake to amend the Bill at a later stage so that hon. Members do not have to rely on reassurances which may not be delivered in practice by the Minister's successors, even if the Minister genuinely intends to deliver them.

Hon. Members should bear it in mind that, if it was announced that our income was to be cut for every day that the Government decided that we should stay at home for our extended summer recess, no matter what Opposition and Conservative Members said, there might be more disagreement about the length of the recess. Of course Ministers would not expect to get away with that, and they should not expect to get away with treating fishermen in the same way.

Mr. Moate: The new clause proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) suggests that the Bill should be subject to annual renewal. That shows how extreme the Government's proposal is. It is extraordinary to propose that the British fishing fleet should be tied up in port for much of its time. Many of us can recall the impact of the three-day week in other contexts.

Mr. Curry *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Moate: My hon. Friend the Minister reacts against that, but that is the proposal. I do not suggest that it is an unacceptable proposal—the next interesting fact is that virtually every fisherman to whom I have spoken accepts in principle the need for further conservation and effort control. But the proposal is extraordinary.

No one should be in any doubt about the far-reaching nature of the days at sea regulations. It is even more extraordinary that we should ask British vessels to be tied up in port while we do not place similar restrictions on our common market partners and other fishing vessels fishing in our waters and therefore often taking from the British quota. That is why I have added my name to amendment No. 18, which has been taken with the new clause 1 for the debate.

Amendment No. 18 argues for a level playing field. The British fishing industry accepts the need for conservation. There seems to be universal agreement that conservation measures must be taken, but surely it is self-evident that we

shall not achieve conservation of British stocks without the full-hearted co-operation of the British fishing industry. It is surely also self-evident that that climate does not prevail as we reach this point in the legislation.

It would have been much better if we had paused for further consultation with the industry and sought agreement on how to implement conservation measures. We are taking the Report stage today without a great deal of time to consider the amendments that have been tabled or to discuss with the industry how best to implement the Bill.

I accept that there have been rumours of efforts to meet some of the genuine concerns of the House, but unless we can translate that concern into positive legislative intent, it is extremely difficult to respond other than by saying that we must have it in the Bill.

Amendment No. 18 is sensible. It might not be legally perfect—I am aware that Governments are in the habit of saying that the drafting of an amendment lacks something so they cannot accept it—but the Bill has a long way to go. My hon. Friend could accept the amendment, or he could accept the principle behind it and incorporate it in legislation in another place. I know that he wants to be helpful, so can he assure us that he accepts the principle of the amendment? Otherwise—*[Interruption.]* If my hon. Friend says that he accepts the principle of the amendment—

Mr. Austin Mitchell: He has not said that he accepts the principle of the amendment.

Mr. Moate: If he cannot accept the principle, those of us who signed the amendment in good faith will have no choice but to support it.

Understanding what is at stake, I hope that my hon. Friend will do his utmost to help the House and the fishing industry. There is a genuine desire to make further conservation measures work, but he is asking too much of British fishermen if he thinks that he can apply days-at-sea regulations so that British vessles are tied up while French, Dutch, Spanish and other nations' vessels are free to fish in our fishing grounds. If he does not accept the truth of what I and many of my hon. Friends are saying, he will undermine the principle of co-operation.

7 pm

I share much of the scepticism about whether the measure will work. There has been no proper explanation of how days at sea will be allocated, and whether they will apply to pressure stocks only or also to non-pressure stocks. My hon. Friend is asking too much of the industry by demanding its wholehearted co-operation, until we have had such an explanation.

I want my hon. Friend the Minister of State to tell us from the Dispatch Box that he fully accepts the principle of the amendment and, if he cannot say so, the House should say it by voting.

Mr. Curry: I did not wish to speak when there was such a sense of anticipation in the Chamber. Rarely has the main picture been preceded by so many trailers, but I had better be careful about what I say.

Effectively, we have had a Second Reading debate, and I shall not rehearse the arguments aired on Second Reading and in Committee; this is not the place to do so. Hon. Members were insistent about some matters and I shall try to reply briefly, so that hon. Members and my hon. Friends are satisfied.

People are concerned about how the scheme will work in practice. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) said that his fishermen do not want to work on Sunday. I hope that I gave him a satisfactory answer when he asked about that. Nothing in the Bill will force them to fish on Sunday. The idea is that fishermen will be able to choose which days they fish. There will be no Government prescription and no blocks of allocations for one coast, one port or one stock. All fishermen will have the choice of when they fish, within the framework that has been set. I have said so before, and I wish to make that clear to the right hon. Gentleman.

I have heard what my hon. Friends have had to say about their great concerns, and many fishermen have visited me in my office. Shortly before the debate started, some fishermen from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) visited me to express their concerns about the proposed measure.

I recognise that some of my hon. Friends have special problems—when I think back to their remarks, I find it difficult to think of one of them who does not have a special problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) mentioned Fleetwood. That port has problems, because it has many old vessels. Fishermen from Fleetwood fish in the Irish sea, which also has problems. We have a 74 per cent. stake in herring in the Irish sea, a 33·5 per cent. stake in cod, a 38 per cent. stake in whiting, a 48 per cent. stake in plaice and approximately a 58 per cent. stake in sole. Although those stocks are not phenomenal, they are none the less important, and I recognise my hon. Friend's problems.

I want to dispel the idea that there will be a gigantic tie-up and that fishermen face a 30 per cent. cut in days at sea this year, followed by another 30 per cent. and then another. It will not work like that.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Curry: No, I want to conclude this part of the debate.

I understand the problems that my hon. Friends have explained. I know that they appreciate that I have to negotiate with the Community. I have to come up with a target, and we have to deliver it, as has every other member country. I have listened to what has been said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) argued with great force, and my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat) put the east coast view with particular cogency. My hon. Friends the Members for Shorham (Mr. Stephen) and for South Hams represent the south-west. I recognise that that area has a mixed fishery, which does not have a preponderance of certain stocks, as is the case with the North sea and the west of Scotland.

From the outset, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) has taken an honourable position over the Bill. I do not agree with him, but we have had a friendly and constructive disagreement on the issue, and I hope that we may at least build a few piers towards each other before the day is out.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) represents another entirely different fishery, which shows the problems involved in trying to produce

[Mr. Curry]

regulations which will not merely achieve a level playing field throughout the Community but will be seen to be fair among the various British fishing communities, which are often in competition. We all face that problem.

I recognise that the concerns that have been expressed have a twin source: first, the effort control regime and its impact on the fishing industry; and, secondly the use of ministerial power, which is a constitutional concern.

The new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth seeks to tackle those concerns. I shall therefore make a proposal that I hope will satisfy my hon. Friends that I am trying to respond to those concerns. The Government have spelt out clearly their intentions in relation to 1993—a freeze, based on 1991 track records. No one can say that that was not fully debated on Second Reading and in Committee. I have amended the Bill as promised, to introduce statutory tribunals to deal with disputes.

I propose that Ministers should use the powers in the Bill, as envisaged, to freeze fishing effort in 1993. I also propose that Ministers should be obliged to seek an affirmative resolution in both Houses of Parliament before they use their powers to reduce effort below the level set for 1993. That meets the widespread concern expressed in the House.

We should not introduce such a resolution unless we are satisfied that member states which share our fishery stocks are taking effective steps to meet their multi-annual guidance programme targets. I therefore undertake that, subject to my hon. Friend's agreement to withdraw his new clause, the Government will table an amendment in another place to insert those provisions in the Bill. I hope that the House will feel that I have sought to heed its concerns in that regard.

Mr. Trotter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for making that statement and welcome it, although I and many other hon. Members will regret that it was not made earlier in the proceedings on the Bill. He has taken on board the fears expressed throughout the country about the future of the industry under the proposals before the House.

My hon. Friend must bear in mind that he and his colleagues will have to work with the industry, and it is essential that there should be a relationship which makes effective——

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that I have been following the proceedings with care. I am not sure whether the Minister has sat down and the hon. Member for Tynemouth is exercising his right of reply, or whether it is an intervention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I understood that the Minister had sat down.

Mr. Curry *indicated assent.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: He is nodding his head in agreement.

Mr. Trotter: The Minister will have to work with the industry and there must be seen to be a regime which is effective and fair. That is not the way in which the Bill, as originally presented to the House, was viewed.

Mr. Salmond *rose——*

Mr. Trotter: I shall not give way.

There has now been a clear undertaking that it is the intention to freeze fishing effort for next year at the 1991 level. My hon. Friend said that that had been made clear from the beginning, but I do not believe that to be the case.

I welcome the fact that he now accepts the need, in principle, for the House to be consulted before he comes forward with any further developments.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose——*

Mr. Trotter: No.

No further reductions should be made unless other countries take steps to ensure that there is fair play.

It is fortunate that we have the presidency of the Council of Ministers, because it will take some time before this Bill is enacted. It must go through the Upper House, where it will be amended on the basis of what my hon. Friend has agreed to tonight. I hope that this country will take the opportunity presented by our presidency to ensure that similar action is taken by other countries and we have an equivalent footing against which our industry and the Government's measures can be judged.

On the basis of the undertaking to amend the Bill during its passage through the Upper House, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Hon. Members: No.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 312.

Division No. 67] **[7.13 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene	Canavan, Dennis
Ainger, Nick	Cann, Jamie
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Allen, Graham	Chisholm, Malcolm
Alton, David	Clapham, Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Armstrong, Hilary	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Clelland, David
Ashton, Joe	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Austin-Walker, John	Coffey, Ann
Barnes, Harry	Cohen, Harry
Barron, Kevin	Connarty, Michael
Battle, John	Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Bayley, Hugh	Corbett, Robin
Beckett, Margaret	Corbyn, Jeremy
Beggs, Roy	Cousins, Jim
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	Cox, Tom
Bell, Stuart	Cryer, Bob
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Cummings, John
Bennett, Andrew F.	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Benton, Joe	Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Bermingham, Gerald	Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Berry, Dr. Roger	Dafis, Cynog
Betts, Clive	Dalyell, Tam
Blair, Tony	Darling, Alistair
Blunkett, David	Davidson, Ian
Boateng, Paul	Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Boyce, Jimmy	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Boyes, Roland	Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Bradley, Keith	Denham, John
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Dewar, Donald
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*	Dixon, Don
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Dobson, Frank
Burden, Richard	Donohoe, Brian H.
Byers, Stephen	Dowd, Jim
Callaghan, Jim	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*	Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*	Eagle, Ms Angela
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Eastham, Ken

Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1

LICENSING OF FISHING BOATS

Mr. Channon: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 1, line 7, at end insert:

'(1A) (a) In paragraph (a) of subsection (1), after the word "boats", there shall be inserted the words "of more than 17 metres overall"; and

(b) in paragraph (b), after the word "boats", there shall be inserted the words "of more than 17 metres overall.".'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 8, in page 1, line 10, at beginning insert

'in respect of boats of over 17 metres overall,'.

Government amendment No. 10.

Mr. Channon: The amendment deals with the inshore fleet and, in particular, with a group of fishermen in Leigh-on-Sea in my constituency and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). This is the first occasion on which I have intervened in a fishing debate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber, including those congregating at the back of the Chair, please do so quietly? That will enable the rest of us to hear the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon).

Mr. Channon: The fishermen in my constituency who are particularly concerned about the Bill and would be helped by the amendment catch Dover sole, mainly in the Thames estuary, and they are already under considerable threat. They work on small boats, which usually have skipper-owners, and they do not travel enormous distances. The amount of pressure stocks that they can fish is already controlled. They are limited to about 40 stone of sole per month.

The size of the boats is limited under the rules of the Kent and Essex sea fisheries committee. That is why I propose that boats of less than 17 m should be exempt from the requirements of the Bill, or at least from its days-at-sea provisions. The livelihoods of these small, traditional fishermen are under threat and their conditions will be made much worse by the Bill.

To make a living, those fishermen must catch other fish than sole, which is their main catch. In particular, they go fishing for white weed, to which I referred in an

intervention on an earlier amendment. White weed is a type of white coral, which is an extremely popular decoration, particularly in Holland. There is a considerable market for white weed, which they catch because their sole quotas are insufficient to enable them to make a living.

As the Bill and the proposed regulations stand, the number of days at sea which fishermen will be entitled to fish will be based on their fishing effort in 1991. But in 1991, all the fishing for white weed, eels and shellfish required no landing declaration. How, then, will they be able to prove that they were fishing on those days? Their allowable days will be based on an entirely false premise. I think that I heard my hon. Friend the Minister give an assurance on that point when we were debating new clause 1. Perhaps he will now spell out the precise situation, having had more time to consider the matter. Incidentally, I am grateful to him for the fact that there is to be a tribunal if no agreement can be reached with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

7.30 pm

The Government should exempt those small boats altogether or, as a minimum, excuse them from the days-at-sea restriction. One of my constituents fished for sole for 61 days and for white weed for about 120 days in 1991. In future, his days at sea will be based on the 61 days and he will get no credit for the days that he spent fishing for white weed. That is most unfair and the system should not be adopted. If it has to be adopted, as an absolute minimum it should be based on an average of five years rather than simply on 1991, and days at sea spent fishing for non-notifiable species should be included.

As experts on fishing will know, 1991 was a particularly bad year for fishermen in my part of the country. They were extremely short of cod, but they will be penalised for the fact that they did much less cod fishing than usual in 1991. In general, my fishermen fish for only part of the day and rarely go out to sea for 24 hours; in many other parts of the country, enormous fishing boats go out to sea around the clock. Small fishermen will be particularly hit by the measures.

I have seen what the Kent and Essex sea fisheries committee says about the Bill, and I expect that my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) has seen it, too. It says that the package of new measures which the Government are introducing appears to represent a significant threat to the inshore fishing industry in the committee's district, for reasons that I outlined. The committee says that if the Government's proposal to control effort and days at sea is accepted in its original form, it could effectively put out of business a large portion of the 10 m plus boats working from our district. It will certainly extremely curtail their current efforts and, in the long run, have an adverse effect on the value of those vessels.

The matter is serious, not to an enormous number of fishermen but to people from traditional families of fishermen who have been engaged in the fishing business for many years. Will my hon. Friend look at the matter again and see whether he can exempt the 10 m to 17 m boats? If he cannot go that far—I understand his difficulties, because those boats represent some 36 per cent. of the fishing fleet—I hope that he will meet some of my points.

All sorts of anomalies will arise under the Bill. For example, boats that use nets will leave their nets out and go to sea less frequently and more and more fish will die. Those fishermen will not be particularly inconvenienced, but the measure will be bad for conservation. The measure is bad for small fishermen in my constituency and the constituencies of some of my hon. Friends in Kent and Essex. I hope that the Government can do something to meet the genuine fears of fishermen who live in my constituency.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I hope that the Minister will be able to make a concession, because he can concede very little in the Bill.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) so ably said, our constituents in Southend are extremely worried about the Bill, because there seems to be little that we can do about it. We have just discussed the possibility of a level playing field. We said that if our boats have to restrict the number of days, why could not the same rules apply to French boats? The Minister explained that, sadly, absolutely nothing can be done about it because of European law. Although I appreciate that that is a problem for politicians, the fact that we can do nothing about anything is a problem for all concerned. We can do nothing about matters such as unemployment and interest rates and the difficulty for those engaged in the fishing business is even greater. They see the possibility of a whole new bureaucracy and restrictions, and no good coming out of them.

Will the Minister answer a simple question: what would he lose if he accepted the excellent amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West? It has been suggested that he make a concession on the number of boats. We are told that about a third of the boats are 17 m and below, but surely, as a part of the total fishing catch in any year, that is an insignificant number. We are not discussing the large boats that catch vast numbers of fish but a very small industry. If, by any chance, those small boats were to overfish, they would suffer the consequences.

The Minister should try to imagine the nonsensical bureaucracy through which the fishermen of Southend will have to go. It is obvious that we cannot base the number of their days at sea on the 1991 catch, because the fact that they engage in all kinds of fishing means that the information does not exist. They will probably have to start filling in forms, signing sworn statements, go to a tribunal and then appeal against the tribunal. If the tribunal appeal does not work, they may then be able to appeal to the Minister. The Minister may even find that some brave fishermen in Southend—there are plenty of those—will want to go to the High Court for a judicial review. What is the point of all that? How does anyone gain?

We know that there is a serious problem of overfishing by certain large boats, but the small fishermen gain nothing by going through that absurd nonsense. It will mean getting people to estimate valid days on the basis of what they think the situation is. While they are going before tribunals, filling in forms and discussing the matter with their colleagues, the French boats will be fishing in the same waters with no restrictions. How does that make sense? How is it fair? When people who do not study all the laws and procedures of Parliament see a measure passed which seems to be silly, costly and unfair, they will become extremely angry.

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

Will the Minister consider making a concession on this matter? What would be lost? The small 17 m boats could not rush round, kill vast numbers of fish and ruin the fishing industry. They simply do not have the capacity to do so; they make only a small contribution, to judge by their logbooks. It would be sensible to have an exemption for them. I have heard no argument against one. If, instead of allowing fishermen to go about their business, we make them fill in forms, go before tribunals and through all that costly, silly nonsense, that will be pointless.

Because of their enthusiasm for the EC, Labour Members will be well aware that we can do nothing about most of the measures in the Bill, because the EC has taken over and the power no longer rests here. However, the Minister could make a decision on this measure; the concession would do no damage, but would simply relieve fishermen in Southend and other places of much unnecessary hassle, stress and paperwork.

I hope, therefore, that, in that small area where the Minister still has some power and influence, he will use that influence in the best interests of the fishing industry and the fishermen so ably represented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West. I assure my right hon. Friend that, come what may, the fishermen of Southend appreciate what he has argued for and hope that the Minister will listen.

Mr. Moate: I believe that Government amendment No. 10 is grouped with amendment No. 7. May I respond to that, but begin by expressing my thanks to my hon. Friend the Minister? I may sometimes appear to be unreasonable in response to some of his points and I apologise for that. On this occasion, he has been most helpful and I am grateful to him for the steps that he has taken to help us with regard to the vessels measuring under 10 m. We discussed the matter at length in Committee and put forward clear arguments that, to apply days-at-sea regulations to small vessels, particularly those measuring under 10 m, would be extraordinarily difficult and unproductive. In effect, my hon. Friend had already conceded that by saying that it was not his desire to apply the regulations to the under 10 m vessels. None the less, the powers are there.

In response to our arguments in Committee the Minister helpfully said:

> "We are not about to extend the restrictions. I will have a full process of consultation with the industry and I will give the House an opportunity to comment on the course of action that we then propose to take."—*[Official Report, Standing Committee D,* 2 July 1992; c. 183.]

I hope that I am not quoting out of context. Clearly, if the Ministry feels that there is a need to extend the days-at-sea regulations to the under 10 m vessels, there will be another consultation process with the industry.

The Minister has gone further in Government amendment No. 10, for which I thank him. In effect, it says that there will be a further commencement order before any such rules are applied to the under 10m craft. He has been immensely helpful in saying that those resolutions will be subject to the affirmative procedure in both Houses of Parliament. That guarantees the industry further opportunities for consultation and Parliament further opportunities for debate.

I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for those assurances. I hope and believe that they will be welcome to the industry and will reassure many smaller fishermen who are genuinely worried about their livelihood. They had some reason to be worried, and here I come briefly to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) about the 17 m boats.

I do not know whether we can be described as riparian Members of Parliament, having constituencies on an estuary, but on a fine day I can see my right hon. Friend's constituency and he can see mine. He has 17 m boats but most of mine are under 10 m. None the less, in a couple of weeks' time they will be competing in a trawler race. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad to hear that support from the Front Bench. But that poses the question whether a day at sea in a trawler race would count against the number of days at sea permitted under the regulations. One hopes not, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would say certainly not.

Mr. Curry: I think the answer is that it depends what they do with their nets. If they keep their nets on board, the answer is positively no—if they are not fishing.

Mr. Moate: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He did not make such a helpful statement in Committee. He did not say that time spent at sea not fishing would not count against the days at sea permitted. That would mean that collecting white weed would presumably not count as fishing.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is seeking to lead me much further down the path. His question was whether if there was a trawler race it would count against days at sea. My response was that if it were a trawler race, it would not.

Mr. Moate: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I and some fishermen had understood that a vessel not tied up in port would be subject to inspection and perhaps challenged as being at sea. This is a particular problem with the 17 m vessels and vessels fishing in our estuarial areas. Very little of their time is spent fishing precious stocks. Much of their time is taken up with a range of other activities such as going for oysters, non-notifiable stocks or white weed, they may be on pleasure trips, carrying angler parties or engaging in trawler races. Because it is so difficult to find quota stocks in the estuary, much time is often spent looking for alternative sources of income. That is why I hope that we shall never have to apply these tough regulations to the 17 m vessels.

In Committee, my hon. Friend mentioned the Dutch days-at-sea regulations. I was informed that they applied only when their fishermen were fishing for quota stocks. When they were not, they were free to pursue other activities at sea. If my hon. Friend can confirm that our regulations will be applied with equal flexibility and common sense, many of the fears of the smaller fishermen will disappear, because they will know that they can carry out a range of other activities freely as long as they are not endangering quota stocks.

I support what my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West said about 17 m vessels. I repeat my thanks to my hon. Friend the Minister for his helpful and constructive response on smaller vessels. I hope that he can meet the point about 17 m vessels, exempt them altogether or at least demonstrate a great deal of flexibility and help in response to the valid points made by my right hon. Friend.

7.45 pm

Mr. Curry: I hope that I shall be able to help my right hon. and hon. Friends, to some extent at least. My right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) has introduced me to a new flora, white weed, which I did not expect to encounter in this debate and I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. One discovers things all the time. The answer to his question is that we are not interested in how much time is spent chasing white weed. That does not fall within the restrictions.

We are interested in the time that is spent fishing for fish. Fishermen engaged in activities other than fishing —for example, trips round the bay in a clearly definable period, fishing for white weed or ferrying people to an oil rig, an example that I have given before—could have their licence suspended for that period so that they would not then find themselves caught by the regulations. It is not our intention to deprive a fisherman of his due fishing entitlement.

My right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) referred to the relative unimportance of vessels under 17 m in the fleet. However, they are a significant part of the fleet, comprising 61 per cent. of licensed vessels in England and Wales, catching 30 per cent. of the landings by licensed vessels. They are not a negligible part. If we were to exempt those vessels, an enormous part of the burden would fall upon the larger vessels, which the industry would see to be unfair.

However, I think that I can help my right hon. and hon. Friends. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) said that I gave a clear undertaking in Committee that I would reflect upon the question of the 10 m and under 10 m vessels. He will recall that at that point I said that I would invite the House to take a further view on the extension of the system, but that I could not in Committee commit myself to an affirmative resolution of both Houses. This amendment provides for an affirmative resolution of both Houses. We shall invite the smaller boats to provide information which enables us to find out what they are doing. That is the important thing. We shall then go to a more detailed sample and collect information on what the smaller vessels are doing and the pressure that they represent on the stocks.

Everyone will accept that some vessels under 10 m are powerful machines. If we exempted vessels under 17 m, a new generation of boats at 16·99 m would be designed. We have experience of the so-called rule beaters, or metre beaters as my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham describes them. That would cause some difficulty. However, we shall investigate which vessels have an important effect upon stocks. If we were to bring them within the system, it would only be after the consent of both Houses of Parliament.

I emphasise that I cannot think of a circumstance in which we would try to bring in the whole of that class of vessels. We would seek to identify those that clearly had an appreciable impact upon the stocks. That said, the Sea Fish Industry Authority, which represents the industry, has pointed to the beginnings of pressure on shellfish stock, and there is some pressure from the industry for conservation measures. I do not want to rule that out, but it would be a separate measure not related to this. It would be in response to a particular demand from the industry as a result of pressures upon those stocks.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I have two interests in the matter, in that I represent a constituency which has a small number of inshore fishermen, and I am also concerned about small businesses. I trust that neither will be subjected to a lot of bureaucracy. Is it the intention that small boats and small fishing operations will be exempted from any regulations, and will there be an opportunity for extensive consultation before any regulations affecting smaller vessels are introduced?

Mr. Curry: We will of course consult widely before introducing any such regulations. We shall have to judge which vessels we eventually suggest to the House ought to be included, in the light of their impact on stocks. However, those that my hon. Friend described make only a small impact—and that would be true of such vessels no matter where they were. I do not imagine that cost-benefit analysis would indicate that it would make sense to bring them within the system. We are trying to include vessels that make an appreciable impact on stocks. I am confident that we shall be able to work out the track records, and I will write to my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West and to my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham about how we intend to do that, if that will be acceptable.

Mr. Channon: Our great worry is how one can prove that a vessel has been fishing when no landing declaration was required in 1991. I have many examples of daily returns to MAFF numbering fewer than one half the days fished because the balance was made up by effort on shellfish, eels and other species for which no landing declaration was required. How can that be overcome, to ensure a reasonable allocation in 1993?

Mr. Curry: The days-at-sea allocation will be made on the basis of 1991 track records, but they are not available for some vessels that landed TAC species only on some of their trips. All vessels over 17 m in length landing TAC species are required to submit logbook returns and landing declarations. Vessels over 10 m but not exceeding 17 m catching TAC species are not required to submit logbook returns for trips of less than 24 hours, but for such trips they are required to submit landing declarations or equivalent data. The declaration states the date of departure and of return, and therefore the days at sea can be calculated.

The appeals procedure will deal with those fishermen who feel that they are entitled to a larger allocation of days at sea, and it will make use of independent and specialist advice. I hope that we shall be able to settle disputes by discussion in the first instance. We intend to be sensible and flexible. Only if we are unable to reach agreement—and our fisheries inspectors are very experienced—will there be recourse to the statutory tribunal.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): While there will be information on pressure stock catches and landings, and on the number of days at sea, it appears that there will be no equivalent information about catches of other species, where there is no requirement to register them. How will that information be taken into account in formulating the permitted catch for such vessels?

Mr. Curry: We should be able to make some of the allocation involving non-TAC species by reference to voluntary returns. We may also find it possible to determine the days-at-sea allocation using a formula based

[Mr. Curry]

on days per tonne of fish landed calculated from voluntary returns. We looked hard at that aspect and accept that it is not straightforward. We know that none of this is straightforward, but we believe that, with common sense, we can work it out.

Sir Teddy Taylor: When my hon. Friend the Minister says that the authorities will be "sensible and flexible", does he envisage that a fisheries inspector will negotiate vessel by vessel, or that there be an overall allocation? Will individual vessel owners have to make their case to the inspector—and if they are not happy, will reference be made to a tribunal, might an appeal be lodged, and so on? Or will the Minister make an overall decision in respect of vessels fishing out of, for example, Scotland?

Mr. Curry: I made it clear that we intend to make individual allocations. We will not apply a blunt, blanket formula. I gave that pledge at the earliest stages of the Bill, and I am pleased to repeat it. In the light of my remarks, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West will feel able to withdraw his amendment, and that the House will accept the measure that I have suggested—which fulfils the obligation into which I entered in Committee.

Mr. Morley: I welcome the Minister's remarks in respect of boats under 10 m, which are an improvement on those made in Committee, when the issue was discussed in terms of an affirmative order. His proposal introduces some accountability in terms of any change that might apply to boats under 10 m. Some of them, however, will be caught by the restriction. Although the Minister has tried to be reasonable and helpful, there will be some hard cases to deal with in terms of track records, fishing activities, and which vessels should be covered by the rule. There will be some difficult borderline cases. Also, all the bureaucracy involved in administering the regulations will be imposed on small business people who are already subject to a lot of stress—not least in making their living.

We welcome the improvement to the original Bill, but we remain concerned about the provision's effects on vessels of under 10 m, and on the many thousands of small business people around our coasts.

Mr. Channon: Although we are against people having to go to tribunals, thank goodness they exist. If there is a manifest case of injustice, it can be dealt with. Let us hope that is a step forward. My hon. Friend the Minister said that he would write to me, but perhaps I may press him further. If I, or those more expert than I, find that small fishermen are still worried about the situation, will my hon. Friend receive a deputation of Southend fishermen, accompanied by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and myself, so that we may explain to him in detail the points of remaining concern?

Mr. Curry: If we can find a date, I will come to Southend.

Mr. Channon: I might even make my hon. Friend travel on the misery line. He can then kill two birds with one stone, and report on it to the Department of Transport. My hon. Friend the Minister has not fully met my points, but we have made some progress this evening. I therefore beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Morley: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 11, at end insert

', provided that it shall be a condition of any licence granted under this section which contains a condition under paragraph (c) above pursuant to those regulations that any days on which such a restriction applies should be spent at a port nominated in advance by the owner or charterer of the vessel.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 11 at end insert

'provided that it shall be a condition of any licence granted under this section which contains a condition under paragraph (c) above that a proportion of days spent in port pursuant to these regulations may, at the direction of the Minister, be taken in any United Kingdom port.'.

No. 17, in page 1, line 11, at end insert

'provided that, in respect of any British-registered vessel regardless of nationality of ownership, any day which is not to be spent at sea as a result of a condition under this paragraph shall be spent in a British port.'.

No. 19, in page 1, line 11, at end insert

'provided that the period of restriction shall not exceed 4 days in any month, or 48 days in any period of twelve months.'.

No. 20, in page 1, line 16, at end insert

'; but time spent in fishing for shellfish shall not count as time spent at sea'.

No. 21, in page 1, line 16, at end insert—

'(6C) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (6B) above, any day or part of a day during which a fishing vessel sails to its home port or to a port in which it is to undergo repair shall not count towards the number of days spent at sea as long as no fishing is undertaken during the voyage.'.

Mr. Morley: The House now has an opportunity to deal positively with the problem of foreign vessels that register as British and are therefore legally entitled to fish on the United Kingdom quota. The Government tried to tackle that problem, which has existed for some years, by amending the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, to try to restrict the vessels that went on the United Kingdom register according to the nationality of their ownership. That was doomed to failure, because of the Government's commitment to a single market within the European Community. It was never likely to stand up in court.

Although quota hoppers were stopped from fishing—the fishing was suspended—the owners of the vessels concerned brought a case against the British Government in the European Court on the ground of discrimination on the basis of nationality. They argued that, if the Community was moving towards an open market, it was wrong for a member state to discriminate in licence conditions on the ground of nationality rather than the business that was being pursued. They won that case.

What worries me, apart from the current position, is the fact that such people are entitled to claim damages from the Government for the fishing time that they have lost. What is even more serious is the possibility that they will try to claim a track record as well. When we were discussing days-at-sea restrictions, the Minister said that he would have to try to calculate a national track record to be spread among the various vessels, on the basis of the targets laid down for us by the multi-annual guidance programme of the European Community.

The problem of having quota hoppers on our register is twofold. First, they will inflate the fleet, because every vessel that appears on the United Kingdom register is

counted as a British fishing vessel, thus adding to our problem of over-capacity. Secondly, any problem involving retrospective track records may have to be included in the target figures that the Minister will have to meet. I shall be interested to hear his comments on that.

8 pm

Amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 16 provide the Minister with a helpful opportunity to try to deal with the problem of quota hoppers. They offer him three different ways of doing that. They present the principle of using licence conditions in a way that blatantly favours British vessels. I am not suggesting that any individual should be discriminated against on grounds of nationality; I am saying that, if people are registering their fishing boats as British, sailing under the red ensign and applying for British fishing licences, they must expect to obey the conditions of those licences, whatever they may be. If those conditions are laid down for all licence holders in the country, and if they are applied fairly and equally, it is clearly not a case of discrimination.

Some of the amendments suggest that, if days must be spent in port, they should be spent in a British port. It is stretching a point to allow vessels that are registered as British to be based in Spain, to operate in Spain, to land in Spain and to enter United Kingdom ports rarely if at all. There is no reason why such vessels should not adhere to the licence conditions that apply to our British ships.

There is also a practical implication—the question of enforcement. If vessels are operating from foreign ports, who is to make sure that the enforcement is carried out? Who will make sure that the vessels spend their days tied up in port as a condition of their British licences? How will the Ministry do that? We discussed the issue in Committee, but the Minister has not yet given us a satisfactory answer about how it could be done and what the cost would be. Will MAFF fishery inspectors be based in Spain, Holland and France to ensure that vessels abide by the regulations?

It should be said that, for various reasons, genuine British vessels operate from foreign ports. Equally, genuine British vessels may want to fulfil some of their days-at-sea restrictions in a foreign port: they may have entered into a contract for refitting, they may have been landing there or it may suit their operational arrangements. That is why one of the amendments gives the Minister the option of making it a licence condition for those who are to spend that time in port to nominate the port in advance to the Minister, so that he will know where they are. Even if it is a foreign port, it will be a nominated foreign port, which will make the measure much easier to enforce.

Mr. Curry: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that boat owners should notify Ministers of the port where they intend to spend the entire period for which they will be tied up, or does he mean that they may have to name the port in which they will spend each specific day?

Mr. Morley: In typically generous fashion, I am deliberately giving the Minister an opportunity to make such decisions for himself, thus allowing him the maximum flexibility. That not only helps the Minister, but deals with a serious problem. A number of vessels are still coming on to the register, and the Minister should spare a thought for what that will do to our capacity targets. The implication is that, for every foreign vessel that comes on to our register and flies the British flag, there will be another over-capacity problem for the Minister to handle.

If the Minister is determined to apply the measures in the Bill, he may as well take the opportunity to use the amendments to try to end an anomaly in British law and solve the problem of quota hoppers. I accept that this is a tricky legal area; some of the amendments may need some technical knocking into shape, and I should welcome an assurance from the Minister that he is prepared to examine them further. I shall not be impressed, however, if the Minister says that his legal advisers have told him that the amendments will not work. I strongly suspect that they are the same people who advised on amendments to the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, which did not work at all, and I think that we should exercise some common sense.

Mr. Moate: The position is not merely anomalous, as suggested by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley); I find quota hopping offensive and outrageous, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister—or other Ministers—will tell us at some stage of the Bill's progress what the Government will do, or try to do, to deal with it.

No doubt my hon. Friend will describe the immense legal difficulties involved and will enlarge on the legal dilemma—touched on by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe—that now confronts us. Although the position may be legally complex, there must be a political solution. It is outrageous that the European Community should allocate national quotas to us and then allow those quotas to be undermined by another Community rule. "Outrageous" is a strong word, but I suspect that my sense of outrage is widely shared. Why should British quotas be taken up by Spanish vessels? If Spanish vessels register in British ports, we accept that they have found their way through a legal loophole; none the less, the position is unacceptable.

We make much of the fact that, for the next six months, Britain will have the European Commission presidency. I gather that we are renegotiating protocols to the Maastricht treaty, among other things. Why can we not renegotiate another protocol to deal with the quota anomaly? I am sure that the European lawyers could come up with some amendment to the Maastricht treaty to deal with the provision and to make it acceptable in European law. Presumably our European partners intended the quotas to work for British fishermen; let us translate that intention into practice. If the amendments are unacceptable, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us what the Government plan. Are they going to try to do something, or do they intend to sit back and accept the present untenable position?

If we cannot control or prevent quota hopping, a number of alternatives are on offer, by which we could try to control quota hoppers who, presumably, will operate under the British days-at-sea regulations. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us how he intends to ensure that the British days-at-sea regulations apply to Common Market vessels fishing in British waters. If he cannot do so, there will be an even greater sense of outrage among British fishermen when they are tied up and see Dutch, Belgian or French fishermen fishing in our waters. My hon. Friend knows that that is unacceptable. We have to find ways to overcome the problem.

[Mr. Moate]

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe put forward some practical ideas. They may not be perfect, but they are certainly worthy of examination. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond today or, if necessary, at some other time and tell us how he intends to apply the days-at-sea regulations to foreign vessels and, more importantly, what the British Government's plan of campaign will be to eliminate the problem of quota hoppers, in conjunction with our European partners. My hon. Friend the Minister sighs. I know that it is a difficult problem to solve, but there has to be a political solution, in conjunction with our European partners. If partnership means anything, let us put it on the agenda and deal with the issue during our presidency of the European Commission.

Mr. Curry: What my hon. Friend thought was a sigh was the tail end of sinusitis.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I support the submissions by the hon. Members for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and for Faversham (Mr. Moate). It is important for the House of Commons to understand the extent of the outrage felt by the industry, to which they so eloquently referred. The Government must be left in absolutely no doubt about the sense of unfairness that the Government have created among the fishing communities, because of the legal bind into which they have got themselves.

I am concerned about the effects of the whole measure on small communities and, in particular, on small-scale businesses in the smaller ports. I underscore the need for an answer to the question about how quota hopping will affect capacity targets. The vital question was raised, fairly, by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe. However, the issue is much wider than that. If the quota-hopping trend continues in this worrying way in relation to Spanish vessels and, in particular, to Dutch beamers, we run the risk of driving a coach and horses through the whole concept of relative stability and the share of total allowable catches.

That, in its own way, will have an important potential impact on the review of the common fisheries policy. This is not a temporary problem. We shall have to deal with it over a long period. It may have a fundamental impact on the way in which the common fisheries policy operates in this country in the years to come.

It is right not to make light of the fact that these are legal questions. They were all caused by the European Court of Justice when it exposed our industry to the predations of other European Community fishing fleets. That, combined with the unilateral imposition of days tied up that this measure unilaterally brings about, creates very great difficulties for our fishing fleets.

It is not just a matter of finding a way through the legal problems. The Minister cannot just sit back and listen to his legal advisers and then sigh, or say that he has sinusitis. The House and the industry deserve at least an update on the Department's current thinking on this important subject.

Apart from the legal difficulties, there are enforcement difficulties. The amendments go to the heart of the questions that are in the minds of small fishing communities throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. They concern the way in which the Minister intends to police the provisions. Cast-iron, copper-bottomed guarantees have to be built into the enforcement procedures.

Like the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe, who so eloquently moved amendment No. 1, I do not know whether it is technically in order. However, the amendment, and those grouped with it, go to the heart of the question that ordinary people on quaysides throughout the United Kingdom are asking: how can the provisions be enforced unless there is a move in the direction outlined in these important amendments?

If a fair scheme of implementation is not written into the Bill, fishing communities will be justifiably outraged. The Bill discriminates against the way in which the industry operates in this country. The question of enforcement must be dealt with.

8.15 pm

There is a great deal of confusion about the tie-up regulations. This issue was raised in Committee. Unfortunately, I was not one of those who was chosen to serve on the Committee, but I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) represented my interests assiduously and played an important part in its work. There is great uncertainty about the regulations. They must be clarified, either here or later in the Bill's passage through Parliament, or by means of a statutory instrument or whatever other device the Minister decides to use.

The best way to deal with the issue is put forward in the amendments. That would entail the inclusion of restrictions in the licences. I can think of no better way of resolving the problem. The spirit and intention of the amendments are clear. They have a defined purpose. They are necessary. I have great pleasure in supporting them wholeheartedly.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): The objective of amendment No. 19, which stands in my name, is to limit the Minister's power. I make no apology for that. As has already been pointed out, the powers being vested in the Minister under the terms of the original Bill—I appreciate that he has made certain commitments—are wholly unacceptable. Under its original terms, it would be possible for the Minister to ban fishing on every day of the year except Christmas day. Just to give the Minister such enormous power, even assuming that no sensible Minister would come anywhere close to using it, would undermine the livelihood of many thousands of fishermen throughout the country—in particular, the livelihood of the fishermen in my constituency. More than a dozen boats and their crews operate from the Torbay constituency, although the boats are moored mainly in Brixham.

The objective of the amendment is to limit the Minister's powers. My constituents and, I believe, everyone in the industry accept the need to conserve fish stocks. They represent their future, but the question is how fish stocks are to be conserved. Quotas do not work. If they did, the Bill would be unnecessary and we should not be debating it this evening. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) said, the concept of quotas is deeply flawed, especially as foreign vessels—the so-called quota hoppers—take advantage of our quotas. That leads

to consideration of the technical means to limit catches. Clearly, there would not be a need for an effort control exercise if the technical means worked.

What has gone wrong with quotas? I believe that we are the only country in the European Community to take any notice of them. I do not believe for one moment that the French exercise any control over their fishing fleets. It became perfectly clear a few weeks ago that there were no enforcement officers or inspectors in French ports to exercise control or to police French fleets. Quotas have come to an end, and that is the heart of the problem. There can be nothing more galling for a British fisherman than to accept the principle of conserving fish stocks and to tie up his vessel, only to watch a foreign boat come to exactly the area that he would like to fish, for that boat to fish to its heart's content and then to claim off the British quota.

That is the position of the British skipper. We should bear in mind the fact that skippers and their crews are not rich men. I have seen their landing documents, and I know the size of their catches. They are barely making a living and rely on the good will of their bank managers: it is as simple as that. One of the great problems with the Bill is that it undermines the relationship between the skippers and their bank managers.

Skippers have been able to get loans and operate on large overdrafts on the understanding that they carry on with their livelihood, catch fish and pay their debts. As soon as the bank managers read in the newspapers that their customers' livelihood is subject to the will and whim of a Minister, it dramatically undermines their confidence in the skippers' ability to pay the interest on their loans.

The amendment would limit the Minister's powers. As I understand it, the Minister has agreed that the limit that he proposes to put on the days at sea is to be directly linked to the days at sea of each individual vessel in 1991. I welcome that, and I also welcome the introduction of an independent appeals tribunal. Clearly, the moment the Minister says he is going to reduce his powers and accepts a finite limit, there is bound to be argument about what the 1991 level was for each vessel. I thank the Minister for the commitment to the 1991 limit and for the introduction of the independent appeals tribunal. However, some confusion remains, and I hope that the Minister will deal with one issue in particular.

Some of my hon. Friends believe that the Minister's commitment to a 1991 limit is directly linked to the French and to our European partners introducing similar limits. From his remarks, I understand that the 1991 level will be introduced immediately and that any future step to reduce the figures will first have to come before the House but, in any event, will not be brought before the House or the other place unless our European partners agree to similar limits.

There could be nothing more galling for British fishermen than to be the first victims of Maastricht. If we are honest, we must concede that Maastricht is the reason that the Bill has been introduced in this way. As the fishermen have said, the Bill was introduced before the end of the consultation period. Surely it is because the Maastricht Bill has effectively come to a dead end—and not a day too soon—that there was a gap in Government legislation.

It was a mismanagement of the House's affairs to produce a Bill with such wide powers, but to do so before the end of a consultation period seems to show a certain arrogance or incompetence, or both. I am profoundly disappointed, because the Bill has created an enormous feeling of ill will among fishermen who accept that conservation is necessary.

Amendment No. 20 covers shellfish fishermen. I am attempting to exclude them from the legislation in every regard except that of decommissioning payments. I understand that there is a lot more to the issue than meets the eye. It is a European matter, and the Commissioner will have a say, so the Minister is not his own master. I should be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about shellfish fishermen.

The shell fishermen themselves recognise the need for good conservation measures. When I spoke to them, they mentioned two particular proposals. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree to listen to the proposals and will discuss them with the fishermen. First, the fishermen are willing to increase the size of the lobsters they catch, which will, of course, reduce the total catch but will mean that there will be more stock available and more breeding stock.

Secondly, at present the so-called cripples—the crabs which have lost one claw—are caught. I understand that the shellfish fishermen would be willing to throw back the cripples. Such crabs are not as valuable as others. They are being caught at present but could be thrown back and could become part of an important stock.

I am grateful for many of the Minister's remarks and for the concessions that he has made. There will be a broad welcome for the fact that he has recognised the fact that the blank cheque which he had proposed to write himself would be unacceptable to the House.

There must be a long-term measure to protect shellfish stocks around our coasts. There is no alternative to a licensing system, which I believe the shellfish fishermen would welcome. I am disappointed that such a system is not proposed in the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give a firm undertaking to consider the needs of shellfish fishermen, the need to preserve stock and the need to introduce at some stage a sensible method of licensing.

8.30 pm

Mr. Salmond: Let me take the opportunity afforded by amendment No. 21 to revisit a subject with which the Minister is familiar. May we have an exact definition of what constitutes a day at sea and, in particular, clarification of whether a day spent sailing to or from a home port or going into another port for repairs will constitute a day's fishing for the purposes of the Bill? I read what the Minister had to say about that in Committee, although I confess I was none the wiser:

> "The model is more of an à la carte, 135-day tie-up, than a dirigiste, inflexible eight-day tie-up."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee;* 23 June 1992, c. 44.]

I regard the Bill as more of a dog's breakfast than an à la carte meal, but we are certainly due some explanaiton of whether a vessel going to or from a home port, or to a port elsewhere for repairs, counts as a day's fishing.

The Bill says:

> "A licence containing a condition restricting the time which a vessel may spend at sea may make provision as to the circumstances in which time is, or is not, to count as time spent at sea."

The amendment specifies that time spent by a vessel sailing to or from a home port or going in for repairs would not constitute time spent at sea.

Those who follow the affairs of the fishing industry will recall that a similar argument occurred during the debate

[Mr. Salmond]

on the eight-day continuous tie-up. I pointed out then that a vessel sailing the short distance from Whitehills to MacDuff, a major port, for repairs, would be counted as breaching the tie-up regulations. Would a vessel making the same journey be counted under the Bill as taking another day at sea, or does the Minister intend to discount time spent in that way?

In Committee, the Minister's response to those questions, which it is legitimate to ask of a Minister who is seeking such extensive powers, was that everything would be flexible. He said that everything would depend on individual circumstances and that he intended to consult the industry and see what came out of that consultation. We need to know more about what progress he has made since then, and whether he is clear in his own mind whether a vessel undergoing such trips will or will not be counted as taking a day at sea.

The Minister will recall that much concern was expressed about this question in respect of the continuous eight-day tie-up in Scotland. Implicit in what I am saying is the fear of discrimination between ports. Clearly, if fishing boats land in a port away from their home port, and if a trip to the home port for repairs is to be counted against fishing time, they will tend to stay at that port.

On 7 March last year, I presented a petition from the Fraserburgh harbour traders expressing precisely that concern. Yesterday I received a charming note from the Clerk of Public Petitions, telling me, pursuant to Standing Order No. 135, that, having had the petition for 16 months, the Scottish Office had no observations to make on its contents. Even by Scottish Office standards, 16 months is a long time to take to say nothing. I repeat that we are due some explanation from the Minister on this important matter.

The Minister cannot have drafted the Bill without having a clear view on whether time spent at sea that is not spent fishing will or will not be counted as a day spent at sea. In Committee, he argued that the present provisions were quite different from the prescriptive "dirigiste" continuous tie-up proposal. If he is to honour that, he must give us some idea of how the flexibility that he promised will be implemented. The fishing industry would greatly appreciate a straight answer to a straight question: is time spent going to and from a home port or for repairs in another port to be counted as a day at sea?

Mr. Harris: I shall direct my remarks to the amendments intended to ensure that some control is exercised over the so-called quota hoppers or flag-of-convenience vessels, to which I might apply even stronger terms. I have been trying to fight these wretched vessels for a dozen years or more, both in this place and, before that, in the European Parliament, because I believe that they have posed and continue to pose a tremendous threat to our own fishing industry, particularly in Cornwall.

One of the worst aspects of the Bill so far—again, I look to my hon. Friend the Minister to table amendments or give reassurance—is that it is clear that the tie-up measures cannot be applied to quota hoppers under the existing arrangements. Technically, the boats are British boats and appear on our register, although in reality they are nothing of the sort. Many of them are Spanish boats. If the Minister gets a holiday this summer, perhaps he should spend part of it in northern Spain—in Coruna, for example. Much to my wife's annoyance, I went there one Sunday morning last summer while I was on holiday. Numerous boats had British registration numbers painted on them. There were boats from Penzance, Plymouth, the east coast of England and Scotland.

Mr. Moate: What a farce!

Mr. Harris: Yes, it is a farce. They are no more British boats than are Spanish or French boats that carry the registration of their true home port in Spain or France. In reality, because they operate mainly from Spanish ports, there is no way that we shall be able to exercise effective control over them under the tie-up arrangements.

In a letter to *The Western Morning News* last week, my hon. Friend the Minister said that the Bill applied to such vessels. Of course it applies, but, at present, its application is only theoretical because the Minister and his officials cannot enforce it. They do not know how many days a particular boat spends tied up in a Spanish port, and they have no power to go there and demand to know.

I hope that the Minister will go some way towards meeting our objections. I have had some discussions with him and I believe that he has some proposals that may help. I look forward to hearing what they are. If my hon. Friend feels that I have been hard on him today—and perhaps I have—let me pay tribute to him and to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. No two Ministers could have worked harder to try to rid us of the plague of quota hoppers. They have both worked extremely hard.

Late in the day, urged by the industry and several hon. Members, including me, the Government introduced the Merchant Shipping Act 1988. I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, monitor these matters carefully from your constituency. No doubt you will recall that section 2 of that Act set up a fishing register, giving us a chance to start again and get rid of those wretched boats, which should never have been on our original all-vessel register in the first place. We all knew what would happen then: part of that Act was challenged in our own courts and, perhaps more important, in the European court.

I read the vitriolic comments of a certain columnist in *The Sunday Telegraph*, who tried to imply that, in recent years, my hon. Friend the Minister and his Department have been lax in allowing the boats on to our register, and almost that they welcomed them on to our register. That is completely untrue. The ships were able to get back on to the register because of the diabolical decision of the European Court of Justice, and that is why the Bill has been introduced. I am convinced that the Government were hoping for a reduction in the size of our fleet by removing the quota hoppers from our register under the 1988 Act. That would have gone a long way towards meeting the target that the Commission will eventually set for a reduction in catch capacity.

We face difficult problems tonight because of the decision of the European Court and the return of some of those quota hoppers to our register. If the Government want to enforce tying up on our boats, it is incumbent on them to make serious and effective efforts to ensure that the Dutch and Spanish boats, which are technically ours, but which really have nothing to do with us, are subjected to the same tying-up regulations. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend how he intends to bring that about.

Mr. Ainger: I want to refer to amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 17, which do not address the issue of the controls that should be placed on quota hoppers. I will refer to amendment No. 20 later in relation to shellfish fishing.

As the hon. Member who represents Milford Haven, which has the largest number of quota hoppers in Britain, I am aware that the quota hoppers from Milford Haven, Penzance and Plymouth may well be able to form their own fish producers organisation. I am sure that hon. Members recognise that the people in the south-west and on the west coast of Wales face an extremely serious problem.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) said that he saw fish being landed in north Spanish ports such as Coruna and Vigo. We could perhaps stick a label on that fish stating, "This is British fish, but untouched by British hands." Even when quota hoppers land fish in ports like Milford Haven, that fish is not touched by British workers. It provides no benefits to the local economy. The fish literally passes from a Spanish vessel—for that is what they are—into the back of a Spanish lorry. The fish is then driven on to a ferry and off to markets in Spain.

That is the main reason why we should insist on every possible legal restriction on quota hoppers. It is not just a matter of jobs being lost at sea and unfair competition. More importantly, what should be a British product loses its value because it is not being landed or processed in our ports.

Current legislation requires the quota hoppers to make only four visits in every six months which last a minimum of 12 hours. That is the only time that they have to be in a British port by law. Amendments Nos. 2 and 17 provide that, when days-at-sea restrictions are imposed on those so-called British vessels, they should be applied and monitored in a British port. That is the only possible way that those cowboys or pirates will abide by the law.

As the hon. Member for St. Ives said, the issue has caused an awful amount of friction in my part of the country and in his. Having tried the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 and been knocked back by the European Court, we can use the amendments to offer one of the few opportunities to impose restrictions and control on those pirates. However, the Minister refuses to take the opportunity. Perhaps he will respond differently, particularly after his apparent concession earlier.

8.45 pm

In many of the small ports, and in some that we certainly would not call ports, the shellfish fishermen who work crabs and lobsters off the west coast of Wales are absolutely staggered that the Government are proposing to impose days-at-sea limits on them. They cannot see the logic in that. The South Wales Shellfish Fishermen's Association, together with other shellfish fishermen's associations, has offered proposals to the Government to increase the minimum landing size of crabs and lobsters. They have pointed out to the Minister that the new EC regulations on measurements of lobsters will mean that smaller lobsters will be landed. Those organisations have told the Minister that he should get hold of Mr. Marin and sort the problem out. I am glad to learn from a parliamentary reply that the Minister appears to be doing just that.

The fishermen's associations claim, quite sensibly, that there are far easier ways to limit effort and thereby increase conservation. For example, the number of pots that a boat is allowed to work could be limited. The size of pots could also be limited. In relation to shellfish fishermen, the gear option, not days at sea, is the right way to increase conservation.

As I said earlier, the number of days that shellfish fishermen can spend at sea may be limited if the Minister has his way. However, they will maximise the time that they spend at sea by working the pots for 24 hours a day in two runs, instead of for 12 hours a day in one run. However, in that respect, they will still comply with the days-at-sea regulation.

The shellfish fishermen's organisations constantly provide the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, local officers and local committees with suggestions for ways in which more conservation can be built into the way in which they operate. It would be a significant concession if the Minister were prepared to sit down with the relevant organisations that want to talk seriously about conservation of shellfish.

I remind the Minister that, in the latest EC document about the multi-annual guidance programmes for the period 1993-96 for fishing fleets, the suggested base for fishing methods should, for static gear fisheries including shellfish, mean no reduction of effort. However, the Minister insists on imposing reduction in effort and restrictions on days at sea on the shellfishery.

I urge the Minister to think again, particularly about quota hoppers. The Minister would receive unanimous support in the House if he were to impose restrictions on the quota hoppers. I am sure that the House would welcome any movement that would improve conservation in our shellfishery without imposing restrictions on days at sea.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Although the Bridlington fishermen welcome some of the proposals in the Bill, particularly in respect of licensing for smaller boats and the one-net rule, they have great reservations about the effect that the days-at-sea proposal will have on their livelihoods.

While, by and large, they are not affected by quota hoppers, I support the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) about what I believe is an abuse of the common fisheries policy. That is not the Government's fault. They legislated, but unfortunately we were overruled in the European Court.

It is strange that we proposed legislation on restricting days at sea when we had a quota system. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) that quotas are not working. That is absolutely true. If quotas had been working, we would have been able to increase them rather than reduce them every year. If we had quotas, it would be nonsense to bring in regulations that prevented our fishermen from fishing their quota while fishermen from other EC countries were free to fish their quotas. I took up that matter with my hon. Friend the Minister and he assured me that that was not the intention, and that, if it became clear that our fishermen would not be able to catch enough fish to cover quotas, he would take action and extend their days at sea. I thought that that was a reasonable reply, and naturally I conveyed it to Bridlington fishermen. I regret to say that it did not pacify them. They said:

"It is therefore our view that the answers being given by the Minister cannot be given and will never come to fruition. Firstly, the EEC has a condition for compliance with its multi

[Mr. John Townend]

annual guidance programme is currently suggesting fleet reduction in capacity and net terms of 40 per cent. for our time of vessel"—

that is, commercial trawlers. They go on:

"The Ministry in its wisdom, as an alternative to a decommissioning scheme has argued that the prime element of the policy be directed at effort limitation, namely, by means of day-at-sea restrictions. As the MAGP will be cast in stone"—

That is what my fishermen fear—

"and will not relate directly to quota uptake, you will see that there will be very little room for quota manoeuvrability. While a counter assurance may be given to that effect which also from past experience with the north sea tie-up provisions for quota industries, I would suggest that the previous conditions were implicit on the quota regulations and as such could be relaxed."

If my fishermen have got it wrong, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to repeat, so that it is on the record, that, if the regulations that are being brought in by the Bill prevent our fishermen from catching their quota, he will take action to see that that quota may be fished. If he can give that undertaking, it would certainly help to reduce my reservations about the Bill.

Our fishermen are very worried about weather and what effect it will have on days at sea. We suffer from much bad weather in the North sea around the coast of Bridlington and Scarborough. We are particularly vulnerable to winds from the east to the south-west, which make predictions of tie-up days almost impossible at times.

This year, many Bridlington vessels which are caught by the EC's tie-up restrictions have found that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been singularly inflexible in relation to sudden changes in weather conditions, preferring to accept a morass of paper work from our fishermen for nine hours in advance of the tie-up date. The system is, in short, a bureaucratic nightmare and singularly inflexible to our fishermen, and does not take account of sudden changes in the weather.

Those are relevant points. Again, I ask my hon. Friend to give an assurance that will satisfy me and the Bridlington fishermen whom I represent that adequate note will be taken of the weather and that he will investigate the bureaucratic snarl-ups that have occurred in his Ministry in the past. Those points should be dealt with, because there is a great danger of misunderstanding. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of the fishermen's concern and of the financial pressures that they are under. I should like to add my thanks to those of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives for the concessions that the Minister has already made in respect of the Bill. I trust that the undertakings that I ask the Minister to give will produce a Bill that we will be able to support.

Mr. Curry: Again, we have had a wide-ranging debate, and I shall seek to answer the main points that have been made.

I understand concern about quota hoppers. I am sure that the House will equally understand that I cannot stand at the Dispatch Box and declare that there is some war plan specifically designed to sink quota hoppers, because I would be supplying ammunition to their lawyers in their next case against the United Kingdom. I put it bluntly to the House that that is the situation.

The House will know that measures were taken to tackle the problem of people seeking to register and fish against the British quota. Hon. Members know that that led to a series of court proceedings. The Attorney-General, who was on the Treasury Bench a short while ago, will know how hard the United Kingdom fought those cases. The House will know also that matters following those cases have not finished and that there are still outstanding matters. Therefore, I entirely understand why hon. Members are concerned, and I wholly support their concern, but we are very attentive in our policies to try to make sure that boats fishing against the United Kingdom quotas have the links with the United Kingdom which we have been able to write into the regulations, such as visiting conditions.

I am sure that the House will equally understand that I cannot declare that I can take a course of action that I know would be illegal and which I am strongly advised would be illegal. I have to take advice from my lawyers, and I seek advice from very authoritative sources. I cannot say that the lawyers have got it wrong and that I am going ahead. I cannot knowingly invite the House to legislate something which I am told would be illegal. It might be easy for me to do that as a political cop-out, but I cannot responsibly invite the House to do it.

I have to make that clear. It is a frustrating position for all hon. Members, but I must have the principles of the maintenance of the rule of law foremost in my concern, whether it be fishery legislation or anything else. I understand the problems, and hon. Members also understand the problems.

Mr. Harris: We are not asking my hon. Friend to take discriminatory action against quota hoppers, because we realise the difficulties in doing that, although I should like to take discriminatory action against them. However if there is to be a tie-up which affects our boats, it should apply equally to quota hoppers. That is not discrimination; it is equality of treatment.

Mr. Curry: I shall refer to the measures outlined in the amendments, but I wish to deal with one or two matters, that, strictly speaking, are not covered by the amendments, but hon. Members are concerned about them so I shall try to respond.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) said that we were guilty of arrogance and incompetence. That would be a double whammy for anybody, I suppose. I think that, in three years in the job, I have not displayed arrogance; as to whether I have been guilty of incompetence, I have to submit to the judgment of my peers and contemporaries.

9 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason: Let me take this opportunity to withdraw those remarks, on condition that my hon. Friend explain the point that I was making when I made them. It appeared that the Bill had been introduced before the end of the consultation period. That move was certainly open to misinterpretation, and I should be delighted to hear the Minister's explanation.

Mr. Curry: During the Second Reading debate and in Committee, I explained that the Bill is enabling legislation which makes provision for the broad principles of a certain course of action. There will be very detailed consultation about how it should apply specifically. I have made it absolutely clear that we hope that the industry will come to us with its views on how we should apply particular

measures. We are still open to that course of action. Several hon. Members have asked me whether I will consult on this, that and the other. The answer is that, if the industry is in a consulting mood, I shall consult, but I cannot compel it to consult. It is known that my door is always open to people who want to see me, and that will remain the case. I have never taken up any contrary position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay and the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) mentioned shellfish. Let me make the situation clear. We agree with the industry that the new minimum landing sizes for lobsters which have emerged from the interpretation of Community regulations are silly. The sizes are too small, and we have gone to Brussels to try to have the matter put right. I put that on record as a matter on which there is nothing between us.

On the question of action generally in relation to shellfish, the Sea Fish Industry Authority has produced a report indicating that there may be a case for limitation, some sort of discipline in respect of shellfish activity. We shall be discussing the implications of that report and what measures ought to be taken as a consequence of it. We accept that there is a problem in a particular fishery, and we shall seek to deal with it.

Let me now deal specifically with the amendments. With regard to amendment No. 1, the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said that owners or charterers of fishing vessels should be required to advise fisheries departments in advance of which port they intended to tie up in. As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, the amendment does not specify whether the notification should take place before each tie-up or whether it should be a blanket arrangement. He kindly left the choice to me.

Blanket notification would reduce flexibility enormously, whereas one of the purposes of the Bill is to provide maximum flexibility. If it is a question of notification in respect of individual voyages, the amendment is flawed. However, it is not necessary to amend the Bill to require advance notification of tie-up, as this can be achieved by licence conditions. While I cannot accept the amendment, I can say that I shall examine the practical and administrative implications of introducing advance notification of the port of tie-up for individual voyages, and I shall consult the industry about whether it favours a notification system of this sort.

The hon. Gentleman then introduced a series of provisions dealing specifically with the quota-hopper problem. I am sorry to have to tell him that, while we sympathise with the intention behind the amendment and while we would welcome the opportunity to secure improved enforcement, I have been advised that it would discriminate against British-registered fishing boats operating out of foreign ports, because the European Court has established that, although the quota system entitles us to have a condition, such as a visiting condition —and I assume that the amendment is based on the visiting condition—that establishes a real economic link between quota and the population dependent on fishing, such a condition must not amount to an obligation to operate habitually from a United Kingdom port or hinder normal fishing operations. The amendment would be contrary to those principles and would give rise to legal proceedings, possibly involving a claim for damages.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does that mean that the Government concede that there is no effective way of enforcing these provisions?

Mr. Curry: The Government are saying that measures incorporated in the Bill that could be interpreted as being targeted specifically against a certain category of vessel —the flag of convenience or flagship vessels—would be illegal and could be challenged. That is the problem. My lawyers advise me that, although the European Court has established that the quota system entitles us to have a condition, such as a visiting condition, that establishes a real economic link between the quota and the population dependent on fishing, such a condition must not amount to an obligation to operate habitually from a United Kingdom port or not to hinder normal fishing operation. Tying up in a United Kingdom port amounts to an obligation to operate habitually from a United Kingdom port.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister turn his mind to what positive steps he plans to take? The economic link appears on the face of it to offer scope for a positive measure to restrict the activity of quota hoppers. I cannot believe that since the judgment the Minister has been merely sitting wringing his hands and doing nothing. He must have considered measures that he could take, drawing on the economic link criteria. The House would like to know what they are.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman knows that we introduced the visiting conditions, which were designed to address the problem. It was clear that we had to be careful how we framed the conditions so that we did not have the same legal problems again. I am sorry to sound boringly repetitive, but I am conscious of the possibility of further actions. I do not want to concede any more ground. I do not want to be driven to take actions that open the way to challenge. I am deliberately careful in phrasing my replies, for that purpose.

The hon. Gentleman knows that I am investigating the use of electronic tracking equipment to improve enforcement of limits on the activities of vessels which tie up overseas. We are working hard on developing that technology for enforcement purposes. I have made it clear throughout the debate that I recognise the problem of quota hopping. I do not pretend that the problem does not exist. I am describing candidly to the House the constraints on me and how I address them.

Mr. Moate: My hon. Friend referred to electronic tracking devices and the like. Will he endorse his determination to ensure that the days-at-sea regulations will be applied in practice and in an enforceable way equally to quota hoppers as to British vessels?

Mr. Curry: Yes, I will. The hon. Gentleman knows the difficulties we face. I ask him to accept my assurance of our determination.

Amendment No. 19, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay, would place a limit on days at sea because that is how the legislation is framed. I appreciate that that was not his intention. I am aware that, in tabling his other amendment, No. 20, he had in mind the particular problems of the shellfish sector. The reassurances that I have given about the vessels of 10 m and under, which must be the predominant type of vessel in that fishery, will go some way to reassure my hon. Friend. If I

[Mr. Curry]

add that we are looking hard at concerns about the future of the shellfish sector as a whole, and considering measures such as he mentioned, I hope that he will feel that we have the fate of that sector in our focus.

The purpose of amendment No. 21, tabled by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) is to allow vessels to sail from the port where their catch is landed to their home port. I recognise the problem that the amendment seeks to address, because it has been brought to my attention in the context of the eight-day and 135-day rules. We cannot adopt the solution envisaged by the amendment, because it would not provide a clear guarantee that fishing was not undertaken during the voyage. A better solution is to ensure that the days-at-sea entitlement includes an allowance for such voyages. That is what we propose to do. The appeals system could be used by those who feel that the system is unfair to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) asked me some specific questions. The multi-annual guidance programme targets are not yet agreed. The Commission has discussed the 30 per cent. cut, but it has not been agreed. I accept that fishermen do not like the Bill, but I hope that they will address what may happen, rather than some myth of what may happen. There has been some misinformation and exaggeration about the practical effects.

The one problem that we have never faced in our fisheries is not catching our quota. Indeed, as I have said many times, periodically we have to close fisheries down to eke the stocks out to the end of the year. I am sure that the problem to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington referred will not arise. If the problem occurred in exceptional circumstances—they would have to be extraordinary circumstances—I repeat that I would immediately seek ways of ensuring that the quota was taken. We are not in the business of stopping people from catching their legitimate quota.

We mentioned that there was a difficulty with the 1991 data.

Mr. John D. Taylor: I asked the Minister earlier whether there had been any consultation with the Dublin Government, because of the implications of southern Irish and British boats operating under different guidelines in the Irish sea. The Minister did not answer. He is ending his comments on amendment No. 21. What would be the implication if fishing boats in Kilkeel registered in the Republic of Ireland, 15 miles to the south, but used Kilkeel as their port for landings? If their home port were in the Republic of Ireland, would they be excluded from the implications of the Bill? That is the way that some people are beginning to talk.

Mr. Curry: If I have received the message right, I think that the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting a new form of quota hopping. I have often been asked whether we could encourage our people to quota-hop. I shall not comment on that as a recommended course of action, but I have consulted the Irish Minister about enforcement and management in the Irish sea, which is much more important as stocks are in such a parlous state there. When we increased the minimum landing size for whiting, a simultaneous announcement was made for the first time from Dublin and from London that we had taken an act of conservation together to preserve joint stocks. I am willing to pursue that matter with the right hon. Gentleman outside this debate.

We shall make administration as flexible as we possibly can. If fishermen in Bridlington have had a problem because of the weather, they should use the consultation process to tell us.

I shall discuss the further amendments on the gear option when we come to that point, if my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay allows.

If tides cause a problem, it should be reflected in track records and thus fishermen would automatically receive time to allow for that under the system that we shall pursue.

I have tried to answer the debate fully, and I advise the House to vote against the amendments.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Morley: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 11 at end insert

'provided that if the master, owner or charterer of a fishing boat gives an undertaking to use only such fishing gear as may be specified, whether by reference to mesh size, mesh shape, or otherwise, paragraph (c) above shall not apply.'.

The amendment provides a choice of being tied up in port, or using conservation gear with a wider mesh size. That is an important option and fishermen are keen that it should be provided in the Bill. When the Government introduced the eight-day consecutive tie up, they conceded the option for fishermen to continue to fish by using a mesh size specified by the Minister. That facility is required in this Bill.

The gear option can work. There is no argument between us about the need for conservation. The gear option is more conservation orientated than simply tying boats up in port, which does not necessarily meet the conservation objective.

Also, if fishermen believe in, and can see the logic of, a measure they will do a great deal to support it, which has been borne out by the fact that fishermen pioneered square mesh panels and various forms of conservation gear. The 100 mm mesh size came into effect only on 1 June this year. The Minister has said that such options have not been effective, but many conservation options are very new and have hardly been given time to operate. We should give them more time so that we can evaluate their effectiveness, rather than deciding on the days-in-port option.

Fishermen advocated an 80 mm maximum mesh size in the Irish sea when the Government introduced a 75 mm size. Fishermen have also suggested a licence scheme for shell fishing and proposals for banning the French dredge, for conservation boxes and for a ban on industrial fishing in certain areas of our coast. The gear option should be included in the Bill.

Conservative Members who are concerned about the fishermen in their constituencies have been given a concession by the Minister, but it does not amount to much. I accept that limited accountability will be introduced which will allow us to consider the proposals that the Minister will bring forward. The Minister also said that the changes would not be brought in until 1994, but that was no concession, as that commitment was always part of the Bill. All the Minister has done is to put off until 1994 the time when the axe will fall. That still means that British fishing boats will be tied up in port while those of other member states will be allowed to fish.

The amendment is important because, although it will allow the Minister to argue, if necessary, for a days-at-sea restriction, it will also give fishermen the option of using conservation gear. Such an option would be more effective and meaningful than a days-in-port restriction.

9.15 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I support the amendment. During the United Kingdom's presidency of the Community, one of our main objectives will be to try to achieve a level playing field—in this context a flat pond. We strongly believe that the inclusion of this option in the Bill will enable such a flat pond to be enforced more effectively.

We have a clear choice between the compulsory tie-up and the gear option. The tie-up is subject to the sort of objections that have been voiced from every part of the House and every part of the country. It presents major difficulties for all sorts of fishermen who undertake all types of fishing. That restriction is transitional and short-term and lacks the authority of a permanent, credible option. It also presents all sorts of difficulties in terms of its stated objective of conservation; it is a backward step, because it pressurises the industry into depleting the juvenile stock.

Gear restrictions have major advantages. We already have good precedents to demonstrate its effectiveness. Such a restriction represents conservation in practice and it demonstrably achieves what it sets out to do. That is recognised even by those in other industries who might otherwise question the objectives for the fishing industry. Its precise objectives are an advantage in an imprecise area of the law. It has great advantages in terms of stock generally and major ones in terms of the survival of juvenile, immature fish in particular.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has already said that there is a precedent for the use of such restrictions, so we are not creating a pig in a poke, or whatever the fishing metaphor is. It offers great advantages for handliners, who are important in the south-west and for the shell fishermen.

The biggest advantage of that option is that it offers the very thing that the Minister wants to include in the Bill —maximum flexibility. That flexibility dictates that the gear option must be included in the Bill.

The NFFO is strongly in favour of the gear option and is prepared to do all that it can, within the industry, in support of it. It has set out in three concise phrases why it considers that the option should be included. First, it claims that it has considerable conservation advantages in terms of selectivity. Secondly, it provides an element of financial protection and could avoid the need to pay compensation to those who adopt that option. Thirdly, it is easier to administer than a days-at-sea restriction and it will minimise the enforcement and administrative costs. That final point must be of considerable importance to the Minister who will otherwise face a difficult time not just with the United Kingdom industry, but with that of the whole Community during our presidency.

The gear option offers the guarantee of effective Community conservation action. We strongly support it.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) was right to say that during our presidency, enforcement must come at the top of the agenda, so I could not accept a measure that would be unenforceable. Whereas a gear option was possible with 350 or 450 boats coming under the previous types in the Community, a gear option involving 3,800 vessels over 10 m would be impossible to police. They fish for a wide variety of stocks using a wide variety of gear.

I do not minimise the need for technical conservation and I pay tribute to the way in which the industry has co-operated in developing such means, which is an essential part of any fisheries package. But in the context of the Bill, I must be able to demonstrate that what we do is enforceable and not open to evasion. With some regret, I must reject the amendment because it could not be made to stick, and the whole Community would see that. I advise the House to vote against it.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 313.

Division No. 68] **[9.20 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Cox, Tom
Adams, Mrs Irene	Cryer, Bob
Ainger, Nick	Cummings, John
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Allen, Graham	Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Alton, David	Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Dafis, Cynog
Armstrong, Hilary	Dalyell, Tam
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Davidson, Ian
Ashton, Joe	Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Austin-Walker, John	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Barnes, Harry	Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Barron, Kevin	Denham, John
Battle, John	Dewar, Donald
Bayley, Hugh	Dixon, Don
Beckett, Margaret	Dobson, Frank
Beggs, Roy	Donohoe, Brian H.
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	Dowd, Jim
Bell, Stuart	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Bennett, Andrew F.	Eagle, Ms Angela
Benton, Joe	Eastham, Ken
Bermingham, Gerald	Enright, Derek
Berry, Dr. Roger	Etherington, Bill
Betts, Clive	Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Blair, Tony	Fatchett, Derek
Boateng, Paul	Faulds, Andrew
Boyce, Jimmy	Flynn, Paul
Boyes, Roland	Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Bradley, Keith	Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*	Fraser, John
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Fyfe, Maria
Burden, Richard	Galloway, George
Byers, Stephen	Garrett, John
Caborn, Richard	Gerrard, Neil
Callaghan, Jim	Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*	Godman, Dr Norman A.
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*	Godsiff, Roger
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Gordon, Mildred
Canavan, Dennis	Graham, Thomas
Cann, Jamie	Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*	Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm	Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Clapham, Michael	Grocott, Bruce
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*	Gunnell, John
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*	Hain, Peter
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	Hall, Mike
Clelland, David	Hanson, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Hardy, Peter
Coffey, Ann	Harman, Ms Harriet
Cohen, Harry	Harvey, Nick
Conaarty, Michael	Henderson, Doug
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*	Heppell, John
Corbett, Robin	Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Corbyn, Jeremy	Hinchliffe, David
Cousins, Jim	Hoey, Kate

Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl'f)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael

Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Arbuthnot and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment made: No. 14, in page 1, line 19, at end insert—

'(4A) After subsection (7A) there shall be inserted—

"(7B) In any proceedings in Scotland commenced on or after the coming into force of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 for an offence under this section, any—

(a) entry in any logbook kept, under an enforceable Community obligation relating to fishing activities, by the master of a vessel;

(b) declaration made, under such an obligation—

(i) by the master of a vessel or by an agent, as to fish landed; or

(ii) by the master of a vessel, as to trans-shipment;

(c) information required to be provided under—

(i) any condition imposed under subsection (6) above, by the master, owner or charterer (if any) of a vessel, or by an agent;

(ii) subsection (7) above, by the master, owner, or charterer (if any) of a vessel,

shall be received in evidence without being produced or sworn to by any witness and shall be sufficient evidence of the matters stated therein.".'—*[Mr. Curry]*

Clause 2

LICENSING OF VESSELS RECEIVING TRANS-SHIPPED FISH

Amendment made: No. 15, in page 1, line 29, at end insert—

'(2A) After subsection (8) there shall be inserted—

"(8A) In any proceedings in Scotland commenced on or after the coming into force of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 for an offence under this section, any—

(a) declaration made, under an enforceable Community obligation relating to fishing activities, by the master of a vessel;

(b) information required to be provided under—

(i) any condition imposed under subsection (6) above;

(ii) subsection (7) above,

by the master, owner or charterer (if any) of a vessel, shall be received in evidence without being produced or sworn to by any witness and shall be sufficient evidence of the matters stated therein.".'—*[Mr. Curry.]*

Clause 4

COMMENCEMENT

Amendments made: No. 9, in page 2, line 13, leave out from beginning to the first 'the' and insert

'sections 1, 2 and 3 above shall not come into force until'.

No. 11, in page 2, line 14, leave out 'it' and insert 'this Act'.

No. 10, in page 2, line 14 at end insert—

'(2) Subsection (2) of section 1 above shall not apply in relation to vessels of an overall length of 10 metres or less until such day as may be appointed by order made by the Ministers (within the meaning given by section 22(2)(a) of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967).

(3) An order under subsection (2) above shall be made by statutory instrument; but no such order shall be made unless a draft of it has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament.'.

No. 12, in page 2, line 15, leave out 'comes into force' and insert 'is passed'.—*[Mr. Curry.]*

Clause 5

EXTENT

Amendment made: No. 13, in page 2, line 20, leave out from 'by' to end and insert 'this Act'.—*[Mr. Curry.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

9.34 pm

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I commend the Bill to the House. It is, above all, a Bill about the conservation of fish for British fishermen. At the heart of it is our concern for the industry's long-term future. At the moment, no one can pretend that the industry can look to the future with confidence. The reason is the great crisis with fish stocks. Wherever we look, we find difficulties.

It is a worldwide problem. We see it off New England, where fish stocks have collapsed. We see it off Iceland, where it is recommended that cod quotas be cut by 40 per cent. The Canadians have suspended cod catches for two years. Although our stocks are not at the point of collapse, they are one iota away from it.

We have the option of doing nothing. That would be politically easy for a little while, but it would end up being an impossible option. We have chosen the option of admittedly difficult action now, for the industry's benefit and long-term future.

We have a comprehensive package of measures. They include licensing down to zero and decommissioning, which the industry wants, measures to enable quotas to be more freely traded, which the industry will find advantageous and which is wanted in some areas—particularly Scotland—and provision for capacity aggregation and effort limitation.

Mr. Salmond *rose*——

Mr. Curry: I listened carefully throughout the debate, as I did in Committee, and now I will have my say, albeit briefly.

The Bill contains a series of measures which will benefit the industry and which it will eventually discover have served to save stocks and to ensure the industry's survival. I shall make it clear what will happen, because sometimes people tilt at windmills and are influenced by myths, not by reality. We must agree our multi-annual guidance programme. We cannot escape from that; nor can anyone else. We will reduce capacity by decommissioning, measures taken within producer organisations and capacity aggregation. Only then will we have to apply effort control. The more we pursue those other measures, the less dependent we will be on effort control—which will almost certainly be differentiated according to species and the state of the stocks.

We will apply the Bill with great flexibility. We will not prevent fishermen from catching their quota. I understand the concerns that have been expressed, but I must make it clear that we have never had to face the problem of not catching our quota. I am confident that we will never have to do so. If in the most exceptional circumstances we were to confront it, I would seek measures to guarantee that we would catch our quota.

I understand the fears about the activities of foreigners, but overwhelmingly the stocks that are important to us are subject to TACs and quotas, which means that quotas are ring-fenced for British fishermen. We are not in the business of removing the legitimate entitlement of British fishermen; we are in the business of producing a measure that will give the industry a long-term future.

I have said repeatedly that if there are no fish, there is no future. More and more effort is pursuing fewer and fewer fish. Smaller and smaller fish are being landed. Everyone goes to the quayside and says, "Look how small the fish are." If we carry on like that, we shall end up with nothing worth catching.

That is not the obligation that I have as a Minister. That is not something that I would commend to the House. I commend to the House a series of measures that will benefit the industry in the long term. I have no doubt at all that, at the moment, the industry would like to chuck me off the pier. I hope that in a few years' time it will put a statue to me on it. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.38 pm

Mr. Morley: In a few years' time, the fishermen might attach a statue to the Minister and then chuck him off the pier, for giving them this legislation. If the Bill passes in its present form—even with the slight concessions made by the Minister to buy off those of his Back Benchers who are threatening to revolt because of pressure from their constituents—it will be a serious blow to fishermen. It is not just a question of no fish, no future. Of course that is important, but there will be no future for fishermen if the Bill becomes law.

The Government are introducing a unilateral measure. In an interview, Mr. Marin, the EC Fisheries Commissioner, was asked whether he thought it sensible to force fishermen to have their boats tied up alongside a port for a large part of a season. He replied:

"I didn't take that decision. It was the member state itself. In my view, when it comes to choosing between economic anomalies and the destruction of part of the fleet, the choice must be demolition."

That is a reference to a decommissioning scheme. Mr. Marin concluded:

"This at any rate is the case for Britain."

There is an alternative, although it does not include a proper decommissioning scheme. This week's issue of *Fishing News* contains a letter of support for the fishermen's rally that took place on 7 June. The Danish Sea Fishery Association wrote:

"Denmark has had government and EC funded decommissioning schemes in operation since 1987, resulting in an overall reduction in Danish fishing capacity of 20 per cent.

Although we do not like decommissioning we see it as necessary because only properly funded decommissioning schemes can reduce fishing effort with some form of economic compensation to fishermen.

The Danish Seafishery Association, representing the Danish North Sea fishermen, therefore fully supports UK fishermen in their demonstrations against days at sea restrictions as a means of structural policy to reduce fishing capacity."

The message behind that letter is that alternatives exist to tying up in port.

What some hon. Members have said today has reflected the concerns of fishermen in their constituencies genuinely and honestly, but we have not secured the changes in the Bill for which we have argued in a reasonable and constructive manner. Our only option now is to oppose the Bill's Third Reading. If Conservative Members—indeed, all hon. Members—genuinely represent their constituents' interests, they must recognise that, in its present form, the

Bill does not deliver real conservation; that it discriminates against British fishermen, as opposed to their EC counterparts; and that it will ruin the British fishing industry and the many fishermen who will face bankruptcy rather than decommissioning.

9.41 pm

Mr. Harris: I opposed the Bill on Second Reading, and between then and now I have done all that I can to persuade the Government to see sense. I must acknowledge that the Government listened, especially today, but how I wish that they had listened much earlier. Indeed, I wish that today's proceedings had been postponed until the autumn, thus allowing genuine consultation with the industry.

Having had several meetings today with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I am convinced that he has made a genuine attempt to meet the deep-seated anxieties felt by many of my hon. Friends —and, more particularly, the deep-seated anger felt by our constituents. Nevertheless, I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister bluntly that I cannot vote for the Bill's Third Reading. As I said earlier in an intervention, it is unacceptable in its present form.

Because I recognise the genuine attempts that Ministers are making, however, I am prepared to give them at least the benefit of a half-doubt. I wait—and want—to see the details of the amendments that will be tabled in another place, and the commitments that will be given there. In the hope that those amendments will be constructive and will go much further than the proposals that we have discussed tonight, and in the hope—I have assurances on this—that Ministers are prepared to consult the industry before the Bill goes to another place, I shall abstain tonight. I warn the Government, however, that I retain deep-seated anxieties about the Bill, and I beg them to think again before its Committee stage in the House of Lords.

9.43 pm

Mr. Salmond: The Minister can claim one achievement, which may be regarded as substantial: he has united the entire fishing industry. The fact that he has united it against him rather than for him is both his and the industry's misfortune.

The Bill is deeply misguided. Indeed, it was misguided to proceed with primary legislation during a consultation period: that sowed a seed of bitterness that it will take a long time to dispel. The Minister was wrong about the timing of the legislation. It was foolish to go ahead with legislation before he had received an assurance that the other member states of the European Community would introduce similar measures.

Earlier in our proceedings, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), said that the Bill is complex because all European Community legislation relating to fisheries is complex, but the irony is that this is not European Community legislation. The Government are charging ahead with a unilateral measure without thought, without consultation and without bearing in mind the arguments put forward by the fishing communities.

Most of all, the Government's attitude to the industry is wrong. They argue that the industry can have the sweetie of decommissioning only if it is prepared to accept the poisoned pill of this and other legislation. That attitude is entirely wrong, if the Government are looking for a fundamental transformation of the way in which the industry regards itself and its relations with the Government.

For all these reasons, this is a bad Bill, and the House should vote against it. The rebels on the Conservative side have been bought quite cheaply. I have not heard an assurance that there will even be a debate on the affirmative resolution on the Floor of the House, as opposed to upstairs in Committee, but the Minister may tell us about that later. The Conservative rebels have been bought off very cheaply. The legislation is unacceptable. As the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) rightly said, the proper way to deal with unacceptable legislation is to vote against it and to square our actions with our conscience.

9.45 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I suspect that I shall increase my unpopularity with the fishermen in Hastings and Rye. Unlike those hon. Members who have already spoken on Third Reading, I intend to continue to support the Government.

I have been on a very steep learning curve during the past few weeks. I appreciated being a member of the Committee, though I cannot say that I enjoyed the experience. However, during the past few weeks we managed to tease out of the Government, both collectively and separately, some useful concessions. Other hon. Members may not agree with me, but I am conscious of the fact that a number of the questions that the fishermen in Hastings and Rye asked have been answered. My fishermen may not be happy with the answers, but the fact is that their questions have been answered. We now know what is to happen in the case of the under 10 m fleet. We also know that the question of what is to happen in the case of the 10 to 17 m fleet is being taken on board. Many of the questions have been clarified.

However, two difficult problems that we cannot possibly solve tonight, or by means of the Bill, were considered during the past few weeks. They relate to a constitutional issue. The first problem concerns the unilateral nature of the Bill. The other member states of the European Community will be unaffected by it. I am somewhat reassured by the Minister's statement that he will try to ensure that the other European Community countries implement a similar policy.

The second and even broader problem concerns enforcement. The question of enforcement arises not only in the fishing industry but elsewhere. I was told last week by the chemical industry—that most European of industries—that it, too, has problems over enforcement. The Government and the nation ought to consider this issue vis-a-vis the European Community. Enforcement is the cause of the problems that we have with the other members of the European Community and with the Maastricht treaty. I should like effective and speedy efforts to be made to ensure enforcement in the fishing industry.

The common fisheries policy is the core of the problem. Until it is sorted out, we shall have to go on dealing with these difficult issues. The common fisheries policy has forced upon us an illogical and totally unfair system. I hope that, when the Minister attends the next meeting of the Fisheries Council, he will bear that point in mind.

9.49 pm

Dr. Godman: We need to conserve fish stocks, but, in considering the Bill, we are confronted with a savage irony. Not so long ago, the British Isles were surrounded by some of the richest seas in the world by way of commercially viable fishing stocks. Now, an over-large and over-powerful European Community fishing fleet is depleting the scanty stocks of United Kingdom waters. The solution should be Europewide legislation covering the policing of fishing activities not only in United Kingdom waters but throughout the common European Community territorial waters. The Bill is not the fair and decent legislation which we require.

I stick by what I said: I genuinely believe that the majority of our fishermen would accept tough policing regulations on two conditions. First, there must be a sensible decommissioning scheme. Such a scheme should have been introduced five years ago, but the Government did not have the guts to introduce it because the present Minister had his knuckles rapped over the way in which certain Hull trawler owners took him and the scheme to the cleaners in an incident involving a dozen big stern freezer trawlers. The other condition under which I believe our fishermen would accept tough policing measures would be if such measures applied equally and uniformly throughout the European Community.

I am not a lawyer, but I genuinely believe that, if the Bill is passed, it will eventually be challenged by the European Court of Justice, because it discriminates against United Kingdom fishermen in favour of fishermen from other European Community fleets. It is not a bad Bill—it is a lousy one, raddled with inconsistencies, although I appreciate the Minister's intention.

As I said in Committee, we must conserve fish stocks. There is no doubt about that, but we must do so fairly by imposing Communitywide policing regulations. We shall not achieve that aim by discriminating against our fishermen. I shall vote against the Bill, but I am sorry that so many Conservative Members have gladly and eagerly found reasons, oddly and curiously, to vote for such a mess of a Bill.

9.52 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I shall not detain the House, because I detect a certain restlessness and anxiety to move on to the next business. However, I seek clarification from the Minister on one issue which has troubled me greatly.

The Minister will be aware from a recent Adjournment debate that I represent an inshore shellfishery where the main catches are shrimps, cockles, whelks, mussels and crustaceans in the same category. I should like a categorical assurance that the Bill will not impact too greatly on such fisheries. The idea behind the Bill is to ensure that the stocks which are currently at risk and about which we have heard so much are not wiped out.

The Minister wrote to me the other day and made it clear that the Bill would have only a minimal effect. It is an enabling measure and he will have the power to ensure that inshore fisheries are not affected too adversely. However, his letter was too vague for me to give my local fishermen an assurance that they will not be adversely affected and that their livelihood will not be stifled. I urge the Minister and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who is to respond to the debate, to reassure me. I should be extremely grateful.

A fact that has arisen from our deliberations is the complete inadequacy of the common fisheries policy. We entered into it with all the best intentions and with a view to co-operation, to conserving stock and to progressing on a workman-like and constructive basis. All that has started to look very frayed around the edges, and I wonder whether, if we had never had a common fisheries policy but instead had stuck to the 200-mile limit, the fears that fishermen are now voicing would have had any foundation.

We could have had co-operation on the high seas in the areas between the different zones. But the fisheries in the Celtic sea, the south-western approaches and the area around Norfolk and the east coast would have been entirely the purlieu of British fishermen—in the case of the celtic sea, Irish and British fishermen—and a lot of the aggro and trouble that we now face might have been avoided. Surely the time has come to look again at the whole common fisheries policy.

9.55 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Our proceedings on the Bill have been marked by some changes, but it seems to me somewhat strange that Parliament should have had to fight to wring a concession from the Minister allowing us to debate the details of the restrictions that the enabling Bill will allow him to introduce. It seems strange that it took an amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, to persuade the Government to introduce a tribunal system to ensure a degree of justice for fishermen. It seems strange, too, that it took so long to persuade the Minister even to acknowledge that there might be some point in establishing a basis of equity as between this country's measures and those in the rest of Europe.

The fundamental point at this stage is that the principle on which the Bill rests—the restriction of days spent at sea —remains. That is the principle which led Conservative Members to rebel, or threaten to rebel, against the Bill. When push came to shove, however, those hon. Members said that they were not prepared to vote against the Bill. It seems to me that one either agrees or disagrees with what the Minister proposes: either one votes for it or one votes against it. I do not see the value of abstaining in this case. There is no third way before the House, and I deeply regret the fact that, even now that the Government have a greatly reduced majority and are vulnerable to pressure from their Back Benchers, those Back Benchers are not prepared to stand up and be counted.

9.57 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Like many hon. Members and many fishermen, I was hoping that this vessel, the Bill, would not be still afloat tonight. I have been a vociferous critic on behalf of my constituents, who still feel that it is an ill-fitted craft which will bring ill and which will have to be sunk in the Lords, as it is beyond a refit.

I am aware that many hon. Members wish to get on with the business that is to follow this debate. I understand that, but I hope that they will recognise the depth of feeling

in the fishing communities around the coast of Britain. If those fishermen's fears are realised and hundreds of fishing jobs are lost, it will be of small consequence to inland constituencies where, if people eat fish, they do not really care or know whether it was caught by a Dutch, French or Spanish boat. Why should they?

One of the lessons of the great mass lobby of Parliament last Tuesday was anticipated by me and others on Second Reading: the Government and their advisers want the Bill but the men who go out in the North sea day after day, who mortgage their homes and the lives of their families to earn a living, do not. Until tonight, it was clear that the Government were not listening to the fishermen except in relation to tribunals. That was a disappointment, because, when my hon. Friend the Minister visited Lowestoft, he won deserved respect for his straight-from-the-shoulder approach, which he put in jeopardy by persisting with the Bill in the face of informed opposition.

A second lesson of that huge protest last week and the consequential media coverage is that no one is against fish conservation. That has been said many times but needs repeating. My hon. Friends are not against it. Several of them have said to me, "If it is a Bill about conservation, it must be all right. Why on earth are you rocking the boat?" Fishermen are not against conservation, either. I have yet to meet a fisherman who does not recognise the reality of declining fish stocks. Merchants see the evidence of small catches every morning on the markets. No one is against fish conservation. To suggest otherwise is to distort the truth. However, it is not enough for my hon. Friends to say that the Bill is the only medicine that the fishermen must take, even if it kills them. It is not the only medicine.

We cannot now consider other technical measures such as more net selectivity, net shape, closing sea areas and banning industrial fishing. We cannot discuss a compensation scheme which goes to the heart of the problem in a European rather than a British final solution style. We can argue only that medicine that cures the illness, but kills the patient, is too draconian. It was the draconian nature of the Bill, designed without reference back to the House, which stuck in my throat and the throat of an industry struggling in the recession like most businesses, struggling against the elements, against fewer fish and against bureaucracy gone mad.

After all, fishermen are usually paid by a share system: no catch, no pay. That, plus the other points——

It being Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill, the Tribunals and Inquiries Bill *[Lords]*, the Protection of Badgers Bill *[Lords]* and the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill

Question again proposed.

Mr. Porter: The other point that stuck in the fishermen's throats was that they would watch from ports, their boats tied up, while our competitors laughed all the way to Dogger bank and beyond.

My hon. Friends have listened to the deep-seated objections that I and others have, and I am pleased that I feel justified for sticking out against the Bill on Second Reading. Inevitably, the fight must now move to the other place because the Bill will clearly receive the Third Reading tonight. In the other place, the strength of the undertakings given here by my hon. Friend the Minister will be tested. Should they prove inadequate, the Bill must return to this place for consideration of Lords amendments.

We have said often enough that the decommissioning part of the package is not enough as it has come three years too late. It does not cover the whole industry and it will not succeed in reducing the fleet. If the Bill achieves that through bankruptcy, we will see the truly unacceptable face of the common fisheries policy.

We have had no real debate about the CFP tonight. On Second Reading, I called the CFP a raft of measures, restrictions, curbs, quotas and red tape which fail each year. So what do we do? We come back and pile more such restrictions and curbs on the raft in a desperate attempt to make it work. The Bill is just the latest pile on the raft.

Eventually, the weight of restrictions will sink the raft. In the meantime, the recognisably British activity of sea fishing for a living may be all but wiped out. What a shame that we do not have the guts to scupper it now in lieu of the CFP mid-term review and start again, but this time from the starting point that we have—just: a viable British fishing industry. Let us work together to see how we can make it stay that way, given the realities of the fish stocks.

The Bill has united the industry against it. That is an unprecedented advantage and a baseline for future discussion. Although I do not like it, I recognise the reality of the situation that we, the industry, the country and my hon. Friend the Minister are in. We have wrung some concessions to make the Bill at least a little less unpalatable. That is a gain, given that this is not the end of the voyage. If the Bill had to be introduced at all, I wish that we could have done this much weeks ago.

10.3 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I shall be brief, but I must express the opposition of a united Grimsby fishing industry, while it is still England's premier fishing port, to the Bill. It is a bad Bill. The Minister's rant at the beginning of this Third Reading debate was typical of his approach to the Bill. It has been pushed through without consultation, without answering any of the questions and in a dictatorial fashion. It has been imposed on Back Benchers who should have stood up for the industry.

The Bill has all the hallmarks of bad government. The speed with which it has been enacted, the lack of consultation and the lack of co-operation that it is going to get from the fishermen of this country mean that the Bill is not a workable measure. It is a disastrous measure.

The Bill is bureaucratic, because the Government think that it is simple to count vessels in ports, especially when they are not at sea. The Bill will be enormously complicated to administer and it will not even do anything about the main problem with which it is supposed to deal —conservation. It imposes a direct incentive on the industry to go to sea in the time allowed to catch as much fish, of whatever kind and size, to make up for the tie-up period. The Bill does not even impose proper conservation on the European fishing industry with which we are competing—it will still be allowed to fish untrammelled. As my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) said, it will have no effect on the quota hoppers.

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

British fishermen are justified in feeling that they are being discriminated against. Quota hoppers registered in this country are now allowed to spend their days, when they should be tied up, in foreign ports where they will be unsupervised. How do we know that there will not be fishing? There will be fishing. That is discrimination against the British fishing industry.

The Minister has bought off Back Benchers who should have known better and who should have represented their fishing industry, with all its complaints and agonies and the loss of work and earnings that has been imposed on it and the blow that has been dealt to the most vulnerable people in the country. Conservative Members have just allowed a measure to go through with a concession that is no concession at all. If they let the Bill go through now, what possible chance have they of holding up its implementation later? The pass is now sold, and they have sold it for nothing—for no gains and no concessions from the Government. There is no chance now of stopping the measure. Conservative Members have even thrown away the chance to impose the better option, which is a gear option—bigger mesh sizes and better gear to give us proper conservation and deal with the problem. This is an appalling exercise in misjudgment, bad government and dictatorial behaviour.

A great responsibility is now imposed on the Minister, and I hope that, for once, he will listen to something that is being said to him. He has his measure. He has been able to impose it on Back Benchers who have been weak-willed and who have no guts to represent their fishermen. He has imposed the measure without consultation with the industry. That imposes an enormous responsibility on the Minister. He has been shown, by the ease with which he has got his measure through, that he can get away with anything. It is up to him now to deal justly and fairly with an industry that, until now, has been trampled on and to deal with it honourably, because he is an honourable man. It is up to him not to brutalise the industry in the way that the measure allows him to do but to cherish it, support it, help it and give it compensation and what it has not had in the Bill—a fair deal.

10.6 pm

Mr. Trotter: All too often, the Government's approach to the problems of the industry seem to be piecemeal. I still await the day when we shall see a plan that seeks to fit together the various courses of action that can be helpful in an inevitably difficult scenario. We seem to be seeking a unilateral solution to an international problem. One of the anxieties that the industry shares with me is that, through the Bill, we are seeking a system that is easily enforced —perhaps hard to administer bureaucratically, as some of my hon. Friends have pointed out, but easy in principle to enforce—while our competitors will be free to continue to adopt measures that do not lend themselves to enforcement. That is clearly unfair.

The Government have listened to what my hon. Friends and I have said—even if they have listened very late in the day—and they have made major concessions. My hon. Friend the Minister has made pledges that are of great value. I should like to consider what will happen in the next few months. We shall see further proceedings in another place. I am sure that the pledges that have been given today will be translated into Government amendments in the Upper House. I also expect very determined action by the Government on the international scene while we chair the European Commission. I very much hope that when we next debate this subject we will see perhaps not a level playing field but a smooth sea, so that the same conditions affect our industry as are seen to affect our competitors.

With the concessions made today, the Government have justified our support, but they are on trial, especially when they are in a position in Brussels to act to correct something that has been wrong for far too long.

10.8 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor: I must begin by congratulating the Minister on the way in which he has managed to destroy opposition on Government Benches. On 7 July, hon. Members attended Westminster central hall to listen to 3,500 fishermen from all parts of the United Kingdom. From the beginning to the end of the meeting, I sat at the back of the hall, and I was very impressed with speeches by Conservative Members who represented fishing constituencies and who promised fishermen that they would fight the Bill. They sat on the platform to be photographed, to be televised and to receive publicity.

The Minister destroyed that opposition tonight by the way in which he delivered his speech. He has certainly melted all opposition. The Conservative Members who, only a week ago, promised that they would support the fishermen of this kingdom, have tonight let them down.

The Bill is not welcomed by the fishing industry. There are many reasons for the opposition to it. It is criminal to recommend the imposition of a fine of £50,000 when a small boat just over 10m in length happens to breach the regulations. But the main reason for our opposition to the Bill is that it discriminates against British fishermen. The European Community has a common fisheries policy, but if the policy is indeed to be common it should be applied to all fishing boats, not just those from the United Kingdom. While we introduce legislation that disadvantages our fishing industry but enables other boats to come into our waters and take our fish, we shall damage our own industry.

The Minister made a brilliant Third Reading speech. It was what one expected from him. It was fluent and well-informed, and once again the hon. Gentleman demonstrated that he was on top of the subject. But anyone reading the speech in *Hansard* will see that he said at least four times that the fishing industry wants the Bill. I can tell him that the fishing industry of the United Kingdom does not want it. The industry sees it simply as a Government mechanism to introduce a decommissioning scheme on the cheap. If farmers can be properly compensated when they have to cut their production, we ought to have a proper decommissioning scheme to support our fishing industry, as other parts of the European Community have.

We in the parliamentary Ulster Unionist party will unite as a team and vote against the Bill.

10.12 pm

Mr. Steen: The problem at Third Reading has been caused largely by a lack of clarity as to what my hon. Friend the Minister actually said. I wonder whether, before we complete the Third Reading, my hon. Friend

will spell out, in words that everybody, even my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat), can understand, exactly what the concessions are. My understanding is that the legislation will be brought back to the House only when the Government are satisfied that the other European Governments are putting in place legislation that will have the same effect in this country as in their own. There is some confusion on both sides of the House as to whether it is only then that the Bill will be brought back for affirmative action. Before we vote on Third Reading, my hon. Friend the Minister should spell out, for the benefit of hon. Members on both sides of the House, exactly what the concessions are. The whole House ought to know on what it is voting.

That is the only contribution that I want to make to the Third Reading debate.

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

10.13 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The Minister wants to maintain the confusion. In Committee, he undertook to consider the possibility of Government and EC assistance for exploratory voyages in the fishing grounds west of the Hebrides in connection with French and other boats. Has he been able to come to any conclusions? If he cannot give me a reply tonight, perhaps he would write to me.

10.14 pm

Mr. Wilson: There has not been much humour during the passage of the Bill. In particular, there has not been much humour for fishermen. On the memorable day last week on which the fishermen came to London, the opinions of the British fishing industry were summed up by a banner outside the House of Commons, which said, "Skinner in, squirt out". I believe that that is an old piece of fishing terminology.

This is a bad, bureaucratic Bill based on a deeply flawed approach to conservation. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) that the Bill will go to the European Court and will be challenged legally. When it is challenged, that will surely be the first recorded case of a national Government being taken to court for discriminating against not the peoples of other countries but their own people.

Throughout the passage of the Bill, I have been appalled by the carelessness with which Conservative Members deal with other people's livelihoods. In what other industry would Members of Parliament vote for legislation which deliberately and systematically reduces to a pitiful level the number of days in the year on which people are allowed to go out and earn their livelihood? If Conservative Members were treated in that way in their part-time employment, never mind their full-time employment, and if their ability to earn was interfered with, they would rightly be aggrieved.

Once again, the Tories are setting up an enormous bureaucracy. They have set up a bureaucracy of tribunals and appeals. Every little boat in the country will have a number of days fishing set aside. If a Government of any other hue set up such a huge bureaucracy, Conservative Members would complain and talk about Stalinism, centralism and the rest. But willy-nilly in legislation such as this, they set up huge bureaucracies under which other people have to live.

Nothing in the Bill guarantees even the conservation ends to which the Bill pays lip service. In fishing ports throughout the country, fishing vessels and fishermen who do no harm to the cause of conservation will have the regulations and legislation imposed on them. Many of them will go out of business and many will be forced to yield up quotas. The people who are most protected from the legislation are those who do most damage to conservation. The fishermen who will be wiped out do no damage to the conservation of stocks. It is cruelty and it is against natural justice that the fishermen of the small, poor, less capital-intensive ports of the United Kingdom will have their traditional industry destroyed by the legislation.

In the interests of time, I shall be brief, but I shall not lightly forget and the constituents of Tory Members will not forget, Conservative Members who went to the rally across the road a week ago and trembled at the sight of 3,000 fishermen but came back and trembled even more when they went to see their Whips. In future, let us not give those Members the dignity of the name "Tory rebels". Let us call them what they are—Tory kippers, two faces and no guts.

The message to Conservative Members from the electorates of fishing constituencies will be that they can run but they cannot hide. No one will be interested in who abstained. Those constituents will look at who voted for the Bill and will consider that anyone who did so voted against them. The Members from fishing constituencies will either be true to what they said last week when the fishermen were here or they will spinelessly fail to vote against the legislation when the fishermen are not here.

10.17 pm

Sir Hector Monro: In Committee and today on Report and Third Reading, we have had a good-natured debate on an important subject, but we have understood the anger of the fishermen and their organisations and of some Members of Parliament. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) spoke of a slight concession. We made an important change to the Bill tonight as a result of consultations. We shall continue those consultations until the Bill returns from another place. That is some months away. Those consultations will be valuable and we shall use what news we have from the fishing industry to good effect. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe underestimated the importance of the appeal tribunals, which we were glad to include in the Bill.

Conservative Members were disappointed that throughout the debate we heard so little about the Opposition's policies. They have never said how much they would put into decommissioning. As a result of the Bill, we shall put in £25 million, and that is part of our conservation package. We have no idea whether the Opposition would have matched that or would have put a higher figure on it. We do not know their views on mesh sizes, technical gear or effort elimination.

There was much talk of conservation from the Opposition Benches. They criticised every Government proposal but kept their own powder dry. We believe

[Sir Hector Monro]

strongly in conservation, and the Bill is an important step forward. In a few years, our scientific advice will prove to be right, when fish stocks begin to increase.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State and I want a profitable fishing industry, unfettered by controls. We want the burden of conservation to be shared equally throughout the Community. We shall achieve that, but it will take time, combined with effort by everyone, to reach the levels of conservation that we feel are essential.

The Bill is a useful and valuable start and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 282.

Division No. 69] **[10.20 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Ms Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter

Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Ms Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gl'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*

Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*	Wright, Tony
Wilson, Brian	Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Winnick, David	
Wise, Audrey	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Worthington, Tony	**Mr. Eric Illsley and**
Wray, Jimmy	**Mr. Thomas McAvoy.**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

TRIBUNALS AND INQUIRIES BILL *[Lords]*

Considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

PROTECTION OF BADGERS BILL *[Lords]*

Considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

TRADE UNION AND LABOUR RELATIONS (CONSOLIDATION) BILL *[Lords]*

Considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Statutory Instruments, &c

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(1) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

HOUSING (NORTHERN IRELAND)

That the draft Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 29th June, be approved.

FORTH PORTS PLC

That the draft Forth Ports plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.

OIL PLANTS (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Oil Related and Petrochemical Plants (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 23rd June, be approved.

HORTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

That the draft Horticultural Development Council (Amendment) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 25th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

European Community Documents

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community documents.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees.)

WILD BIRDS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5185/91 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of the Environment on 9th March 1992, relating to the conservation of wild birds; and calls upon the Government to take the necessary steps to safeguard practicable arrangements for the control of pest bird species in the United Kingdom.

MINES AND QUARRIES

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6831/92, relating to health and safety of workers in mines and quarries; approves the Government's support for the aims of the Directive; and endorses the Government's view that, in principle, it will be in the United Kingdom's interest to agree to its adoption.

REGISTRATION OF ANIMALS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6414/92, relating to the identification and registration of animals; and supports the Government in its intention of securing measures which are practicable, not harmful to animals, and which facilitate veterinary controls together with market support arrangements, but which do not place unjustifiable burdens on the livestock industry.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Office Costs Allowance

Madam Speaker: It might be helpful if I tell hon. Members the procedure to be followed on the motion on office costs allowance. This is important to hon. Members. There will be a joint debate on the motion and the selected amendments which will last for one and a half hours. The amendments selected are amendment (a), to which amendments (c) and (d) are consequential, and amendment (b). At the conclusion of the debate, there will be an opportunity for the amendments to be moved formally and decided, and I shall then put the Question on the main motion.

10.34 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That in the opinion of this House—

(1) The limit on the office costs allowance (subject to what follows) should be—

(a) for the year beginning in 1992, £33,190;

(b) for any quarter in the year beginning in 1993, the sum of £8,298 (that is, a quarter to the nearest pound, of £33,190) but increased by any percentage increase by which the standard secretarial salary applicable in that year has increased compared with the standard secretarial salary applicable in the preceding year; and

(c) for any quarter in any subsequent year, the limit for a quarter in the preceding year but increased by any percentage increase by which the standard secretarial salary applicable in the subsequent year has increased compared with the standard secreterial salary applicable in the preceding year.

(2) The limit in relation to Mr. David Blunkett should be 2.57 times that determined in accordance with paragraph (1) above.

(3) Any limit determined in accordance with this Resolution should be calculated to the nearest pound.

(4) In this Resolution—

(a) "year" means a period of twelve months beginning with 1st April;

(b) "quarter" means a period of three months beginning with 1st April, 1st July, 1st October or 1st January.

(c) "the standard secretarial salary" means an amount consisting of the Standard Pay Point for a Senior Personal Secretary in the Home Civil Service in London and the Inner London Weighting.

(5) For the purposes of this Resolution the amount of the standard secretarial salary applicable in any year should be the amount specified by the Treasury as applicable in that year.

The motion represents the Government's recommendation to the House on the way in which we should proceed following the Top Salaries Review Body's report, which I laid before the House last Thursday, and which right hon. and hon. Members will no doubt have studied.

As the House is aware, the report was commissioned a year ago. The report was received in February, but it was felt at that time, as my predecessor indicated in a written answer on 16 March, that it could more properly be considered by the new Parliament. It is a substantial report, which would entail major changes both in the structure and the amount of the allowance, and whatever view may be taken of particular recommendations, I think that the House would wish to express its thanks to the TSRB for the significant effort that the report represents.

It may be that the main issue on which the House will wish to focus is the amount of the allowance, but it is important that I should first say something about what might be called the structural changes proposed, all of which raise issues separate from the question of the actual sums of money, and which the House also needs to consider on their own merits.

The first of these is the proposal to compartmentalise the allowance, which is at present, of course, a single all-purpose sum, into four separate allowances: one for staff costs, one for general office expenses, one for constituency office expenses where a Member of Parliament occupies only what is described as

"basic minimum accommodation at Westminster"—

a description that many hon. Members may think applies to a great deal of accommodation—and an initial acquisition grant for capital equipment, seen as an interim measure pending the central provision of such equipment.

While understanding the perception of improved accountability that underlines the recommendation, the Government doubt whether there would in fact be a significant gain in that respect, given that almost all the expenditure of Members of Parliament on such costs is now disbursed directly by the Fees Office or reimbursed against invoices, and the obvious scope for regarding some items of expenditure as falling under more than one head. Against a gain that would be at best doubtful, what would certainly be lost is the flexibility, which many Members value, to make the most effective use of the allowance—for example, by varying expenditure between staff and other costs—according to what is quite legitimately a wide variety of individual preferences and patterns of working.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way on a matter of which I have given him notice. Will he not overlook the mileage allowance which I find has been paid to me incorrectly by the Fees Office, a point which I have drawn to its attention and which I have now arranged to reimburse?

Mr. Newton: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's reasons for raising that point, and I shall duly take note of it. But he will realise that the mileage allowance is not under discussion at the moment.

We see particular problems about the proposal to introduce a specific constituency office allowance, which the report itself acknowledges would entail further work and take time to introduce. In our view, the difficulties would verge on the insuperable, both in agreeing a definition of

"basic minimum accommodation at Westminster"

and in devising arrangements that would be seen as fairly reflecting the variations between those who do all or most of their work at Westminster, those who do all or most of their work in the constituency, and what I think is probably a growing number who divide it between the two.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): An important part of the right hon. Gentleman's job is to safeguard the rights and privileges of the House and of right hon. and hon. Members. Does he think that he and, in effect, the Treasury should seek to decide the resources that are given to Parliament to scrutinise the Government? Would not that responsibility be better placed in the hands of a Committee of the House—particularly the Commission, now that it has responsibility for the staff of the House, accommodation, and equipment?

Mr. Newton: The appropriate course—and perhaps you, Madam Speaker, might agree, as Chairman of the Commission—is for the House as a whole to decide. The House is being given that opportunity tonight.

[Mr. Newton]

The Government are firmly of the view that the most sensible course is to retain a single, undivided allowance —and the resolution provides for that. I shall mention one smaller change of merit that flows from the report that could be seen as being of a structural kind, and which the resolution also covers.

We propose that eligibility to the office costs allowance should be calculated on a quarterly basis from 1 April 1993. That will rectify a long-standing anomaly, whereby a Member of Parliament leaving or joining the House part way through the year is entitled to claim against a full year's allowance. I know that that matter is of concern to one or two hon. Members who have mentioned it to me in the Corridors.

I should stress that that change does not mean that right hon. and hon. Members must claim the OCA on a quarterly basis or lose entitlement. Claims can still be submitted as and when Members of Parliament wish. The only change is in the total maximum amount to which a right hon. or hon. Member who enters or leaves the House during the year is entitled. I hope that clarifies that point.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): Before the right hon. Gentleman moves on from the separate provision for office costs, and while I accept his general point, telephones in the House are free to right hon. and hon. Members, but that is not the case in their constituencies. I run my office from my constituency, where the phone bill approaches £1,000 a year. I cannot understand why a provision similar to that available in the House should not be made available at a Member of Parliament's constituency office, where his secretary works.

Mr. Newton: My understanding—I assume that the hon. Gentleman has made appropriate inquiries—is that costs properly incurred by a Member of Parliament in performing his duties, and whether the telephone used is in his constituency office or at Westminster, could be properly claimed and reimbursed.

Mr. Taylor: I was making the point that office telephone expenses incurred by our secretaries at Westminster do not count against the OCA, but they do in the constituency.

Mr. Newton: I am sorry—I mistook the hon. Gentleman's point. In practice, it is virtually impossible for the allowances to take full account, especially if we retain a single, undivided allowance—I sense some support around the House for that proposition—of every possible variation. The point could be made, for example, that right hon. and hon. Members who undertake most of their work in their constituencies may incur lower costs—although that too will vary from one part of the country to another —than Members of Parliament whose work is done at London rates. That illustrates the kind of difficulty that can arise if we attempt to over-refine the allowance.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The right hon. Gentleman represents the Executive, and he is discussing the provisions for the legislature. Can he give even one example of a civil servant controlled by the Government who has a single sum for his secretary, telephone, equipment, or office space? Not one civil servant must operate under the same conditions that he is trying to impose on right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Newton: Again, I understand the point that is being made, not least in the context of a number of decisions that have been made over the years. The House has chosen to link some aspects of its remuneration to civil service rates, but I do not believe that there is a complete and sustainable parallel between the way in which civil servants are provided with the facilities to do their jobs and the way in which Members of Parliament are provided with the facilities to do a different job.

The second structural issue is the report's proposal to move as rapidly as possible to the central procurement of information technology equipment, and meanwhile to introduce an initial equipment allowance, partly offset by a reduction in the general office expenses allowance in the year in which that equipment allowance is taken.

The Government believe that the case for central provision of IT equipment needs a good deal of further consideration. We think that many Members of Parliament are likely to welcome continued flexibility to lease or purchase the equipment that is most suited to their individual needs. Savings equivalent to those achievable through central procurement might well be obtained by call-off contracts, without the need for bulk purchase by a central authority. Such an authority would inevitably base its specification on generalised requirements, rather than on individual needs.

The House is currently undertaking a networking study, in the light of which further recommendations on compatible IT equipment may be drawn up. Although the Government have considerable reservations about a centralised system of procurement for office equipment, we think it sensible to allow the Select Committee on Information to examine the TSRB's proposals on the provision of equipment in the light of the networking study before a final decision is reached. I hope that hon. Members will agree that that approach is sensible. We do not, however, recommend the implementation of a separate one-off initial acquisition grant as an interim measure.

The third structural issue raised by the report is the proposal to create a Personnel Office, separate from the Fees Office, to

"provide advice and guidance on personnel matters to MPs and their staff, in particular on rates of pay, and to review the pension provisions for MPs' staff".

While recognising the reasons for such a proposal, we are also conscious of the concern expressed by many Members that such an office could be seen as moving unacceptably towards intervening in, and centralising, the many individual arrangements that currently exist. Subject to the views of the House—I emphasise that—we do not recommend proceeding with this proposal, and accordingly the motion that I have moved this evening does not provide for it.

I shall, of course, listen carefully to all that is said about those issues in the debate, and I shall also listen to what is said by hon. Members who make their views known in the many other ways open to them. I am, however, somewhat encouraged—although, I hope, not unduly so—by the absence from the Order Paper of amendments on what might be described as structural points, apart from amendment (b), which you have selected, Madam Speaker. Although I suspect that that amendment is aimed at the level of allowance, it would also delay until 1994 the

coming into effect of the switch to a quarterly basis for hon. Members joining or leaving the House, to which I referred earlier.

The same absence of amendments does not, however, apply to the issue of the amount of an increased but non-compartmentalised allowance.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Surely the reason for the absence of amendments from the Order Paper is the fact that, in the limited time of an hour and a half, it clearly would not have been possible for the House to do justice to all the important recommendations in the report. Will the Leader of the House give an undertaking that, once the main decision has been made on the increase or otherwise in the money, we can return to the other issues after the summer recess?

Mr. Newton: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point, although I had not realised that that was the reason for the absence of what might be called structural amendments. As I have said, I—indeed, everyone—will listen carefully to what is said in the House tonight, and that includes anything that the hon. Gentleman wishes to say about these or any other points.

I was about to deal with the amount of an undivided allowance—if I may use that shorthand. Let me first set out clearly the scale of the increase to which the report's proposals as a whole would give rise.

At the very least, the maximum allowance for every Member would rise from £28,986 in 1991-92 to £37,360 in 1992-93. For those taking the full constituency allowance and the initial equipment allowance—the latter partly offset by a reduced general office expenses allowance—the 1992-93 maximum would be £42,360. Thus, in percentage terms, the maximum increase would range from 23·6 per cent. to 40·2 per cent., in addition to the 4·25 per cent. increase due from April, in line with the existing uprating formula, giving overall increases in the maximum of between 28·9 per cent. and 46·1 per cent. on the 1991-92 figure.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Does the Leader of the House not recognise that percentages are meaningless and that those figures should be compared with the £75,000 or thereabouts that is available for Members of the European Parliament, who have a much smaller burden of case work than Members of this House?

Mr. Newton: I am aware that comparisons are sometimes drawn with Members of the European Parliament, both in this and in other ways. I have two points to make about that. First, their working patterns and methods are entirely different from ours. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I should be obliged if the House would not be so restive. It is only right that the Leader of the House should be given a proper and a fair hearing. He is having very great difficulty at the present time.

Mr. Newton: I do not think that the existence of higher allowances in any other country to which reference might be made can necessarily be taken as providing a good guide to what this House should do at this time in the situation in which Members of Parliament find themselves.

I have underlined the scale of the percentage increases that would be entailed if the report were to be implemented in full. The second point is that the background is not one of prolonged erosion of value but of significant real improvement by comparison with the position not so many years ago. As the survey at the back of the report itself observes:

"any MP who was a Member of the House before the late '60s will testify that since then the position of the British MP has been transformed."

While the context of that comment goes wider than help with office costs, it is in fact the case that, between 1979 and 1991, the office costs allowance increased by 530 per cent., in cash terms, representing an increase of one and a half times in real terms.

I make these points not because they can or should in themselves be conclusive, but because I think that they need to be taken into account by the House in making its judgment—and it is its judgment—bearing in mind also the considerable and inevitable uncertainty about the exact scale of the problem that the report seeks to address.

There will certainly be few in the House who would quarrel with the view that our work load as constituency MPs has continued to rise in recent years, but there are, I think, many who question whether the increase has really been on such a scale since the last big uplift in the mid-1980s, followed by annual upratings, as to justify a further increase now of the size that full implementation would entail.

There is another factor that the House cannot—I repeat, cannot—escape taking into account in making its judgment, any more than the Government can escape taking it into account in considering what recommendation they should make and, indeed, in making their decision on another Top Salaries Review Body report which has recently commanded attention. That is the wider context in which these proposals come forward—at a time when it is necessary to constrain public expenditure and when so many other individuals and groups are being asked to accept restraint, or are finding it necessary to impose it on themselves. I have to say, quite simply, that the Government do not believe that the evidence would justify the House in going as far as the report suggests, or as far as some of the amendments to the resolution seek.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): The Leader of the House is not taking the House with him with this part of his argument, and I am not surprised. It is clearly weak, because he is now making comparisons with personal income. The allowance is to enable parliamentarians to do their job properly. Will he deal with that aspect and say why he thinks the TSRB is wrong to state that we need the money to do the job properly in Parliament?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that my remarks just now were not related solely to salary issues. I said specifically that many other individuals and groups were being asked to accept restraint or finding it necessary to impose it on themselves. That affects not only people's salaries but many other things that they would wish to do if there were no difficulty.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I have listened carefully to my right hon. Friend's rational and persuasive presentation of the issue, and I am glad that he is about to deal with public perceptions. Let us not fool ourselves: whatever the rights and wrongs of the issue, it is being observed by the public out there, and the public are about

[Mr. George Walden]

to undergo an economic phase in which they will have not inflation-plus rises but perhaps inflation-minus rises. They will ask themselves why we are behaving like a 1970s trade union and awarding ourselves increases for reasons that they will never understand.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a point which obviously struck a chord with a number of hon. Members.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Will the Leader of the House confirm that the advocacy of restraint has come from the Treasury, which, in a reply to me today, states that, on policy and advice alone, it spends more than £28 million a year, on outside consultancies £2·8 million and on hospitality £115,000 a year?

Mr. Newton: The suggestion that the House needs to act with reasonable restraint comes not from the Treasury but from many Conservative Members and, most recently, from my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) a moment or two ago.

The resolution therefore rests on the proposition that, while it is right that a significant increase should be made in the office costs allowance, over and above inflation, it should be based not on the additional half-member of staff proposed in the report, but on an additional one quarter, together with the full £4,000 proposed for general office expenses. That gives an increase from £28,986 to £33,190, representing a real increase of 9·8 per cent. and—with the normal uprating increase of 4·25 per cent.—an overall cash increase of 14·5 per cent.

We believe that this proposal, while clearly less than the TSRB recommended, strikes a fair balance between the interests of our constituents as taxpayers and the undoubted need of hon. Members for sufficient support to carry out their duties. It would bring a real improvement in the funding for Members' secretarial and research costs, and I commend it to the House.

11.4 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I have sat through many similar debates in my 22 years in the House, and this one is typical of most of them.

The Government commission an independent report. They establish a committee of people who are distinguished in their fields, under the chairmanship of Sir David Nickson. The secretariat is provided by the Office of Manpower Economics. Hay Management undertakes the research. The committee takes many months to do its work. It takes evidence from hon. Members on both sides of the House. The Government receive the report, suppress it, leak it selectively to the newspapers so that it is grossly misrepresented, then come to the House and tell us that they propose to ignore all the main conclusions of the work.

That is a recipe for confusing the public, and it does the case of the Leader of the House and the Government no good at all to confuse—whether by accident or design—allowances granted to Members of this House to enable them to employ staff with their personal incomes. That is remiss of the right hon. Gentleman and those few people in the press who seek to convince the public that the debate is about the incomes of Members of Parliament. I know that that annoys many hon. Members, but, even more, it annoys our staff—those for whom we must fight in such debates, who have families, homes and mortgages to maintain and who are entitled to much better treatment and conditions than we are able to provide for them whether here at Westminster or in our constituencies.

There is a rumour going round the House—I do not know whether it is true or not; perhaps we may be advised—that the Government Chief Whip has been effortlessly gliding around the Corridors and Rooms of the House trying, for once, to ensure that the Government do not win in the Lobby tonight.

I may say that, in this context, the present Government are no better and no worse than Labour Governments, who also have a pretty undistinguished record on these matters. But if they want to absolve themselves of responsibility for the decision that I hope the House will take in a little while, as they apparently do, it would be better if they accepted the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), whose point of view I share, and handed responsibility for this matter to the House of Commons Commission, which already has responsibility for every other aspect of the budget of the House. That would ensure that the House, on the recommendation of the Commission, no doubt following some similar work, could make its own decision, quite detached from the Executive of the day.

In my experience, the only Prime Minister who has dealt with this matter properly and expeditiously is the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who received the report, published it quickly and implemented it in full. On that occasion, all the fuss quickly went away. The Government have dragged the process out, with all the consequences that we face this evening—not just for ourselves, I emphasise, but for the people to whom we have a responsibility as employers.

Let me refer briefly to what the report says in its conclusions. Paragraph 51 states:

> "These recommendations arise from our general conclusion from all the available evidence that the pressures and demands on MPs have altered since our last report, and that their workload has increased substantially. Accordingly, we believe that further resources are necessary to enable MPsproperly to perform their jobs."

Paragraph 53 says:

> "Together our recommendations are consistent with the objective referred to at paragraph 11 that MPs should receive allowances which are sufficient to enable them to fulfil their duties, but that the way in which the allowances are used should meet high standards of public accountability and employment practice."

No one, surely, could disagree with any of that—except, apparently, the Government, for reasons that are not altogether clear following the speech made by the Leader of the House.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Perhaps I may help the hon. Gentleman by suggesting that the reasons are clear. The money to which we are referring is to enable Back-Bench and Front-Bench Members to examine what the Executive are doing. The Government have an interest, I suspect, in ensuring that it is as little as possible.

Dr. Cunningham: I am delighted that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. He anticipated the remarks that I was about to make, and I wholeheartedly agree with what he said. After elections, Ministers go to their offices and get a nice new Rover or Daimler. Everything is provided for

them and they like what they have. I do not blame them for that. However, the last thing that they want to face day in, day out, is a better-informed, better-resourced House of Commons. The hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) was absolutely right.

As the taxpayer's interest has been mentioned, I make no apology for saying that it is in the taxpayer's interest to have a better-informed, better-resourced House of Commons with hon. Members who are more easily able to take on and challenge the decisions of the Executive. Nothing can be more in the taxpayer's interests than that.

I am very sorry about the way in which the Government have handled the matter and the recommendations that they have put before the House in the motion which I hope that the House will reject. I understand that at least some of the spouses of right hon. and hon. Members on the Treasury Bench are also pretty sorry about that. I guess that those who quite legitimately and properly employ their spouses as secretaries to aid them will get a bit of an ear-bashing when they get home tonight if the Government get their way. That is all well and good.

I must say to our friends, the ladies and gentlemen of the press who may want to record our deliberations, that I should be very happy for them all to write whatever they want to write about our decisions, accurate or otherwise, so long as they all publish under their columns their expenses for the past three months.

I hope that the House will listen carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) who will shortly move amendment (a), which I endorse, and which I invite all right hon. and hon. Members who are not the subject of the authoritarian activities of the Patronage Secretary, to endorse also.

Amendment (a) is computed on the basis of what the recommendations of the Top Salaries Review Body report would mean to us, given that we accept, at least for the moment—I stress, for the moment—the Government's intention to continue to pay the allowance as a lump sum in the way that it has been paid in the past. I know that many hon. Members want to examine that aspect of that decision in more detail later, but tonight is not the occasion to do that.

Amendment (a) takes the Government's recommendation of one allowance and adds to it the consequences of the recommendations of the TSRB. It is accurately and fairly calculated and I believe that it is right that at least that aspect of the recommendations of the people who did all that work over so many months, and who reached such emphatic conclusions and clear recommendations, should be implemented.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will refer to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) who said that there are millions of people outside this place, in the public sector as well as the private sector, who are experiencing very difficult financial circumstances. They will misunderstand the hon. Gentleman—I speak as someone who is to visit his dentist in the next few days.

Dr. Cunningham: There are indeed millions of people outside this place in very difficult circumstances. However, it is rather peculiar that it is only on occasions like this that the hon. Gentleman seems to remember that they are there.

In the time that I have enjoyed the privilege of being a Member of the House, very few of my constituents have ever seriously complained about the provision for hon. Members to do an effective job on their behalf. Indeed, I have had far more remarks and observations from people in business and in industry and commerce who are astonished at the mediaeval nature of this place and the provisions not simply for us but for the people who work long hours on our behalf in conditions which, if we were acting like the trade union to which the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) referred, would not be tolerated for a moment, not least because they do not meet the basic requirements of the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act, and this place would be closed down if the law applied to it.

Let us have no hypocrisy about what the public think and about taxpayer's interests, thank you very much. The public want, especially in these circumstances, more effective checks and balances to be placed upon the Government. I urge the House to take this opportunity, which is the only opportunity that new hon. Members will have in this Parliament, to strike a blow in the interests of greater and more effective scrutiny of the Executive, in the interests of our constituents and ourselves, and not least the people whom we employ, and vote for amendment (a).

11.15 pm

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I have put my name to amendment (a). I am grateful for the opportunity to say that the Government were absolutely right to commission the report. The fact that they commissioned it recognises the substantial change that has taken place in the duties of Back-Bench Members, not just in their weekly mail but in their wider responsibilities, in the extra costs of employing highly skilled secretaries who now have a substantial job to do beyond just typing letters, and, of course, in the increased costs of office equipment. Any hon. Member who has recently sought to sell a second-hand typewriter or early computer will recognise that there are no great capital gains to be made in buying office equipment.

We have a unique job, which is scarcely ever recognised outside this place. It is unique because it is carried out in two separate places, it is carried out for ourselves, yet we have a sort of employer, it is different and it has to be seen as different.

I congratulate the review body on the immense trouble tht it has taken and on its appreciation of many of the special difficulties that assail us. There will never be a perfect arrangement for us. Our London living allowance, for example, is a crazy calculation, but we are not debating that; we are debating the office costs, which gradually, over the years, have become more sensible. I take the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) made, that this matter is not about our salaries or our income. I am delighted with the way that it has been reviewed, but perhaps there are those who think that, because the review has been headed "Top Salaries Review Body", there is some misapprehension. As every hon. Member does, I have to justify every penny of expenditure that I claim, and it has to be justified as an expense in association with my parliamentary duties. In no way could that be regarded as salary or pay.

It has been a long struggle to realism in getting our allowances put right. Since I have been in the House, 13 such reports have been referred to review bodies. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was right to say that only one was adopted by the Government. It caused no difficulty, it went through quickly, and that was a way to handle it. I am very sorry that, yet again, by this attempt at cheeseparing, the Government have produced controversy, misunderstanding and a dispute which need never have existed had they published the report and adopted it.

The Government, if they propose to deal with these matters by referring them to review bodies, must decide in advance to accept the review bodies' reports. Otherwise they should not bother in the first place. They could just as easily make an arbitrary decision without all this work, without all the effort to arrive at a proper assessment. I make this plea to the Minister; whatever the result of tonight's votes, let the Government, before repeating this exercise, as they will surely have to do in respect of other aspects of our salary and expenses, take into account the point that I have just made. If they do not do so, they will not get responsible people to sit on these boards, and an undesirable disallowance factor will be built in. I urge my hon. Friend to accept the amendment in full and without question. If he were to do so, we should have no controversy at all.

11.21 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): This is, and should be, a House of Commons matter. It is not a matter for determination by the Executive, and when the Executive make a recommendation, it should be reviewed with a healthy scepticism.

At heart, this debate is about how we can make sure that we can do a proper job for our constituents. The pressure on Members of Parliament has increased dramatically in recent years, and it continues to increase. There is legislation to scrutinise; there are Select and Standing Committees to take part in; there is now a flood of European Community directives to take note of and to follow through. At the last count, about two years ago, I found that I dealt with about 6,000 individual constituency cases in a year. I hold five surgeries a month, each lasting five or six hours. The flow of correspondence from constituents get greater and greater every year.

The Leader of the House says that there has been no dramatic increase in the work load of MPs since we last debated this matter. I do not know whether that is true of his constituency, but it is certainly not true of mine. Surely, if we are to do our job properly, we need to be able, as a bare minimum, to employ two full-time staff, to pay them properly, and give them decent conditions of work, and properly to establish and equip an office in the constituency.

As other hon. Members have said, this debate is not about MPs' salaries or perks, although some people much more well heeled than we are have sought to convince the public that that is the case. This debate is about our having the back-up to do our job. I should very much like to see changes in the system of the block allowance. I certainly favour central arrangements for the purchase of equipment. That would be much more cost-effective. There should be much more open disclosure of what happens to our allowances, and there should be proper conditions and contracts for the people we employ.

These are the things we could do to improve the system that has been put before us, but I am afraid that they are not open for discussion tonight. In the meantime, we have the report of the Top Salaries Review Body and the Government's motion. The review body suggests that the allowance should be disaggregated, that it should be split up into blocks for staff, office equipment, a constituency office and a setting-up allowance. For a variety of reasons, some good, some bad, the Government have said that they do not wish to go along with that proposal. For the purposes of the debate, I am happy to accept that position.

The amounts proposed by the review body are as follows: £33,360 to employ two staff; £4,000 for office equipment; £2,000 for a constituency—I observe that £2,000 would probably be sufficient to rent a broom cupboard in my constituency—and, in effect, because of the discounting that takes place if we claim, a setting-up allowance of £3,000.

What I have done in my amendment is simple. I have taken the amounts for staff, office equipment and a constituency office and divided the setting-up allowance of £3,000 by five, because it is supposed to last five years. I have added up all those figures. The result is the figure of £39,960 in my amendment. The Government propose a substantially lower figure than the amount recommended by the review body. The Government's proposal is £33,190.

Even tonight, the Leader of the House has not given us any justification of the figure and how it was arrived at. He has told us that is a percentage, but he has not told us why it is that percentage. It is as if the Government have simply decided on that figure. They have plucked it out of the air. That is the figure on the Order Paper. The alternative in my amendment is to take the total amount that the review body proposed and substitute it for the Government's figure.

Parliament is not the Executive. We are here to do two specific jobs which no one else can do: first, to act as advocates for our constituents; secondly, to scrutinise and hold to account the workings of the Government. To do both those jobs properly we need the necessary resources. I urge colleagues from all parties—it is a House of Commons matter, not an Executive matter—to support my amendment.

11.28 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I shall formally move my amendment when called upon to do so, Madam Speaker but I shall speak to it now.

My amendment takes into consideration the Government's position. We accept that there is a recession. We accept what the Leader of the House said about the wider context and why it was necessary to constrain public expenditure. Opposition and Conservative Members and, indeed, the country are prepared to wait for the recession to turn. We are waiting for the green shoots of springtime to become flowers, buds or shrubs. We shall be ready when that happens.

We must also accept that our work load has increased, but we do not accept the definition of the work load given by the Leader of the House. I refer again to the statement made by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that, according to the report, our work load has increased substantially. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) also referred to our substantial and increasing workload. The retreads—those who have come into the House since the election and were previously Members of Parliament—say that the greatest thing that has struck them is the increase in their mail and work load and the difficulty that they have in coping with it. That is an additional reason for accepting the amendment rather than the Government's motion.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who may catch your eye later, Madam Speaker, was the first to draw attention to the fact that the House of Commons is essentially a legislature which exists to control the Executive. The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and my hon. Friends the Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Islington, South and Finsbury reiterated that.

We are here to hold the Government—the Executive—to account and it is the absolute duty of the legislature so to do.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Does the hon. Gentleman confirm that the report of the Top Salaries Review Body says that, since it last reported, there has been a 50 per cent. increase in the number of letters with which we have to deal? It simply recommends an increase of one third in our staff levels, from one and a half to two. Clearly, the level of work coming into this place will be measured and, in addition to increases for inflation, we should have an increase for our staff because of the volume of work with which they have to deal.

Mr. Bell: The hon. Member makes my point for me. In an aside, my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) referred to one of the issues with which we have to deal from time to time—whales. All of us find it difficult to cope with the mail in our post bags. Each letter received by a Member of Parliament generates four more letters. When an issue arises, it becomes impossible to cope with the burden. That is why we need appropriate secretarial and research assistance and appropriate allowances, so that assistants can "do their jobs properly"—as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) said in an intervention.

I wish to draw the attention of the House to another significant factor. This is the last occasion for us to debate this issue in the present Parliament; it may be about seven or eight years before we debate it again. This Parliament will eventually end and there will be another review. Perhaps we shall take up the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) that the matter should be debated by a House of Commons Commission and that we should await its conclusions. The vote tonight will be the last vote for several years.

I do not propose to delay the House at length, but I repeat the argument of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield: it is the duty of the House to hold the Government accountable.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): If some hon. Members have misgivings about the proposed increase in the limit for one reason or another—collective or individual reasons of restraint—they do not have to claim the maximum; they can claim much less.

Mr. Bell: It is optional; I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point.

Amendment (b) tries to take into account the Government's desire not to enhance secretarial allowances too much at this time, but to accept that the full amount to which my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury referred, should be given next year, as this may well be the last review for five or six years. Our constituents, the taxpayer and the legislature will benefit, and the Executive will be held to greater account.

11.32 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The Leader of the House sought to justify the payment of a lower figure than that recommended by the Top Salaries Review Body by reference to salaries paid to certain public servants. I suggest that that is a misleading analogy, because we are not talking about salaries. I suspect that the Leader of the House has been reading too many newspapers, as the implication in some of them has been that the allowances would be a means of feathering our nests. The only way in which a Member can feather his or her nest through the allowances is by fraud.

Some newspapers have suggested that some Members might commit the shocking act of paying their spouse to work for them. Someone ought to say in this debate that if any spouse does a genuine job of work for any Member of Parliament, they are entitled to be paid a proper rate for the job, and many are not.

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

Earlier, I talked to one of my hon. Friends whose wife has worked for many years in a remote place as his full-time secretary. Such is the feathering of their nest that she is now paid about £8,000 a year for that full-time job. He cannot afford to pay her more, because his allowance is committed in other ways. I hope that I shall not provoke a major row in the domesticity of Scotland if I say that I think that my hon. Friend is underpaying his wife disgracefully. That should not happen.

The Leader of the House told us that the Government had decided, because of general economic conditions, that the figure should be reduced from the recommendation to £33,190. One is tempted to say that the Government are very willing to rely on consultants' reports when they suit them, but it is another matter when they do not. What on earth was the point of the arm's-length TSRB report on this important issue if the conclusions of those independent people are to be ignored?

What evidence does the Leader of the House have to support the figure of £33,190? I thought that the right hon. Gentleman would tell us that we did not need to employ two whole-time people or an office in our constituency —incidentally, one certainly could not obtain an office even in rural Wales for £2,000. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman would produce evidence to support his claim that we did not need research assistants. Where is the evidence that Government briefings in notes on clauses on the Bills that we consider in Committee are an adequate basis for discussing or even opposing parts of those Bills? We did not hear a word of evidence from the right hon. Gentleman about those issues.

I am sure that many right hon. and hon. Members share my disappointment at the fact that the Government, relying on no evidence, have simply decided that hon. Members should have underfunded offices. It is time for us to tell the Government that hon. Members are not prepared to service their constituents poorly because their offices are underfunded. I believe in the principle of compartmentalising the allowances, because they could then be scrutinised more effectively.

A constituency allowance would be extremely useful, but while we have the present lump sum system, we have certain purposes to serve. Our first purpose is to serve our constituents. Even nine years ago, when I came into the House, we were not subject to organised mailing—sometimes it is nationally organised. Then, there were not as many word processors, which has led to so many personalised letters being sent to us. We must reply to those letters if we are to be competent, effective Members of Parliament.

I have added my name to amendment (a). I hope that new Conservative Members in particular will realise that, if they are to do efficiently the job to which they have had the privilege of being elected, they too should vote for that amendment. Otherwise, in three or four years, they will find that they are struggling—running hard to stand still. I do not believe that that is right for Members of this honourable House.

11.38 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I support the amendment and I realise that certain elements of the press may expect me to feel guilty about that. I do not. To be blunt, I wonder how some London journalists dare to write about us when they receive up to twice the salary of Members, as well as a large expense account. I think that they do rather well. Of course they work rather long hours, I am told—I think that we do as well. We are not here tonight to talk about Members' salaries, and that does not bother me greatly. As an ex-village schoolmaster, traditionally underpaid, I can make do on my present salary. While it is inadequate compared with what legislators receive in other countries, I can live on it.

However, I am angry over the totally inadequate back-up resources that I have at my disposal and the fact that the interests of my wife and children have to be sacrificed to make up the shortfall between what I receive and what I spend to service my constituency. Members must already work too hard for too long, away from their families, without having that added pressure.

In the last financial year, I overspent my office allowance by £5,044. In the previous year I overspent by about £2,000. I have to find that from my personal resources—in other words, from my current salary—as I have no private means. I have a mortgage and two children at university. It is not a painless exercise for my wife and myself. I pity new Members, with young families, who came here in April.

My staff, who are excellent, must be paid, but they are not paid what they are worth. Nor do they have a properly equipped office in which to work. For example, the photocopier that I bought nine years ago, when I was first elected, now manages about three reproductions before it has to be switched off, allowed to cool down and switched on again. I cannot afford to replace it.

The further one's constituency from London, the more acute the problem becomes. The most disadvantaged are Northern Ireland Members, although the problem applies in varying degrees to Members from Scotland, the north-east and all constituencies that are distant from Westminster.

Because of the remoteness of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, for example—the issue is further complicated by the direct rule system—I find myself with a constant conflict of duties. How do I divide my time between Westminster, where I want to play a full part as a United Kingdom Member, and Northern Ireland, where the interests of my constituents are dealt with almost exclusively from within the Northern Ireland Office at Stormont? Partly to resolve the issue at constituency level, I am obliged to employ two full-time and two part-time staff. As Northern Ireland does not have a meaningful local government stratum, virtually no problems can be resolved at town hall level. They all arrive on my desk.

Let me compare myself with a parliamentary colleague in, say, the south of England. I do not denigrate his or her work, but their parochial duties are often dealt with at local government level, and one secretary or personal assistant and a researcher can work here in the House, where they have access to free telephones and a library service.

My telephone bill in Fermanagh and South Tyrone for the last year was about £3,750. My main constituency office in Dungannon costs me, including rent and rates, about £3,000 per annum. My Enniskillen office, which is over 40 miles away from the Dungannon office, costs a further £2,000. In addition to lighting and heating bills, I

am obliged to maintain three separate sets of word processors, one in Dungannon, one in Enniskillen and a laptop machine that I carry for my own use.

The TSRB consultants who interviewed me came and saw the situation in my office and constituency. I suggested that there should be a scale of allowances, related to distance from the House, ranging from £40,000 to £55,000 per Member. At present, my absolute minimum requirement to maintain my present position is £35,000 and I would need a further £10,000 to £15,000 if I were ever to hope to employ a secretary-cum-research assistant in this place. I do not have one at present.

At a time when the Prime Minister is promoting his people's charter, should not we start in the House by ensuring that those who are elected can pay their staff a reasonable wage so that the constituents who sent us here can expect a response to their problems? It must be remembered that Members are not handed the money as a lump sum but must reclaim it, having provided the necessary receipts. If some Members do not require the full amount, they do not have to spend it, but those of us with difficult constituencies, for whatever reason, should not be penalised.

I suppose that it is not wise to reveal the details of one's business as I have done. I do not make out that I am a martyr; like most hon. Members, I enjoy my job and want to do it properly. None the less, I feel that the public should know how wrong it is for the Government to propose to underfund the work and business of this House because it diminishes the House and those who work here.

11.47 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): In the 1970s when Clive Jenkins was the leader of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs union, I remember calculating that a skilled white collar worker needed to invest some £31,000 a year to be effective in his job. To extrapolate from that and bring it up to date, it must be double that sum today. People running a business and providing the information services that we provide would have to find such sums out of their profits on top of their salaries, which I admit may be less than a Member of Parliament receives.

In my first year in this place I got away with a reasonable electric typewriter and a secretary, but since I have been here the work load has grown and I have gone from a typewriter with a screen, to an Amstrad, to a £4,500 machine with a laser printer. That is not because I am fond of equipment, but because it was essential to match the growing work load.

It is improper for us to be too censorious about the increase when we consider the number of hours and quality of work that we get from our secretarial back-up, most of which is carried out by women who are usually considered worthy of being paid slightly less than if a man were doing that job. If men provided the back-up secretarial assistance, we would be asking for much more. The women who back us up with clerical efforts and skills are worthy of a reasonable salary because they must cope with London prices. Many people outside who will scrutinise the sums that we talk about may deal with considerably lower salary scales, but they do not have to face up to the costs of living in the city—essentially for travel and rents.

For all those reasons, we should adopt the figure that the review body recommended. Unless we do so, we cannot match the service that our constituents require. I find that a day's surgery generates some two days of work for my secretary. That is a fairly modest work load because my constituency is, fortunately, quite prosperous and does not generate as many case histories as some colleagues must cope with weekly.

I need a research assistant because of the many problems thrown up by the legislation that we in the House are constantly passing. The ordinary citizen needs an encyclopaedia, a citizens advice bureau and sometimes a solicitor in order to understand the way in which it impinges on their ordinary lives. We generate the problem. We must, therefore, at least provide the assistance and the back-up to help people cope with it.

I and a number of my colleagues now pay the Fees Office to be here—my contribution has gone from nil in the first year when I did not spend all my allowance, to barely breaking even in the second year, to £3,000 in my third year, to £5,000 in the last year but one, to more than £7,000 in the last year out of my salary in order to meet my work load, which colleagues may well think is partly self-generated, but I make no apology for that. That is my own choice, but for many colleagues that is a difficult matter with which to cope.

We should stop pussyfooting around, remember the people who do our wonderful back-up work—there are as many women working in this place as there are men, toiling away in the background, at salaries substantially less than ours, but deserving much better—bite this little bullet and make it clear to the public that we do this so that we can provide a reasonable service. Until we can cut down the legislative tendency of the Front Benches of both parties when in office, we should provide the service that the public need.

11.50 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) has made a powerful case on behalf of those who work for Members of Parliament and it is one that the House will disregard at its peril.

We are discussing not a financial but a democratic question. The Leader of the House is here to represent Members. He is the bridge between the Government and the House. I notice six civil servants in the Box who have advised him on his speech and no doubt will check carefully what he said. Not one of the civil servants whom he employs will be working under the conditions that he thinks it right we should work under with the staff that we employ.

As I said in an intervention, not a single civil servant has to choose between a computer, his secretary, a telephone call and his office rent—not one. We are discussing the relationship between the Executive and the legislature. Therefore, this is not an occasion for the usual sort of argument that we have in the House; it is one of those rare but important occasions when the House as a House looks at what the Government are prepared to do.

It is no good telling us what the percentage improvements are. Before 1910, Members of Parliament were not paid at all, and I am sure that if, instead of holding elections, we put out parliamentary seats to private tender the House could be filled with people who would be happy to pay to have the privilege of the

[Mr. Tony Benn]

influence that we have. When I was elected, I received £30 a week, no secretarial allowance, no franked postage, no office and, no telephone allowance and I was even prevented from bringing in a tape recorder to dictate here by someone from the Serjeant at Arms' office because some people did not approve of them. It is no good telling me that we are better off than we were then. The question is whether we are properly equipped to do the job that we now have to do.

Every time I go to my constituency—this is true of every hon. Member—everyone I meet is my employer. A number of people have written to me saying, "We haven't had a reply to the letter that we wrote to you, Mr. Benn," or, "We sent you a message and when shall we get an answer?" But no one has ever told me that my office is stuffed with unnecessary staff, because that is not the case. The truth is that we have to work with local authorities, district and county councils and Government Departments and, now that the agencies have been hived off, we have to chase them up as well. Every time the Government privatise anything, they set up a regulatory body. We are a regulatory body, but the Government say that we cannot do the job that we have to do.

Every hon. Member has his own personal experience. I shall not recite mine, but without the work of one Member of Parliament the Birmingham Six might still be in prison. That work took him years and years of effort. The same applies to other hon. Members. The hon. Member for Billericay has been active in promoting legislation. That is over and above the call of duty, as military citations used to say,' but it is an important role for a Member of Parliament. We have to deal with our constituents and our localities, and weekly surgeries lasting five or six hours —as the my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) mentioned. Some of the cases are tragic and involve all sorts of matters. People come to us because they feel that there is nowhere else that they can go.

As to the number of letters, during the Gulf war I received 12,000 letters—including one from almost every hostage in Baghdad. They wrote saying who they were and describing their medical condition, because they knew that I was going there. Was it not part of my duty to reply to them all? If I had not had the assistance of four or five volunteers in my office, that job could not possibly have been done.

We deal also with parliamentary questions, speeches, early-day motions, Bills, Committee work and campaigns of one kind and another. All that requires proper staffing.

There has been an enormous growth in Executive power over the years. I once worked out—I have not updated my figures—that Government expenditure in the first 50 years of my life, from 1925 to 1974, rose 1,000 per cent. in real terms. The number of Members of Parliament is virtually the same as it was in 1925, but we cover a wider range of activity.

Mention has been made of the enormous growth also in the number of pressure groups. I cannot say that I care for some of them, but I agree with others. They bombard us with information. They are well-resourced—they have staff, computers and fax machines. We have to judge whether we agree with them. There is also the growth in the media. One has only to go to 4 Millbank to know that —it will not be long before they are bigger than we are. We will be at 4 Millbank, and the media will be over here, because they need more space.

All staff should be employed and properly paid by the Government. We could select them, but they would be paid from the public account. All equipment should be provided and, when a Member of Parliament is defeated or retires, he would hand it back—in the same way that the Leader of the House will return his seal of office when he ceases to be a Secretary of State or a Minister. There should be an absolute minimum of three staff for every Member of Parliament—one or two full-time in his constituency, and one in London. There is no other way.

Why did the Government establish an independent commission that had no motive for exaggerating our needs and then say that they could not manage to accept its recommendations? What was the point? I fear that it was to delay matters until after the general election.

This decision is one for the House to take. I hope that the Whips have not used their influence and that no Member will find that he or she has been left off a Select Committee because he or she voted the wrong way tonight. I invite the House to support the amendments. They were recommended by an independent commission of inquiry that received evidence from many right hon. and hon. Members, myself included, and reached a very measured view.

11.57 pm

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I intervene briefly to support the amendments. I do so as one who gave evidence to the Top Salaries Review Body, which studied at length the representations that it received. We referred these matters to the TSBR to take them out of the hands of Members of Parliament and, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I find it extraordinary that the Government, have torn up its recommendations. That is not the way to deal with the issue.

We asked that body to investigate matters affecting Members of Parliament because that was in the interests of the House as a whole, and it would take the issue out of controversy. I remind Conservative Members that this is not a political issue. I have sat in Parliaments under Labour and Conservative Governments, when they have been pressurised not to implement increased facilities for right hon. and hon. Members because that might upset the norm or Government policy.

If we do not take the right decision this evening, we can forget any improvements for the remainder of this Parliament. That is the key issue. I believe that the amendments, especially amendment (a), will give us no more than what the report entitles us to—a "global" sum that would enable us to do the work that we must and want to do. I urge the House to support the amendments.

11.59 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Some hon. Members may feel that, as someone who has been in the House for a mere 15 months, I am being rather precocious in speaking tonight. I am comforted only by the fact that the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and I—who were on opposite sides of the Grunwick picket line in 1977—are agreed on the issue: that must make us right.

I am very conscious that those who have been in the House much longer than I have become accustomed to arrangements that appal a new Member. Those arrangements are primitive—not least in regard to the resources and conditions that we expect our staff to endure. The issue is not, as the Government would have us believe, about Members' pay. An article published in *The Sunday Times* on 5 July, headed

"MPs strike it rich at palace of perks",

said that we were alleged to have an annual income of £102,671. As we all know, that is a fantasy figure of which Del Boy would be proud: I hope that he will apply for the post of editor of *The Sunday Times* when a vacancy occurs.

The issue is not about pay restraint—restraint imposed on us, as Members of Parliament. If it were, the Leader of the House would not have presented us with a proposed increase of 14·5 per cent—nearly four times the rate of inflation; he would have presented us with an increase of about 4 per cent. But he did not do that: he plucked a figure out of the air, illogically and pragmatically, in the hope of buying a few votes against the amendments.

I urge the House to reject the hyprocrisy of editors who claim to be on the side of the people, and then deny us the rights and resources to check and challenge the Executive on behalf of the people. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) so eloquently put it, this is a constitutional issue which affects our right as legislators and our right to represent our constituents.

The Government want Members of Parliament to chase their tails, with very little time to consider the complexity of issues, the nature of political questions and the strategies and policies that we must pursue. Their proposals are almost designed to keep us under so much pressure that we cannot seriously do our jobs as parliamentary representatives, seeking to challenge the Executive and hold it accountable. Nor can we hold our constituents in the high regard in which we ought to hold them: we cannot give them the service that they deserve.

Let me briefly describe the experience of an hon. Member with a constituency office. That office, which had not been set up before I became a Member of Parliament for Neath, is now deluged with daily telephone calls from people with housing and social security problems—people without jobs who sometimes break down in tears. They are able to receive service on their doorsteps from their Member of Parliament or his staff; they could not do that under the old resourcing arrangements. We need extra resources, to ensure that every Member of Parliament can provide such a local service.

I believe that the Executive have launched a deliberate strategy to deny us the resources to do our jobs; to centralise power; to ensure that Members of Parliament are buried under an enormous case load; to ensure that they cannot scrutinise the Government; and to ensure that they are dog-tired and half-witted—that applies to me, at any rate. I ask hon. Members to imagine that they were able to act as normal people for once; to listen to others for once; to think properly for once; to go home and share their spare time with their spouses and talk to their children for once. They should imagine themselves having the time and the resources to be human beings for once. This issue goes beyond the question of Members of Parliament having the resources to do their job and to support their staff.

I urge the House to ensure that we get for our staff proper resources, pay and conditions so that we are able to raise a great number of issues covered by the report but disregarded by the Executive, including the disaggregation of allowances to ensure that the staff of Members of Parliament are not compared with computers but are given proper pay and resources. I urge the House to support the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith).

12.4 am

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): As we get very close to making a decision on behalf of our staff, I ought to point out that the Leader of the House has won neither the argument nor the support of his hon. Friends. Having listened to the comments made by his hon. Friends and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), as well as to those of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) who spoke so well on behalf of the staff, it is clear that the House does not believe the case made by the Leader of the House. That is because he did not have the courage to bring the report before the House early enough in this Parliament to enable hon. Members to have a full debate on its contents.

There is much in the Top Salaries Review Body's report that hon. Members, on behalf of their staff, would like to debate. All that we have been able to do tonight is to ensure that at least one of its recommendations is carried out—that Members of Parliament are given more financial support for their staff so that they can do their job. I hope that all hon. Members will support the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury.

A number of the recommendations in the report still need to be discussed. I hope that the Leader of the House will respond to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) and that he will allow the House to discuss the contents of the Top Salaries Review Body's report. Hon. Members want to take account of many of its recommendations, in particular the need to provide support for those Members of Parliament who have constituency offices and who require more finance to run them.

The Leader of the House has clearly misread the mood of the House. I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House will join us in the Lobby and support the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury.

12.7 am

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I intend to make two points that have not yet been made. First, I am sorry that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) said what he did, for I believe that he is a constituent of mine. I may remind him of that fact when he next writes to me, but, as my secretary is away on holiday, he may not get a quick reply. All I would say to him is that there is no reason why any hon. Member should not say to his or her constituents, or to any member of the press, that we need this money to do our job as parliamentarians. That is what the argument is about.

Mr. Walden: I have been asked by my constituents about this. I have told them that there is a limit to what I can do for them, with one secretary, but that I do not believe, in the wider interests of the country, that I should vote myself more money.

Mr. Soley: The answer is simple—the hon. Gentleman does not have to take the money. This is a matter not for the Government—I agree with everything that has been said about taking it out of the hands of the Government—but for Parliament.

Secondly, the Government tabled 1,000 amendments to their last Housing Bill, several hundred of which were tabled three days before the Bill returned to the Floor of the House. Every Back Bencher on the Standing Committee had to address those amendments and work out what they were to do. We took the advice of outside agencies. Therefore, we delegated our authority and power to outside agencies. We did so because there was no other way of getting through that spate of amendments. That applies to other issues, too. I shall end on that point.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of the proceedings on the motion, MADAM SPEAKER *proceeded to put the Question which she was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to Order [9 July].*

Amendment proposed to the motion: (a) in sub-paragraph (a), leave out '£33,190' and insert '£39,960'. *—[Mr. Chris Smith.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 324, Noes 197.

Division No. 70] **[12.09 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bowden, Andrew
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Butler, Peter
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Elletson, Harold
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nicholas
Hawksley, Warren
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'p'l Br'g'n)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken

Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richards, Rod
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joseph Ashton and
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Coe, Sebastian
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evennett, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stewart, Allan
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Str'gf'd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Hughes and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments made to the motion: (c), in sub-paragraph (b), leave out '£8,298' and insert '£9,990'.

(d), in sub-paragraph (b), leave out '£33,190' and insert '£39,960'.—*[Mr. Chris Smith.]*

Motion made, and Question put, That the main Question, as amended, be agreed to:—

The House divided: Ayes 317, Noes 186.

Division No. 71] **[12.24 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*

Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bowden, Andrew
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Butler, Peter
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronald *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Churchill, Mr
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ellelson, Harold
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Donald *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nicholas
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross, C & S)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richards, Rod
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and
Mr. Joseph Ashton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James

Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chaplin, Mrs Judith
Chapman, Sydney
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duncan, Alan
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'f'rdshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stewart, Allan
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That, in the opinion of this House—

(1) The limit on the office costs allowance (subject to what follows) should be—

(a) for the year beginning in 1992, £39,960;

(b) for any quarter in the year beginning in 1993, the sum of £9,990 (that is, a quarter, to the nearest pound, of £39,960) but increased by any percentage increase by which the standard secretarial salary applicable in that year has increased compared with the standard secretarial salary applicable in the preceding year; and

(c) for any quarter in any subsequent year, the limit for a quarter in the preceding year but increased by any percentage increase by which the standard secretarial salary applicable in the subsequent year has increased compared with the standard secretarial salary applicable in the preceding year.

(2) The limit in relation to Mr. David Blunkett should be 2.57 times that determined in accordance with paragraph (1) above.

(3) Any limit determined in accordance with this Resolution should be calculated to the nearest pound.

(4) In this Resolution—

(a) "year" means a period of twelve months beginning with 1st April;

(b) "quarter" means a period of three months beginning with 1st April, 1st July, 1st October or 1st January.

(c) "the standard secretarial salary" means an amount consisting of the Standard Pay Point for a Senior Personal Secretary in the Home Civil Service in London and the Inner London Weighting.

(5) For the purposes of this Resolution the amount of the standard secretarial salary applicable in any year should be the amount specified by the Treasury as applicable in that year.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. When the result of the first Division was announced, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster indicated with his fingers that the Division was for money only. For the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a senior Cabinet Minister, to indicate in that way is wrong. The Government would be the first people to criticise Opposition Members doing the same. I know that you, Madam Speaker, deprecate such behaviour, whether verbal or otherwise. I believe that it is wrong.

Madam Speaker: That is hardly a point of order for the Chair. Unbecoming gestures are sometimes made in the House. I deprecate them. My old eyes must have been a little sleepy tonight, because I did not notice the gesture.

PETITIONS

Hedgehog Protection

12.37 am

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I wish to present a petition on behalf of my constituents and the Hedgehog Protection Campaign. *[Interruption.]* This is an important issue. It arises from an unfortunate incident in Pocklington in North Humberside of deliberate cruelty to hedgehogs.

The campaign has been organised because hedgehogs and other wild mammals are not covered by any cruelty legislation. The petition was organised by Mrs. Bell of 363 Messingham road, Bottesford. It calls for a change in the law to protect such wild animals, as the worthy Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) would have done if it had been successful.

With permission, I should like to read the petition. It says:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The humble Petition of residents in Glanford and Scunthorpe sheweth

That wild animals such as Hedgehogs are being subjected to deliberate acts of cruelty.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will bring forward a Bill that will make cruelty towards wild animals such as Hedgehogs illegal.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Poll Tax (Lambeth)

12.39 am

Ms. Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I have pleasure in presenting a petition from the residents of Carey gardens and Patmore estate, which are in the unfortunate situation of crossing the border between the London boroughs of Wandsworth and Lambeth. The petitioners are concerned about a fundamental injustice. They have to pay high rents and high poll tax because they pay poll tax to Lambeth and rent to Wandsworth. That does not seem to make sense, there is no apparent geographical reason for it, and they have the worst of both worlds.

I therefore present

to the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the residents of Carey Gardens and Patmore Estate on the Border of the London Boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth . . .

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House take note of the anomalous situation of those who live in Carey Gardens and Patmore Estate, who have to pay high rent to Wandsworth and high poll tax to Lambeth, and resolves to take urgent action to relieve us of this unfair financial burden.

To lie upon the Table.

Hedgehog Protection

12.40 am

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): My constituents are also outraged at the treatment of hedgehogs and by the same incident which provoked my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) to present a petition.

I want to present a petition from Mrs. Pat Murgatroyd, who runs a hedgehog haven in 43 Foxwood lane, York. Her petition is supported by 888 signatures from the York area. The petition protests

That four fifteen and sixteen year old boys, accused of causing unnecessary suffering to a hedgehog by dropping rocks on it, kicking it and beating it with a fence post and thereby breaking almost every bone in its body, walked free from a juvenile court in Pocklington, Humberside in April 1992 because the Protection of Animals Act 1911 covers only cruelty to captive creatures and it was judged that this hedgehog had not been captured.

Wherefore your Petitioner prays that your honourable House bring about an Act of Parliament which will give hedgehogs legal protection against deliberate acts of cruelty.

To lie upon the Table.

RN Stores Depot, Eaglescliffe

12.42 am

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I seek leave to present a petition on behalf of some of my constituents, namely, A. Dudman of Priory gardens, Norton, C. Davies of Northpark, Billingham, B. Haughton of Hillside road, Norton and others.

It is a parallel, formalised edition of a less orderly petition which was presented at 12.30 pm yesterday to No. 10 Downing street for the attention of the Prime Minister. It refers to proposals to relocate 180 key jobs, covering core management and control procedures at the royal naval stores depot at Eaglescliffe in Stockton-on-Tees. Those proposals make no sense, in terms of efficiency, efficacy, organisation or economics. The proposals run directly counter to commitments said to have been given by the Prime Minister in promising departmental jobs to the north-east. It would seem that the trawl that he promised has succeeded in doing no more than bringing a cake factory and the suggestion that those 180 jobs should be removed to the south-west, to Bath.

In the north-east we have the proper equipment and qualified staff to cover the jobs. However one views the proposals it makes no sense to move the jobs, the staff or the equipment to the south-west.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the Secretary of State for Defence to abandon the proposal to transfer the 180 jobs from Eaglescliffe.

And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

12.45 am

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I, too, should like to present a petition on behalf of a number of my constituents about the loss of 180 jobs as a result of job movements from Eaglescliffe to the south. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said, that decision is contrary to current Government policy, which states that they are interested in bringing jobs to the north-east—the exact opposite is happening. On behalf of my petitioners I pray that

your honourable House urge the Secretary of State for Defence to abandon the proposal to transfer the 180 jobs from Eaglescliffe.

To lie upon the Table.

12.45 am

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I rise on behalf my constituent and petitioner, Michael Bateman of 7 Ustead road, Middlesbrough, who also makes a humble petition on behalf of the work force of the Royal Naval stores depot at Eaglescliffe.

The petition opposes the closure of those particular works and the proposition of Her Majesty's Government to create a centralised naval support command in Bath. That would necessitate the loss of 180 jobs in the royal naval stores depot at Eaglescliffe near Stockton-on-Tees in the county of Cleveland.

I have presented the petition to draw attention to the fact that we are in a recession that is deep and deepening, which is causing great dismay to the people of Cleveland. Their great fear is that the loss of those 180 jobs will add to that dismay.

To lie upon the Table.

12.46 am

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): In common with my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam), for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) and for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), I too present a petition on behalf of my constituents who work at the Eaglescliffe royal navy stores depot.

As my hon. Friends have said, 180 jobs are under threat as a result of the decision to transfer those jobs from Eaglescliffe to Bath. That decision reverses the normal mechanism of regional policy which moves jobs from the south to the north.

Five of my constituents have signed the petition, Brian Hildon, Ruth Cooke, Barry Clarke, Jean Davies and Christine Kane. Yesterday, a petition with 6,000 names was presented to 10 Downing street. The decision has excited a great deal of concern in my constituency and in the general area. It is a matter of great import. I beg to present that petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Local Government Pensioners (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

12.47 am

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I am grateful for the opportunity to address the House, and I shall seek to be as brief as possible. I am also grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland for being here to answer the debate.

The purpose of the debate is to ask the Government to ensure that local government pensioners in Scotland receive outstanding sums due to them for the period from April 1987 to March 1989. The underpayment was due to a computer error in calculating the retail prices index, which was reported as 0·1 per cent. too low for most of the period from February 1986 to December 1987. As a result, local government and other public service pensioners received cost of living increases to their pensions which were less than they should have been for the period from April 1987 to March 1989.

The cost of living increase agreed to operate from April 1989 included a factor to adjust for the computer error from that date onwards, but still left outstanding the underpayment for the period from April 1987 to March 1989. The sum involved was more than £7 million.

In England and Wales, local authorities were able to make retrospective compensatory payments at an average rate calculated by the Department of Environment to be £2 per £1,000 of pension. The Secretary of State for the Environment has authority under the Local Government Finance Act 1982 to sanction certain payments by local authorities that they would otherwise be unable legally to make. He said that he would be prepared to do so in this case.

The Secretary of State for Scotland has no similar statutory powers. As a result, while local government pensioners in England and Wales have received some compensation, those in Scotland have not. In the case of some services for which the Government are themselves the paymaster, a lump sum has been given to one or more charities. It is understood that it will be used to assist needy pensioners or their dependants, but not necessarily the people who were deprived of the money due to the computer error. That solution was not acceptable to the employers or the relevant trade unions representing the pensioners in Scotland.

The local government officers' union, NALGO, raised the matter at an early stage with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and I should make it clear that at no time have COSLA or individual local authorities in Scotland shown any reluctance to pay the pensioners what is morally due to them. Their problem is that they have no legal authority to pay.

In September 1990, COSLA formally raised the matter with the Scottish Office superannuation division. The reply on 2 December 1991 held out no prospect of legislation and suggested that local authorities might find some other type of solution, such as donations to charities. It said:

"The Convention's finance committee may wish to consider whether they could recommend to Scottish local authorities that they should adopt a solution on these lines."

It is not surprising that COSLA did not feel able to recommend that local authorities should give to charity moneys that morally belonged to other people.

[Mr. Norman Hogg]

What I now say is embarrassing, and I apologise to the Minister, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). On 27 July 1991 he wrote to the then Secretary of State for Scotland and received a reply from his right hon. Friend on 31 August 1991. But the Secretary of State was no more helpful to his hon. Friend than the Scottish Office had been to COSLA. He acknowledged that

"in Scotland . . . the local authorities would also have preferred to make individual payments",

but saw no prospect of legislation to enable them to do so.

On 31 October 1991, I tabled an early-day motion, supported by a number of other hon. Members, calling on the Government to find a way of compensating those involved for their error, albeit an unintentional one. That request met with no response, which is why I initiated this debate.

This is a matter of equity. Due to a Government error —nobody suggests that there has been any ill intent—local government pensioners in Scotland have been deprived of sums due to them. Due to a quirk of legislation, pensioners in England and Wales—but not those in Scotland—have been paid. Now, surely, the Government having made an error, it is for the Government to find a way to correct it.

In his letter to the hon. Member for Dumfries to which I referred, the then Secretary of State made what seems an extraordinary statement when he wrote:

"the matter is one to which the local authorities themselves must seek a solution."

Why the local authorities? It was not their computer that made the error in the first place.

We are used to the Government stopping local authorities doing what they should be allowed to do, such as spending the income from council house sales to provide more housing. Here, we seem to be getting encouragement from the Government for local authorities to do what they really have no right to do. If they pay the pensioners, they will, as things stand, be acting outside their powers and therefore laying themselves open to audit penalties.

If, on the other hand, they follow the suggestion of making a donation to charity, they will be disposing of someone else's money without their authority. What right have they to do that, and how would it help the pensioners? No doubt the Minister will inform the House that the payments of which the pensioners have been deprived are very small, and in many cases that is true, because the average former local government officer pensioner in Scotland receives only £2,014 per annum. But I hope the Minister will agree that the amount is not the point. If we do not take £5 or £10 seriously today, we shall be asked to disregard £20 on some other issue tomorrow, and £30 next year if inflation does not come down as promised. In any case, what may seem a small sum to those of us in employment has far greater significance to pensioners on small incomes.

There can be no excuse for depriving people of money that is due to them. It is a strange inversion of justice, logic and even blatant common sense to place the burden of remedying the error on the injured party or on a completely innocent third party instead of the perpetrator. Moreover, there can be no case for treating Scottish local government pensioners differently and less well than those in England and Wales.

I hope that I have made the point clearly to the Minister, and I look forward to his response.

12.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) for raising this question. It may seem somewhat dated, but it has been a source of grievance to local government pensioners and to NALGO for some time. The issues involved are very technical, but none the less real to the pensioners affected. I am grateful to the hon. Member for the opportunity to have them debated, even at this very late stage. I anticipated that he would recall my correspondence of a year ago with the Secretary of State. He was kind enough to read out the gist of the reply that I received. In a way, I am a poacher turned gamekeeper, but he will appreciate that I wanted to see the issue resolved, as he does now.

The grievance felt by the pensioners involved goes back a long way—some five years, in fact. As the hon. Gentleman explained, it derives from an error in the calculation of the retail prices index. Local government pensioners, like other public service pensioners, have their pensions increased annually in line with the RPI. That is a very worthwhile and much valued benefit. It means that those pensioners, unlike many others, have a guarantee that the value of their pensions will be maintained.

The consequence of the RPI error, however, was that those pensioners lost by a small amount. The same applied to state pensioners and other public service pensioners who receive index-linked pensions. For two years—from April 1987 to March 1989—the inflation-proofing element in their pensions was less than it should have been. The shortfall was quite small, but no doubt significant to those affected. It amounted to roughly 0·1 per cent. of the full amount that would have been payable but for the error, and, as I have said, it lasted for two years.

From April 1989, the pensions were restored to their full inflation-proofed values, so in one sense, the matter has been put right. That is a most important point, because it means that the effects of the error are long overtaken and, in many cases, long forgotten.

The amounts involved were therefore not very large and do not recur, and I doubt whether anyone would claim that hardship is involved. But those pensioners who have received nothing by way of compensation nevertheless feel a real sense of grievance. The reason they have not received any compensation cannot, however, be said to be the fault of the Government.

When the error was discovered, the Government felt that whatever practical and reasonable steps were necessary to right the situation should be taken. It did not seem right that the windfall should be to the Exchequer, and thus the public generally. Individual payments were made in respect of the state pensions involved. That was administratively fairly simple to do because the amounts involved were standard, but occupational pensions were a different matter, and in many cases they are additional to state pensions.

In the occupational pension sector, the size of the pension varies from person to person and each pension would have had to have been individually recalculated. The cost to the taxpayer in doing so would have far ourweighed the value to the pensioners involved.

Of course I accept that the pensions of many of the people involved were quite small. Where that was the case, the shortfall during the two years from April 1987 to

March 1989 would also have been small, but would have assumed greater significance. The local government scheme in particular pays many small pensions, partly because it places few restrictions on which employees can join the scheme. It covers a wide range of professions and occupations, from the chief executive down to the lowest paid manual worker. Many move from job to job and typically do not have long periods of pensionable service. That in turn means that the average pension is low in comparison with schemes that cater for a particular profession or career.

The average amount lost by local government pensioners because of the error was of the order of £4 over two years—less than 10p a week.

In other occupational pension schemes, including those for which the Government are directly responsible, such as those covering the civil service and the national health service, there are also many retired members on quite small pensions. Many occupational pension schemes outside the public service do not guarantee inflation proofing at all. Most of the pensioners concerned would also be in receipt of state pensions, where the shortfall has been made good by the Government.

In many cases the state pension would comprise the greater part of people's income. Nevertheless, the Government felt that occupational pensioners for whom they were responsible should not lose out. But they also felt that a better and more cost-effective way of applying the money for their benefit than making individual payments should be found. As the hon. Gentleman said, their solution was to pay the money to charitable organisations supporting retired and needy public servants.

That was the approach taken in respect of retired civil servants, retired teachers, former employees of the health service and others. It was also the approach taken in the case of police pensioners, whose pensions are paid by local authorities,. I have no reason to believe that those pensioners found that approach unacceptable. It may well have channelled the relatively small amounts of money involved to the most needy.

Like police pensions, pensions payable to former local government officials and manual employees under the local government scheme are the responsibility of the local authorities, not the Government. I understand that local authorities in England, and at least one in Scotland, which, coincidentally, happens to be my own in Dumfries and Galloway region, have chosen to make individual payments to all pensioners affected. The hon. Gentleman pointed that out. The Government have not objected to that. It is a matter for the local authorities. In England, the Department of the Environment can formally sanction such payments, but the Scottish Office has no such powers.

I know that the hon. Gentleman thinks that a small, one-clause, three-line Bill would be adequate, and perhaps it would. If he can convince the business managers that that is so, so be it, but he knows as well as I do that it is difficult to find a slot for legislation, even for something brief and non-controversial.

The hon. Gentleman appears to be looking to the Government to require those local authorities in Scotland that have not made individual payments to do so. But, as I said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no powers to do so. It is a matter for the local authorities. In any case, the Government do not believe that that solution best meets the problem. They have taken a different route in the case of pensions for which they are responsible, as have local authorities in the case of police pensioners. The Government have therefore shown the way, and I have no reason to believe that local authorities could not follow a similar route if they chose to do so.

The Secretary of State's position has been made very clear in correspondence and explained to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I do not know what recent consideration, if any, local authorities have given to the question. They have shown no inclination of which I am aware to follow the Government's example. If they want to work out schemes on the lines of those that apply to other public service pensioners in Scotland, it is for them to consider doing so, but the Secretary of State has no power to dictate to them what course of action they should pursue.

The local government scheme is a very good pension scheme; it is available to a wide range of people in different professions and occupations; and it is well administered by the local authorities. The Government have, however, ensured through their pension reforms that choice in pension provision is available. Public service employees now have the right to opt out and make their own pension arrangements if they so wish. For employees who choose the local government scheme—perhaps the vast bulk—they can have confidence that the funds are well run, that their benefits are secure, and, of course, that they will not lose their value because of inflation. It is a pity, however, that the source of grievance over the small amounts lost due to the RPI error has not been dealt with. I have great sympathy for the people involved and many of the points made by the hon. Gentleman. I believe, however, that it is to the local authorities themselves that he should look for a solution.

There is no legal obligation on local authorities to make payments—they paid the amounts required of them by the pensions increase orders. They may feel a moral obligation, however, not to use for other purposes money which, but for the error, would have gone to pensioners. If they do, they should look for a solution within existing legislation, as the Government did. I certainly hope that they do.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 15 July 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF BRISTOL (PORTISHEAD DOCKS) BILL *[Lords]*

SOUTH YORKSHIRE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT BILL *[Lords]*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Tuesday 20 October.

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration of Lords amendments read.
To be considered on Tuesday 20 October.

GREATER MANCHESTER (LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM) (NO. 4) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

PRICES'S PATENT CANDLE COMPANY LIMITED BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Third Reading read.
To be read a Third time on Tuesday 20 October.

RIVER HUMBER (UPPER PYEWIPE OUTFALL) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
As amended, considered.
Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, having been signified—
Ordered,
That Standing Order 205 (Notice of Third Reading) be suspended and that the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*
Read the Third time, and passed.

LLANELLI BOROUGH COUNCIL (RIVER LLIEDI) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Subsidiarity

1. **Mr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the areas of environmental policy currently within the responsibility of the Commission of the European Community which it is his policy to seek to return to the responsibility of nation states alone.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Howard): As agreed at the Lisbon European Council, the Commission and the Council will be working urgently on the procedures and practical steps necessary to implement the principle of subsidiarity and will report to the next European Council in Edinburgh. We shall be looking closely at environmental policy in the context of this work.

Mr. Wright: Is the Secretary of State aware that the proposals that he has just described are causing great dismay among all environmental organisations which, having seen us finally—under the impact of European directives—get rid of the tag of being the dirty man of Europe which the Government gave to us, are now seeing the Government, under the cloak of subsidiarity, planning to celebrate the British presidency of the Commission by trying to reinstate it?

Mr. Howard: This country is not and never has been the dirty man of Europe. We have frequently and habitually taken the lead in persuading the rest of the Community to adopt high environmental standards and we have at the moment the best record in the Community for implementing European legislation. Subsidiarity does not mean and will not mean any weakening in our resolve to achieve the highest environmental standards.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As article 130R of the Maastricht treaty appears to me, probably wrongly, to cover almost all the activities of my right hon. and learned Friend's Department and to transfer all our independence, will my right hon. and learned Friend assist the House in its educational process by publishing a list in the Library of those functions of his Department which he believes are still its exclusive territory?

Mr. Howard: I shall give the most careful and earnest attention to my hon. Friend's request. I suspect that he will find an analysis that the effect of the Maastricht agreement is rather less fundamental in the respect than appears to him at first sight.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Who in this country supports the Secretary of State's moves to wreck the EC treaty on drinking and bathing waters? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman under pressure from the newly privatised water companies, which recently donated so much to Conservative party funds? Having always dragged their feet on environmental protection, the Government have created the situation in which people have to look to Europe for the environmental protection that the Government have failed to deliver.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady's capacity for rewriting history is unlimited. Her question is riddled with misapprehensions. The only people who were concerned about subsidiarity and who needed to look to the European Community to protect our environment were those who wanted a Labour Government elected on 9 April. They knew that they could have no hope of improving environmental standards at the hands of a Labour Government. Fortunately, this country was spared that prospect.

Mr. James Hill: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that some of the worst pollution ever known is to be found in the vicinity of the M3 and Winchester bypass? That issue touches not only on transport, for which my right hon. and learned Friend does not have a mandate, but the pollution caused by delay in finalising that much sought-after motorway. In wresting other parts of environmental policy away from the Commission, could not my right hon. and learned Friend return motorway policy to our national Government?

Mr. Howard: I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern and those of his constituents, which he consistently seeks so assiduously to represent. We have complied with every relevant aspect of European law in respect of the M3. It was the subject of numerous public inquiries, which took into account to the fullest extent all environmental issues. I entirely sympathise with my hon. Friend's point.

Urban Waste

2. **Ms. Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on urban waste management.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Maclean): The Government will maintain tough controls on those who produce, handle, treat or dispose of waste, to minimise any detrimental impact on local communities.

Ms. Eagle: More than half the non-fossil fuel offset capacity is used for waste incineration, which has been shown to account for at least one quarter of United Kingdom dioxin emissions. Does the Minister agree that dioxin is an extremely dangerous chemical, whose effects on the human body pass down generations? How can he justify the Government subsidising dioxin production in that way, and the proposal to build an incinerator at Bidston between Wallasey and Birkenhead in the same locality as 100 residential streets?

Mr. Maclean: The proposal to build the incinerator to which the hon. Lady refers may be the subject of a planning appeal to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, so I cannot comment on it. Before Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution consents to any emissions into the atmosphere, it will need to satisfy itself that any and all incinerators, wherever they may be, are safe and that emissions are tightly controlled.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend the Minister remind my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State —who is not only a decent chap but a well-known Euro-sceptic and also a lawyer—[HON. MEMBERS: "Even worse."]—that under article 130R of the treaty that will bring about European union, European institutions will require competence over protecting human health? In future, therefore, such questions will be better answered in Strasbourg than in the House.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend made it very clear where the Government stand on subsidiarity when he answered the original question, and I have nothing to add.

City Challenge, Deptford

3. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will report on the progress of the city challenge programme in Deptford.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): Deptford city challenge is now making good progress. Its recent achievements include the launch of the community safety programme on 13 July, and the schools routeways programme yesterday. We will be reviewing its progress with its action plan towards the end of the year.

Ms. Ruddock: I share the Minister's satisfaction with the good start that has been made, especially with regard to training. But does he share the despair that I felt on learning that Siemens Plessey Controls, the flagship private sector partner of Deptford city challenge, has had to issue redundancy notices in respect of two thirds of its staff, including all eight apprentices? What action will he take, along with his right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade—who set up the city challenge scheme —to protect existing manufacturing jobs and training in my constituency?

Sir George Young: I am grateful for the kind words about the progress of city challenge with which the hon. Lady began her question. Yesterday, as she knows, I spoke to Dick Liddell, the Siemens Plessey site manager, and I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade has had a meeting with Mr. Beresford of Siemens. He has agreed to help the company to diversify. I also understand that the parent company has agreed to help the subsidiary in Deptford with some of its problems.

One of the problems that face the hon. Lady's local firm is the high cost of the lease. The freeholder is the London borough of Lewisham. It may be possible for the company to renegotiate the lease, thereby bringing down the overheads and some of the running costs.

Mr. Blunkett: In reaching a decision tomorrow about the winners and losers for the next round of city challenge projects, will the Minister take into account the difficulties that have been experienced in the Deptford programme, as outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock)? Does he acknowledge that the urban programme, which the Government have cut by £121 million since the mid-1980s—they have cut it by £14·5 million this year, and a further £50 million has been cut from specific housing projects—should form the basis of any sensible inner-city regeneration policy, rather than city challenge schemes? Such schemes inevitably involve many losers as well as winners and they are taking vital moneys from the urban programme. Will the Minister confirm, at the end of the parliamentary session, that the urban programme will not be cut in the next two years, and will he give a guarantee to that effect as he has guaranteed that city challenge will not be cut next year?

Sir George Young: I am slightly surprised that the hon. Gentleman should speak about city challenge in such terms. The response from local authorities—including those under Labour control—has been most encouraging and my colleagues and I have spent many days over the past month listening to submissions from authorities throughout the country.

My own view is that city challenge has unlocked a fresh spirit of enterprise in the inner cities. We are seeing new partnerships between local authorities, the private sector and voluntary organisations, and I consider that a worthwhile extension of our inner-city policies. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait until tomorrow, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will be announcing the round two winners.

Household Waste

4. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate what proportion of household waste is currently recycled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: We estimate that some 5 per cent. of household waste was recycled in 1990.

Mr. Kirkwood: Is the Minister confident that the Government's target of 25 per cent. of household waste being recycled by the end of the century is on course? Any progress in that direction is welcome, but does the Minister feel that the Department is doing enough to achieve its target? Will he consider specifically the fact that, although £15 million of supplementary credit approvals are available as hypothecated local expenditure in England and Wales, there is no money north of the border for Scottish local authorities to engage in projects? Some useful joint local authority and private schemes north of the border are failing as a result of the lack of finance.

Mr. Maclean: I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's latter point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. As for our target generally, yes I am confident that we shall meet it. We have a very good industrial waste recycling record. In the last few years, we have set a target for household waste recycling and we intend to meet it. I am keen on the recycling credits that we have recently introduced. Any group, from the smallest voluntary charity to the largest company, can participate in recycling. All the goods and materials that they prevent from going into landfill will qualify for 50 per cent. of the actual cost of landfill. That literally is cash for trash. I urge people to grab it with enthusiasm.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that at least as important as the facilities provided by local authorities is the public attitude towards and awareness of recycling? Will he therefore ensure that there is maximum liaison with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education, to ensure that public awareness starts with the very youngest so that this problem can be conquered once and for all?

Mr. Maclean: I am greatly interested in what my hon. Friend says. I congratulate him on his election to the Chairmanship of the Select Committee and I look forward to hearing the advice of his Committee over the next few years. My hon. Friend is absolutely right on this point. We need to capture public enthusiasm for recycling and let the market take its course. If enough demand is generated to use recycled materials, industry will fill the gap by doing the collection and the recycling. However, recycling has to be led by the consumers. The market will then follow. We must not try to shove and dictate it from the top.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: May I encourage the Minister to take up with his opposite number the urgent need for recycling facilities in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Maclean: Yes, I certainly shall. When I was at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Minister I visited the Province occasionally. I hope that I shall be able to do so in future. The hon. Gentleman has given me a convenient excuse.

Mr. William O'Brien: In view of the targets set in the Government's White Paper "This Common Inheritance", does not the Minister feel that the Government should give a higher profile to waste recycling? The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) referred to the shortage of capital to get schemes off the ground. What he said is mirrored in every local authority. Does not the Minister believe that the Government should provide local authorities with capital to get these schemes going? When do the Government intend to give waste recycling a higher profile?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman is obviously not aware of the facts. The Government have given waste recycling a very high profile. We set ourselves a high target in "This Common Inheritance." We have allocated £15 million in supplementary credit approvals for this year. We have launched the recycling credit scheme. By 1 August, all local authorities will have to produce their recycling plans. That, as well as the initiatives we have taken to heighten the importance of recycling, means that we shall meet our target. The hon. Gentleman should not assume that the only way to bring about recycling is to throw money at local councils. I want to capture the tremendous enthusiasm of ordinary people, and among the business community, for waste recycling.

Housing Capital Receipts

5. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for the total in local authority housing capital receipt funds for England.

Sir George Young: It is currently estimated that English local authorities held about £0·8 billion of usable capital receipts at the end of March 1992. In addition, authorities are estimated to hold over £5 billion of capital receipts which have been set aside as provision to meet credit liabilities. Housing receipts are not separately identifiable.

Mr. Hain: But the Minister is dodging the issue. Does he have any sympathy at all for the tens of thousands of families who do not have their own homes and who are squeezed into the houses of relatives or friends? In my constituency, and in many others, there are examples of young parents sleeping with their babies on the floors of parlours and living rooms—and in garages, in some cases. Even worse, some young women are being advised to get pregnant in order to get a house. When will the Minister release all these billions of pounds of funds and enable local authorities to build council houses?

Sir George Young: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman listened to the first part of my answer. I made it quite clear that £0·8 billion of usable capital receipts were available at the end of March 1992. Last year, local authorities spent only 67 per cent. of the receipts that they were entitled to use. Before the hon. Gentleman develops his case for the use of further receipts that have been set aside, he should make sure that local authorities already spend the receipts that they are entitled to spend.

Sir Anthony Durant: Does my hon. Friend agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) who said that the Treasury rules for capital receipts were correct and sensible?

Sir George Young: Yes, indeed. I was only disappointed that that sensible statement by the shadow Chancellor was not swiftly endorsed by the rest of the Opposition Front Bench. We look forward with interest to seeing how the Labour party's economic policies develop with a new leader.

Mr. Madden: Does the Minister remember the promises made by Tory Ministers that when council homes were sold, the money raised would be spent on building new homes? How does he explain that in Bradford 12,000 council homes have been sold, yet not a new council house has been built in the past seven years because of a shortage of cash? Why is he not doing more to release the funds that have been locked up for years to enable people to have the new homes that they desperately need?

Sir George Young: Bradford city council has been spending substantial sums of money on modernising and improving its existing stock. The new provision needed by people in Bradford is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, provided by housing associations, the budget for which is increasing substantially from £1 billion two years ago to £2 billion in two years' time. It is sensible to ask local authorties to concentrate their energy and money on improving their stock and to look to the housing associations, which make the nominations to the local authorities, to provide the new social housing that the country needs.

Mr. Conway: Is it not the case that the sale of council houses and the receipts that come from them are still providing valuable housing stock? Will my hon. Friend confirm that there is no restriction upon local authorities to try to rescind some of their outstanding debts by the use of their capital receipts?

Sir George Young: That is a valid point. The total debt of local authorities is £44 billion a year. Servicing that debt costs each adult in this country £140 a year. There are strong arguments for reducing that debt and the burden on ratepayers.

Mr. Gould: Given that the £6 billion in capital receipts already exists—it does not have to be raised through taxation or borrowing—that there are many local authorities such as mine in Barking and Dagenham that are desperate to spend their money on meeting an urgent housing need and that there is no one in the housing world or construction industry who would not dearly like to see the money released to provide a stimulus to the industry, what common sense explanation can the Minister offer for the Government's policy? Will he use language that will be understood by the homeless in my constituency and elsewhere?

Sir George Young: For a start, there is the comon sense of the hon. Gentleman's right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). The hon. Gentleman must understand that the same money cannot be spent twice. When a local authority uses its receipts to redeem debt and reduce its borrowing, it enables my Department to increase the borrowing of another local authority that does not have those receipts. The same money cannot be spent twice without pushing up taxes or interest rates.

Mr. Jenkin: Does the Minister agree that it is rather sad that councils such as Colchester and Tendring in my constituency do not do more to help themselves by transferring their housing to housing associations and releasing the capital to repay their debt so that they can invest more in housing?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. He will have read in the manifesto that we remain committed to large-scale voluntary transfer. That is an option which many local authorities have endorsed, but, sadly, so far no Labour authorities. It offers benefits to tenants when they transfer. It offers benefits to the local authority in terms of debt redemption and it enables the new housing association that is set up to make faster progress because the local authority can plough back part of the receipts from the sales. It is an important part of Conservative housing policy which I wish to see developed over the next few years.

EC Presidency

6. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his priorities for the EC presidency.

Mr. Howard: As president of the Environment Council, I intend to pursue three main themes—prompt and energetic follow-up to the Rio Earth summit, the integration of environmental considerations into all areas of Community policy, and proper implementation and enforcement of European environmental legislation throughout the Community. I shall pursue the application of the principle of subsidiarity to Community action. I shall continue to press for the early establishment of the European environment agency, but part of our strategy in Europe is to give a strong lead through domestic action.

I can today announce that the Government have decided to establish a new independent environment agency in England and Wales to bring together in an integrated body all the functions of the National Rivers Authority and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, and the waste regulation functions of local authorities. We shall introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Bayley: As a first step, will the new and long overdue integrated environmental agency give a cast-iron guarantee, as other EC member states have, that our emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases will be cut to the 1990 level by the year 2000, even if the American Government do not agree to do so?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is a little behind the times. He needs to take into account the recent

communiqué agreed at Munich by the Group of Seven countries, inviting other countries to join them in ratifying the climate change convention by the end of 1993. That convention was agreed at Rio, very significantly as a result of the efforts of the United Kingdom, so we can fairly claim to be in the lead on this matter.

Mr. Lidington: Will my right hon. and learned Friend take the opportunity of his presidency to ensure that European directives on the environment are equally implemented and enforced throughout the Community to prevent what sometimes happens at the moment, whereby one or two of our partners make grand promises about what they will do but fail to live up to them in practice?

Mr. Howard: I shall indeed. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The one definition of subsidiarity to which I do not subscribe is the one which suggests that individual member states should be entitled to pick and choose whether to implement and enforce legislation which has been agreed at Community level. Where legislation has been agreed, it should be applied consistently across the Community.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Secretary of State said that two of his priorities are to follow up the Rio summit and to secure the implementation and enforcement of European Community environmental legislation, with the inspectorate and the new agency, which we welcome. Does he accept that, as Rio made abundantly clear, environmentalism and nationalism do not go well together? The logic of what he said, with which the House will agree, is that during its presidency the United Kingdom should ensure not only that other countries comply with environmental legislation but that we do so ourselves and do not, as we did on the first day of this month, put off a court case before the European Court to save embarrassment about our failure to comply with the laws with which we say that we agree?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that the application to postpone the hearing was a joint application by the United Kingdom and the Commission. As he is so interested in enforcement—I welcome his interest—I would have expected him to give the Government some credit for being the only Government in the Community—with the exception of Portugal, to which most of the legislation does not apply—against which the court has not passed an adverse environmental judgment.

Mr. Rupert Allason: I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's domestic initiative, but will he turn his attention to another domestic issue—the correspondence between his Department and the Bletchley Park Trust? Would not that site, which is of enormous historic importance and is under threat, be a worthwhile monument to the British presidency of the European Community, and will he at least give an undertaking that he will ensure that there will be no demolition of an area which is of considerable significance to everyone who served this country and those who gave their lives in the second world war?

Mr. Howard: I am sure that all relevant aspects of that site will be taken into account and given full and proper weight in the relevant decision-making process.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement about the creation of an environmental protection agency, which has been long awaited and long supported by my party but which the Government explicitly rejected when we raised it during the passage of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. We are very pleased and hope to get the legislation through in the current Session, but will the Minister state categorically that, irrespective of an American commitment to meet the Rio declaration, we will stabilise our carbon dioxide emissions at the 1990 level by the year 2000?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for my announcement about the agency. I expect the announcement to be widely welcomed. As for the climate change convention which was agreed at Rio, the United States has declared that it intends to take early action to discharge its obligation under that convention and that it will call a meeting later this year to discuss the matter. Of course we attach great importance to the early ratification of the convention and we shall seek to encourage others to join us in ratifying it at an early date. We shall discharge our obligations under the treaty to the full.

Local Authority Expenditure

7. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much local councils spend on average for each person in the country.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. John Redwood): In each area, local councils are planning to spend on average £2,000 per adult this year in England.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that local government spending is now running at £43 billion per year, which gives the Government a legitimate and vital interest in controlling that expenditure? Is he aware that every citizen of Ealing has a debt of £2,000 around his or her neck left by the last Labour council, which increased rates by 65 per cent. in 1987 and trebled them in three years? Is not that typical of the Labour party in control of local government, and is it not awful?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes some powerful points. He is right to say that Labour councils often overspend and over-borrow and leave people up to their necks in debt. Around the country there is an average of more than £1,000 of debt for every adult as a result of borrowing plans, often by Labour authorities. My hon. Friend is right that revenue expenditure is now running at high levels. If one adds capital expenditure, the figure is even bigger, as I said in answer to the main question. Contrary to the opinion expressed by the Opposition, it also shows that there is a great deal of choice and discretion for local authorities in deciding how to spend those huge sums in the interests of local taxpayers.

Mr. Hardy: Is the Minister aware that his answer to his hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) was almost contemptibly arrogant and irresponsible? Does he not accept that the overwhelming proportion of local government spending is in pursuit of the statutory obligations and duties placed on local authorities, and that only a very small proportion of local government spending is left to the liberty of the individual

council? Would it not be more responsible for Ministers to persuade their hon. Friends that it is unreasonable to try to suggest that all local government spending is profligate?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend was not suggesting that. There are many fine Conservative-controlled councils spending well and wisely on good services for their local communities, but there are still profligate local authorities, sponsored by the Labour party and, yes, it is necessary for someone to stand up for the taxpayers in those areas. My reply was far from arrogant. I believe in local government and I want it to have choice and discretion, which is why we vote so much money for it to exercise that discretion.

Mr. Butcher: Does my hon. Friend recall that during the changeover period from the rating system to the community charge, many local authorities used the time to increase expenditure faster than the rate of inflation? In the change from the community charge system to the new council tax system, will my hon. Friend use his capping powers combined with an RPI minus X formula to protect ratepayers and charge payers from the kind of chicanery that they endured three years ago?

Mr. Redwood: Fortunately my right hon. and learned Friend has more extensive powers, and I am afraid that we shall have to use them if councils are irresponsible. However, I am hopeful that many councils will not be irresponsible next year and I am glad that there are more Tory councils as a result of [illegible] local elections. That means that we shall have more sensible councils spending at prudent levels and providing their chargepayers and council taxpayers with very good value for money. It is interesting to note that most Tory authorities spend below the permitted levels and come in with much lower taxes than do Labour councils.

Radioactive Waste

8. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress made by UK Nirex Ltd. in establishing a storage or disposal route for radioactive waste since 1982.

Mr. Howard: After widespread public consultations, Nirex is concentrating its investigations on an area adjacent to the British Nuclear Fuels site at Sellafield. The company is carrying out detailed geological investigations and is refining its design concept for the facility. I understand that Nirex expects to submit an application for planning permission before the end of 1993.

Mr. Smith: As Nirex has ignored public protests and, in my opinion, has disregarded technical difficulties in its search for a site on which to dump its nuclear waste, would not it be wise for the Government to consider postponing the opening of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield, which has no way of dealing with the waste that is created?

Mr. Howard: No, that raises entirely different issues. All the questions to which the hon. Gentleman has referred will, of course, be considered with great care at any planning inquiry following the planning application that Nirex is expected to submit.

Bathing Water Directive

9. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about compliance with the EC bathing water directive.

Mr. Maclean: Compliance has improved from 51 per cent. in 1986 to 76 per cent. last year. A £2 billion programme of improvements is under way to bring virtually all identified bathing waters up to standard by 1995.

Mr. Hanson: With respect, is not the Minister being rather complacent? Can he confirm that the Government pressured the European Commission into postponing the hearing about British beaches, which would have coincided with the commencement of the British presidency of the Commission? Was not that simply because the Government wished to avoid the embarrassment of occupying the Commision presidency while avoiding the Commission's directives on bathing waters?

Mr. Maclean: It is the hon. Gentleman who is avoiding the point. However, he cannot avoid the fact that we have a £2,000 million investment programme which will bring most of our beaches up to standard by 1995. The Commission has accepted that it would not be possible to accelerate that enormous programme further. The Opposition must make up their minds what they want. Do they wish to compain about the speed with which the progamme is being implemented or about the size of water bills? We are paying through our water bills, but most people want their beaches to be cleaned up—and rightly so.

Mr. Harris: Does my hon. Friend accept that while that programme is not just desirable but essential, it is putting impossible burdens on the consumers of some water companies, particularly those of South West Water? Is he aware that, with colleagues from Cornwall and Devon, I had meetings today with the chairman and officers of South West Water, who are very concerned indeed about the financial impact of this capital programme and even more worried about what other measures will be imposed on water companies, not least by the National Rivers Authority, adding to the burden on hard-pressed consumers?

Mr. Maclean: I have considerable sympathy with the points that my hon. Friend makes. In his latter question, he pointed up the trap into which some Opposition Members fall—the trap of automatically calling for ever tougher standards which might not be necessary in every circumstance. We have a huge investment programme, which in the case of the south-west has resulted in some large increases in water bills. However, the south-west is not unique; there are other parts of the country with particular problems, such as those associated with getting rid of nitrates in water and the £4,000 million programme to clean up the Mersey basin. I know that the Director-General of Water Services, Ian Byatt, will be looking at the K factor in his next review. Only through that mechanism may he be able to assist the south-west.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: If the Government are so proud of their record, why—having been in power for 13 years—are they in breach of the directives so often? Is the Minister aware of suggestions being made in Brussels that the environment directorate, DG11, should be restructured

and perhaps denied the opportunity to take legal action against member states? Will the Minister say clearly whether he supports continuation of the powers of DG11 to take legal action against member states when such action is in the interests of environmental protection throughout Europe?

Mr. Maclean: I will not take lessons from the hon. Lady as her party slashed expenditure on our water industry when it was last in power and seems to gloat at every opportunity when Britain is subject to legal proceedings. Labour Members automatically make the assumption that Britain must be wrong. It is about time they stood up for Britain on occasions.

I am not prepared to comment on rumours that the hon. Lady may care to quote about what may be happening in DG11. It is clear that we want to clean up our beaches. Even without the directive, we would want to make substantial progress in cleaning up our beaches and improving our water supply. The British Government will continue to do that, irrespective of pressure from whatever source.

Mr. Knapman: As our private water companies have access to private capital, we shall comply with the directive, but what evidence does my hon. Friend have that our EC partners are making any real efforts to comply?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. That is why we have continually stressed that it is vital that enforcement of whatever EC directives are agreed is carried out at European level. One of our priorities in our presidency will be to insist that enforcement is even throughout the EC. We shall seek to introduce measures to that effect. We should like to see an inspectorate of inspectorates to carry out that task. Certainly, we do not want any diminution of enforcement or repatriation of enforcement to national authorities.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

11. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest information he has available about damage to sites of special scientific interest.

17. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest information he has available about damage to sites of special scientific interest.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The latest available information on damage to SSSIs is contained in the final report of the former Nature Conservancy Council, a copy of which is in the Library. In the period 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991, of the 3,536 SSSIs in England notified under the 1981 Act, 149 suffered some damage, and of that number 22 suffered damage from which the site could not recover in the short term.

Mr. Hughes: Despite what the Minister has just said, damage appears to be continuing at an alarming rate on sites of special scientific interest. That is borne out in a recent report by Wildlife Link. When will the Minister and the Government cut out the political rhetoric and gesturing and do something positive to protect SSSIs, such as making resources available so that local authorities can revoke planning permission and put a stop to peat extraction on SSSIs?

Mr. Baldry: We have a rich tapestry of protection for the countryside. The SSSI system is designed to identify land of scientific interest and provide a means of protecting such sites. Where we have seen any weakness in that protection, we have taken measures to strengthen it by legislation such as the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1991 and also by the removal of permitted development rights in respect of temporary uses of land. Later this year we shall produce planning policy guidance notes on nature conservation. All those measures are intended to enhance the SSSI protection system.

Mr. Olner: Is the Minister aware of a site in my constituency called Ensors pool which is in great danger of being filled and used as a receptor for waste? Will he make a decision? Will he take note of what English Nature says in calling for the site to be classified as an SSSI? Will he ensure that the site is fully protected so that residents in my constituency can enjoy that part of the countryside which should be rightfully theirs? Will the Minister make a statement on that?

Mr. Baldry: The notification of a site as an SSSI signals to the planning authorities the wildlife importance of the site. That is a material factor to be taken into account when considering any planning application that might affect the site. I am sure that that is what will happen with the site to which the hon. Gentleman draws attention.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that we must not be too inflexible about the use of SSSIs? Having alerted the Secretary of State to the problems of an area within an SSSI, it is more sensible to ensure that if a new road scheme or development is to affect a site, the flora and fauna from it will be protected in a different area. In south Dorset most SSSIs are on the sites of abandoned quarries.

Mr. Baldry: The SSSI system is there to identify and protect land of scientific interest and was set up by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is a framework which works extremely well. Of course we keep the system continuously under review. Owners and occupiers of land must be consulted prior to the designation of any SSSI and that provides a good balance.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will my hon. Friend consider carefully Brampton wood, which is in the constituency of our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister but is also enjoyed by my constituents? It contains sites of special scientific interest and is being sold by the Ministry of Defence. Will my hon. Friend have discussions with Ministers in that Department to ensure that the amenities of my constituents and those of the Prime Minister are duly protected?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend can be assured that any SSSI, in whichever constituency it lies, will be given proper protection.

Poll Tax

12. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost to date of introducing, administering and collecting the poll tax, including the cost of Government-initiated relief schemes, broken down by year.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robin Squire): The cost of preparing for the community charge was about £270 million. The cost of administering and collecting the community charge each year has been about £500 million, or between £12 and £15 per charge payer. Relief schemes do not add to overall public expenditure. However, they have ensured that the burden of local taxation has been reduced to 15 per cent. of local government spending.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister tell us the whole truth and admit that the Government had squandered more than £14 billion on the poll tax before eventually being forced to admit that it was all a terrible mistake? Does the Minister realise that if local government representatives were guilty of such irresponsible waste of public money they would undoubtedly be surcharged and banned from office for many years? Why not surcharge and ban from office all those Ministers who were responsible for the poll tax?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Member makes a bogus and entirely false point. He has become something of a phaneromaniac when it comes to the poll tax. You will know, Madam Speaker, that that is someone who has a compulsion to keep picking at something and returning to it. If one leaves it alone, it sometimes gets better—and something better is coming in: it is called the council tax. Above all, the hon. Gentleman is not best placed to ask questions about the costs of administering the poll tax, given his early appearance as a poll tax rebel, which would have encouraged thousands of others to push up the cost of collecting that tax.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend agree that many of my constituents and many people in this country are thankful to the Government for introducing the relief schemes that have helped to reduce poll tax bills? Were not those relief schemes introduced as a direct response to the incompetence and profligacy of Labour councils throughout the nation?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is entirely right on both points.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

13. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the levels of reduction of carbon dioxide emissions he expects to achieve under current policies.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the copy of the "Report on UK National Programme for Limiting Carbon Dioxide Emissions", placed in the Library on 15 May, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves).

Mrs. Roche: On two separate occasions this afternoon, the Government have been given the opportunity to answer this question clearly, but each time they have refused to do so. Will the Government stabilise emissions by the year 2000, regardless of what other countries do —yes or no?

Mr. Maclean: We have made our position clear. We made it clear at Rio, we made it clear in the European Community, and only last week we made it clear in the Munich communiqué. I have nothing to add to that.

Rural Housing

14. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance is available to local authorities to tackle housing needs in rural areas.

Mr. Baldry: We have taken a series of measures since 1988 to boost the supply of low-cost housing in rural areas through local authorities and housing associations. The Housing Corporation has a clear target for new social housing in villages through its special rural programme under which £80 million has been allocated to rural local authorities for 1991-92 and 1992-93 to produce new low-cost homes. New planning guidance permits the development of low-cost housing for local needs on small sites not otherwise designated for housing.

Mr. Evans: Will my hon. Friend accept the thanks of my local authority, which is not a whingeing socialist local authority always complaining that it has no money for its housing needs? My local authority is working in close association with four housing associations to meet housing needs in our rural area. It has won bids for £4 million in grants for rural housing over three years. Much of that money has been paid to the housing associations because of their past effectiveness and not just because of needs. Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that money will be given to local authorities and to housing associations in future because of their past performance and not simply because of needs?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am glad to say that numerous housing associations are active in the Ribble valley. They are doing extremely good work in partnership with the local authority which is delivering well in its enabling role. I am glad to say that almost £2 million is being invested in new rural housing in the Ribble valley this year. That is very good news.

Mr. Trimble: I was especially glad to hear the last part of the Minister's original reply, which referred to planning guidelines. Does the Minister agree that it is important to ensure that housing becomes available in rural areas for local people, and that for that reason it is essential that the cost be kept down? Does he agree that the best way to keep the cost down is to increase the supply significantly?

Mr. Baldry: I entirely agree with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question. That is why we have clear planning policy guidance and why local authorities now have to bring forward development plans in which they have to identify clearly land for housing provision for the coming years.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I fully support what my hon. Friend has said, but does he accept that the wealthier a rural area is, the greater are the problems among the lower paid in the area? Does he accept that there is a need for greater resources to be devoted to areas such as that

covered by Macclesfield borough council to take account of the fact that many people in rural areas, especially young people, can no longer afford to live there?

Mr. Baldry: I am always glad to have my hon. Friend's support. We have taken forward initiatives because we acknowledge that there are particular problems in rural areas. It is because we recognise that there are challenges that the Housing Corporation has a special rural programme and there is the potential for special capital allocations to rural local authorities for the reasons that my hon. Friend has outlined.

Mr. Soley: When will the Government take seriously the voices of their Conservative local authorities, of the rural housing associations and, increasingly, of their own Back-Bench Members, such as the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who is not a whinger as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) would have us believe? When will the Government listen to those voices and recognise that they are saying that the villages of Britain are dying on their feet because of a lack of affordable housing? As the hon. Member for Macclesfield said, the problem is especially serious for young people whose roots are in villages and country towns, but whose futures are in a housing queue which gets constantly longer.

Mr. Baldry: This year we are investing £2 billion through the Housing Corporation for new, affordable social housing. We are committed to do that in the coming three years. A proportion of that money will go to rural areas. In addition, rural areas will have access to their own housing investment money. The Government are determined to ensure that every family has a decent home in which to live, whether in the town or in the countryside.

Mr. Dunn: In the context of housing needs and preserving village life, will my hon. Friend assure the House that every effort will be made to prevent the illegal encroachment of traveller families in our villages?

Mr. Baldry: As my hon. Friend knows, we are committed to reviewing the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and I hope that we shall be able to bring forward that review in the not-too-distant future.

Social Housing

15. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish estimates of the need for social housing in England.

Sir George Young: We publish projections of future household numbers based on demographic trends. It is not practical to sub-divide that and make a single estimate of the need for social housing because of the subjective judgment involved in assessing who should have access to social housing and the volatility of some of the factors influencing any assessment, such as house prices, incomes and interest rates.

Mr. Raynsford: Will the Minister reconsider his answer? Will he recognise that the Audit Commission not only made it perfectly clear in its recent report that it was possible and appropriate to carry out and publish such estimates, but its first recommendation said that the Government should publish estimates of housing needs. When will the Government take housing needs in this country seriously?

Sir George Young: I have in front of me some relevant paragraphs from the Audit Commission, which support what I have just said:

"Definitions of need are value judgments . . . The point on the spectrum at which the definition of need is drawn is a matter of judgment and is partly conditioned by available resources".

It goes on to say that such forecasts are not easy. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that there are imponderables which are difficult to forecast, some of which I have just listed.

Parcelforce

3.30 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I should like to make a statement about Parcelforce.

Parcelforce is the parcel delivery business of the Post Office. Formerly it was part of the Royal Mail, but it is now a free-standing unit with separate accounts. In a difficult, competitive market it has made a loss during the last two years. Through the determination of both management and staff, Parcelforce is making strenuous and encouraging efforts to turn itself round. I welcome this.

Parcelforce operates in a fully competitive market that has grown rapidly. Many of its competitors operate worldwide and are household names in this country. Thousands of other private sector companies also provide a parcel service, albeit on a smaller scale.

For the most lucrative sector of the parcel delivery business—the so-called "next day" market—Parcelforce now enjoys a market share of just 2 per cent. In the "later than next day" market, it has a 34 per cent. share. But the key point is that the vast majority of the work of Parcelforce is targeted at providing a service to business. Only 5 per cent. of the Parcelforce business deals with parcels sent from one person to another, while more than half the remainder consists of just a few large mail order contracts.

I can see no reason why Parcelforce should remain in public hands while operating in such a market. My intention is to privatise it.

At this stage, this is a statement of my intent; I have not yet asked the Post Office board to launch the sale process itself. I first wish to receive advice on the best way to transfer Parcelforce to the private sector. I shall, of course, want to involve the board of the Post Office fully in this.

In considering how privatisation might best be achieved, an essential requirement for the Government will be a continued universal parcel service at a uniform and affordable tariff. That is not negotiable.

What is constantly for consideration, however, is how those or any other services can best be delivered. The Parcelforce emloyees play a key role in this. I will therefore ask the Post Office to make available financial support to help the management and employees in putting together a bid for the business, should they wish to do so in competition with other potential bidders. The Government and the Post Office will of course wish to receive the best price possible for these public assets.

Parcelforce as a business will need to continue its recovery and maintain the confidence of its customers. I would expect any significant decisions on new investment to be left to the new owners.

My announcement today concerns only Parcelforce and not the Royal Mail or Counters. The Government are committeed to maintaining a nationwide letter service with delivery to every address in the United Kingdom, within a uniform structure of prices, and with a nationwide network of post offices. In the case of Parcelforce, our belief is that the essential requirements are best met in the private sector. I commend this view to the House.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): In making this announcement, is not the President of the Board of Trade threatening to undermine more than 100 years of universal parcel delivery service to every home and business in the country? Is he not meddling in a market which he knows is already competitive and which has many operators providing a wide variety of services, at a time when all operators, including Parcelforce, face major difficulties largely caused by the difficult trading conditions of a recession which last week the President of the Board of Trade himself described as the worst recession since the 1930s?

On a point of detail, has £50 million of the planned £250 million investment to develop eight new sorting centres gone ahead? Will he confirm that the source of funding for that investment was the cash generated by the profits of Royal Mail and Post Office Counters? Is any more of the planned £250 million cash injection to be committed by the Post Office to Parcelforce before privatisation? Is not that cash injection and the merging of the profitable Datapost letter and document service into Parcelforce another blatant case of public sector profits fattening up a public sector asset before it is sold off to the private sector?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, as a prelude to privatisation, the Government prevented the Post Office from linking Parcelforce in joint ventures with other carriers? Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that that prevented Parcelforce from developing its business to meet new trading circumstances, especially the international market? Will he also confirm that many private carriers that currently cream off profits from more lucrative inter-city routes use Parcelforce to deliver their parcels to remote districts?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, while part of Parcelforce operates as a commercially viable service, part operates as a vital public service to many regions of the country that desperately require it? Will he give a guarantee here and now that he will reject privatisation if a universal service obligation cannot be met now and in future?

Is this not a case of privatisation for privatisation's sake? If the right hon. Gentleman is so proud of the plans that he has unveiled today, why did not the Conservative party have the courage to include them in its manifesto three months ago so that the British people could vote on them? Is not the President of the Board of Trade hellbent on out-privatising his predecessors with a knack that will do nothing to improve any postal service to any business or home in any part of the country?

Is not this postal privatisation the height of political opportunism? It was furtively announced at the butt end of the parliamentary Session. The country does not need postal privatisation to help the Tories' friends in the City; it needs postal modernisation to secure quality services for the people.

Mr. Heseltine: I think that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne (Mr. Henderson) rather overstates his case. We brought forward the announcement, which otherwise might have come during the recess, as we thought it was good news in which hon. Members would like to share before they went on their summer holidays. I think that it probably enabled Opposition Members to psyche up each other's doctrinal obsessions, which were so decisively rejected at the last general election.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to reflect on the results of that election. To be fair, I should say that the overwhelming vote of confidence that the Government

received then encouraged them to look again at the rate of progress that could be made on Parcelforce—the electorate's support was an important part of the Government's thinking in making the announcement today. It will do the hon. Gentleman no good to indulge in the customary scare tactics with which the Labour party tries to hide its doctrinal and obsessional opposition to privatisation. As I said several times in my statement, the universality of the service is not negotiable. The only issue is who provides the service.

Anyone who has looked generally and widely at Post Office services is fully aware that the Post Office has a whole range of private sector activities to provide what the hon. Gentleman rightly describes as vital public services. Post Office Counters has 1,000 Crown offices and about 19,500 sub-post offices, many of them in the private sector, all providing a vital public service.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement. Does he agree that the object is to introduce the culture and ethos of private enterprise into this improving but still loss-making operation and into an area in which competitors are making a great deal of money? Who or what will be responsible for the fixing of the universal tariff so that operations are carried out on a level playing field?

Mr. Heseltine: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend's view about the need to inject the culture of the private sector, which will include—as I think the House and, certainly, my hon. Friends will broadly welcome—the opportunity for managers and people who work in the industry potentially to become part owners of it, a concept which has proved so successful elsewhere. The definition of affordability is bound to remain a public sector ministerial responsibility.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): When Parcelforce is privatised, will there be a uniform parcel tariff so that a parcel from Truro to Aberdeenshire or Shetland can be sent at a flat rate, because there are surcharges now? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there has been a deterioration in the service in preparation for privatisation, with only one delivery attempted? If that delivery is unsuccessful, the recipient is required to go to a collection point, which may be 30 miles away. That is not an improving service but a deteriorating one.

I welcome the suggestion that the employees might be given an opportunity to buy the business. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure us that it will not be sold to a competitor, and will he reaffirm without equivocation that the Government intend to keep their sticky fingers off the Royal Mail?

Mr. Heseltine: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman missed what I said about the universality of the service. I made it as clear as possible that these matters are not negotiable —I think that those were the words I used—and were the subject of a clear manifesto commitment at the last election. I unhesitatingly reaffirm the Government's policy.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the service has deteriorated in anticipation of privatisation. That is unlikely because I discussed the form of privatisation with the chairman of the Post Office board only within the past few days, and it is unlikely that that has filtered through to cause a deteriorating service in the meantime.

Of course I cannot give an undertaking about the ultimate purchaser of Parcelforce. We must market it and secure the best possible deal in the taxpayers' interests.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the employees of Parcelforce should look upon his announcement as a great opportunity? Does he further agree that their prospects would be ill served by listening to the backward-looking advice of the Opposition?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right. He is drawing on the experience of privatisation because, despite all the endeavours of the Opposition, it has created one of the greatest share-owning democracies in the world. In support of my hon. Friend, I hope that the Opposition will continue to yammer away in this rather obsessional fashion because it will keep them on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Does the President of the Board of Trade agree that the staff of Parcelforce have co-operated magnificently with the changes that have been introduced over the past few years? Does he also agree that his offer to them of a universal service into which they can buy and a universal price does not seem to make economic sense? There must be real worry, particularly among people in rural areas, because they rely on Parcelforce, on the old Royal Mail parcel services, for essential services. In general, such people are very badly paid and do not have the means to pay for an economic service.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Let me clarify one aspect of what he had to say. I did not say that Parcelforce will have to provide a universal service. What I am saying is that the Government will ensure that there is a universal service. I draw the attention of the House to something that most people will already know, and that is that the Royal Mail already provides a support service for Parcelforce in many parts of the country. Therefore, it is perfectly possible to distinguish between the two.

The other point that the hon. Gentleman makes about rewarding the employees of Parcelforce is also of concern to me. There has been a considerable growing market in many of the services, but the growth of the market has not been one in which the Post Office has shared to the scale that it might. One of the opportunities of setting this part of the Post Office free is that it might be able to expand into directions at home and overseas which, characteristically, publicly owned industries have been precluded from doing.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Parcelforce has lost more than £150 million in the past two years? In view of that, and the fact that it has only 2 per cent. of the next-day parcel market, is not the choice facing Parcelforce clear—either to wither in the public sector or to expand in the private sector? Does my right hon. Friend agree that every industry that has been privatised has increased investment, increased productivity and improved the service, and that that is what Parcelforce will do?

Mr. Heseltine: Sadly, my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the scale of the losses. The figure for the past two years is £155 million, although it is fair to say that the loss last year was significantly less than that for the year

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before. It is because we wish to give the company the opportunity to trade in the private sector and to seize the opportunities of what has been an exciting market for many companies but not for Parcelforce that we seek to take the decisions that we are taking today.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Minister aware that what he is setting aside today is the culture of public service that was established by Rowland Hill and has been followed by every Postmaster-General, Conservative, Labour and Liberal, for more than 100 years, based on the clear understanding that it is much more expensive to deliver letters and parcels in remote areas than it is in urban areas? When the admission was drawn from the Minister that there would no longer be a requirement for Parcelforce to meet the needs of the rural areas, he was explaining the loss that it has suffered in recent years because it has had to meet that requirement. Is not the right hon. Gentleman aware that, as President of the Board of Trade, he is presiding over another piece of loot and plunder of the public services in the interests of his grubby little business friends who financed his election success?

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman has much experience, as I believe that he presided over part of the organisation during his long ministerial career. One reason why the losses of the past two years were discovered was that it was realised that there was an accounting error in the way in which the overheads were allocated in the system. It was nothing to do with the cultural change. But if we are talking about culture—I should be happy to do so in this context—let us face the fact that the most eloquent example of the quality of the culture is that Parcelforce has 2 per cent. of the next-day delivery and 34 per cent. of the later-than-next-day delivery. That shows that the customer has decided that the culture in the public sector is not good enough.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): At a time when Governments all over the world are privatising rather than nationalising, including even socialist Governments in Australia, Spain and France, why does my right hon. Friend think that our own dear old Labour party persists in burying its head in the sand and parroting the tired old dogma of the forties, fifties and sixties in wanting to keep in public ownership a loss-making operation, losses which under private ownership could be made up and put into essential areas of public spending, such as health and education, rather than poured down the drain of a loss-making, state-owned industry?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend may feel that, if the Labour party talks the language it does, the most eloquent thing it can do is to bury its head in the sand.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Surely the President of the Board of Trade blew the gaff on his commitment to maintain a universal service when he dumped it back on the public sector, in the form of the Royal Mail. What guarantee can he give Parcelforce employees that their pension rights will be protected, given that the Post Office pension fund will be dominated by the public sector Post Office? By surreptitiously stripping the Royal Mail prefix from the Parcelforce title, has not the right hon. Gentleman indulged in sharp practice? Not least, he has avoided direct conflict with an important person who has declared her opposition to postal privatisation—the Queen.

Mr. Heseltine: It is with some regret that I tell the hon. Gentleman that I did not even know until yesterday that the Royal Mail prefix had been dropped from Parcelforce. If that is seen as some great constitutional lacuna in my performance, let me explain to the House——

Mr. Hain: The right hon. Gentleman answered a question from me on that matter only three days ago.

Mr. Heseltine: What is two or three days? I will give the hon. Gentleman the explanation as I understand it—which is more bizarre than the truth. Some old vans were repainted and in the course of that work the words "Royal Mail" were not signwritten, only the word "Parcelforce". If the hon. Gentleman can see a sinister plot in that, I admire his ingenuity but I do not share it.

The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) raised a serious point to which I will give a serious answer. There is now wide experience of protecting the rights of public sector pensioners as they transfer into the private sector. I give the House my assurance that the same diligence will apply in this case.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I would like to call all hon. Members who have risen in their places, but I make a plea for succinct questions.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his announcement has been awaited by millions of customers of Parcelforce who want to see skill, innovation and entrepreneurial flair brought to this important market? Is it not richly ironic that, at a time when Labour is seeking to change its leader in a futile attempt to attract the electorate, it cannot change the economic policies that have shackled Opposition Members to the Benches opposite and ensured that they do not emerge into the modern economic world?

Mr. Heseltine: I thought that my hon. Friend was about to suggest that Parcelforce should conduct the retiring leader of the Labour party to some unknown destination. My hon. Friend is right when he says that our decision is a reflection of customer choice. We believe that there will be improving opportunities for those working in Parcelforce, and for customers to enjoy a more sophisticated service.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Does the President of the Board of Trade accept that today's announcement justifies the worst fears of the staff and public in recent years? As privatisation has invariably led to increased prices—usually affecting the most vulnerable people—will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that his universal service will be available at a price that is affordable to all, including those living in remote parts of the country as well as those in the cities?

Mr. Heseltine: I thought that I had made that clear, but as the hon. Gentleman raises an important point I will repeat my remarks because I do not want him to be in any doubt. By universality, we mean that the service will apply from one end of the country to the other; we mean that there will be a standard rate applying from one end of the

country to the other; and we mean that the rate—which will be at ministerial discretion and therefore accountable to the House—will be judged as affordable.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I welcome in particular my right hon. Friend's assurance that the Post Office will assist management and employees in their potential bid for a management buy-out, but will he ensure that management have free access to advice and to investors, and that management and investors can talk freely to the vendors? That would avoid the situation that arose in previous privatisations when management were starved of access to free advice and so did not get a fair crack of the whip.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises a most important point. It is one that I have discussed with the chairman of the Post Office, who is supportive of my announcement today. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's views are conveyed to him, because they coincide very much with my own.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As a distinguished gardener, the Secretary of State may obtain his gardening sweaters from Mr. Tulloch of Shetland and his bulbs from the Scilly isles. He said in his statement that a universal parcel service would continue to operate at a uniform and affordable tariff. By what mechanism will that be ensured for the islands and other remote areas? How will it be done?

Mr. Heseltine: It will be done in much the same way as it is done today. Ministers and the Post Office make decisions about what constitutes an affordable cost in the light of the evidence, the economics and the service that they must provide. That can be debated in the House, and, as the Minister responsible, I would take a personal interest in ensuring that a realistic price was part of the structure of any new system that we devised, having regard to what people could afford.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Parcelforce is operating in a highly competitive market, and that it is wholly inappropriate for a state-owned firm to operate in such a market in which there is a danger of cross-subsidy from the letters monopoly? Was not the "nationalisation at any price" mentality that we have observed in Opposition Members a significant contributory factor to Labour's defeat in the general election?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend has made an important point. There are, of course, separate accounts for Parcelforce, which revealed the £155 million loss to which I referred. The funds to meet those losses, however, have come from other Post Office revenue, and to that extent Parcelforce is indeed the beneficiary of cross-fertilisation.

My hon. Friend also made an important point by reminding us that Parcelforce is competing in a very competitive market. My experience leads me to believe that it will be able to compete more freely and responsively in the private sector.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Does the President of the Board of Trade admit that he has literally been caught playing pass the parcel, in that the loss-making parts of Parcelforce will be handed on to the Royal Mail? What will happen when the music stops? Will Royal Mail be next on the right hon. Gentleman's list? Will he also tell the House and those who work for Parcelforce how many redundancies will result from his proposals?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that I cannot anticipate the market trends of this or any other industry. No Government have been able to shelter the employees of public or private-sector companies from redundancies caused by changing market trends; it is naive to pretend that one has that ability, or would want it.

The hon. Gentleman seems to ignore the fact that Parcelforce is losing money. The privatisation will not deprive the Exchequer of a positive cash flow. Parcelforce is losing money, and it is being cross-subsidised. The only issue is whether the public will obtain better value for money, whether the employees will have a better opportunity and whether the marketplace will enjoy greater competition. What is not at stake is the responsibility to deliver a universal service at an affordable tariff.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a company in the private sector must be efficient, produce competitive prices and deliver on time if it is to survive and grow? If a textile mill in my constituency, on the outskirts of Oldham and Rochdale, required a component, it would need to be able to rely on the delivery time: that would be critical. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is better and more efficient for commerce, trade and industry to allow Parcelforce to compete and fight to survive and grow, thus giving a better service to my constituents?

Mr. Heseltine: The people of Littleborough and Saddleworth are undoubtedly a vital part of the make-up of the marketplace to which our new privatised Parcelforce will wish to direct its attention. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's views are transmitted to them.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): If all this is in the general interest of taxpayers, how does it equate with an efficient and universal parcel delivery service?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will understand that by means of the competitive process we can often obtain a cheaper price in the private sector for delivering a public service.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Is my right hon. Friend aware that all those businesses that require, indeed insist upon, a reliable and affordable next-day parcel delivery service will welcome the increased opportunity for competition that his announcement provides? Does he not agree that Parcelforce will stand a much better chance of increasing its present puny share of the market once it is in the private sector?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend touches on a wider issue. It is important to recognise the extent to which in recent years the private sector has eroded a great deal of the new market in delivery services. One of the exciting opportunities to which employees of Parcelforce will respond is that now they will be able to compete effectively in that growth market without the constraints that previously held them back.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It appears from the Minister's comments that it is ministerial assurances that

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will ensure the maintenance of universal delivery at a standard charge. Does the right hon. Gentleman recall going on television many months ago and giving numerous assurances about not standing against the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher? In view of the varying positions he has taken on many issues, would it not be better if we had legislation to guarantee the universal service at a standard charge? If not, will not people on low incomes, such as pensioners, face a massive increase in charges, while the only people to benefit will be the fat cats in the City who contributed to Tory finances at the last general election?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman has his own obsessions, which I understand full well. It is because they are obsessions peculiar to him that they have so little appeal outside this House.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): While I welcome my right hon. Friend's excellent statement, may I ask him to bear in mind the outstanding performance of Document Interlink Ltd. in my constituency, which has built up a successful organisation that specialises in next-day guaranteed delivery of letters?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend encourages me in what I do. I shall certainly bear in mind the excellent example that he has drawn to the attention of the House.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not of some interest that this statement has been made just before the House goes into the long summer recess, a decision based on sheer political dogma, and that we are not being told what is to be done about the growing and deepening economic crisis and the fear of higher interest rates? Would not that have been a far more relevant statement to make today than this nonsense which has just been announced by the Secretary of State?

Mr. Heseltine: I thought that the case of those who sit on the Opposition Front Bench was that I should have made the announcement earlier. Now, apparently, it should not have been made at all and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer should have been here to tell the House that we are pursuing the only sensible policies upon which economic recovery depends.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that some of the scare stories that we now hear from Opposition Members were exactly the same stories as we heard when British Telecom was privatised, particularly about public telephone boxes in rural areas? Is it not a fact that since privatisation there are more public telephone boxes in rural areas and that far more of them are working than ever before?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend draws the attention of the House to the tragedy of the Labour party. The longer the Opposition go on clinging to their outdated ideas and peddling their prejudices, the less credible they are with the electorate. If there is one distinction to be drawn between the privatisation of British Telecom and the privatisation of Parcelforce, it is simply that the Labour party's arguments today are even less credible than they were when British Telecom was in its sights.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The President of the Board of Trade has referred to the opportunities for the employees of Parcelforce, of whom, as he may know, there are 1,000 in the West Ham area of Newham, in my constituency. Does not the competition that he is now introducing mean, however, that other people will have the opportunity to make my constituents redundant? As to universality, if it is not necessarily to be Parcelforce, who will be responsible for it? The removal of "Royal Mail" from the Parcelforce title is a means, is it not, of getting round the guarantee given by Lady Thatcher that Royal Mail would not be privatised?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening closely to what I have been saying to the House. We are not discussing abandoning the pledge of universality. That remains a public commitment. It is a Government policy which was in our election manifesto and I have repeated several times that we do not intend to prejudice that position. We are not concerned about whether there will be universality, uniformity or a standard tariff, because we are determined to preserve all those things. The only issue being dealt with in this case —the same question can be asked in other cases—is how to implement the commitments. It is apparent to anyone studying the Post Office that in many cases the policy commitments which may be those of the Government, are being implemented in the private sector. I gave the clear example of sub-post offices. There are far more of those in the private sector than there are Crown post offices in the public sector.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Is my right hon. Friend aware how long the world has been awaiting his statement? When setting up his postal service, Rowland Hill indicated that in due course he expected it to be run by the private sector. "In due course" has been a long time in coming. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that letter postal services are not too far behind, if not in privatisation, at least in opening up the service to competition?

Mr. Heseltine: I understand that Rowland Hill made that commitment 150 years ago. I can only apologise to the House for having taken so long to make this announcement.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Will not the privatisation of Parcelforce take away another area of parliamentary questioning? There have been many privatisations in energy which have resulted in getting rid of a Department and many agencies have been established about which we cannot ask questions. Is it not a fact that the Government's ideological programme attacks parliamentary democracy?

Mr. Heseltine: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has ever questioned his obsession with parliamentary questioning about this service. What is the point of being able to question Ministers about 2 per cent. of the next-day service when one cannot question the 98 per cent. of the service in the private sector? What is the point of thinking that one exercises any effective control over quality of service if in the later-than-next-day service one can talk about 34 per cent. with Parcelforce but not about the 66 per cent. in the private sector?

Sir Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Will my right hon. Friend accept that his statement will be warmly

welcomed, not least because of the extra competition it will bring that will be in everybody's interest? When carrying out the privatisation, will he use his influence to try to ensure that the employees in Parcelforce have an opportunity of owning the business? He could perhaps take as his role model the huge success of the National Freight Consortium, which has a great deal of employee ownership. Will he do everything he can to help Parcelforce to succeed in the same way as the NFC did?

Mr. Heseltine: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, which I share, for encouraging employees to become owners in the businesses for which they work. I have discussed the idea with the chairman of the Post Office and he has readily agreed that the Post Office will make funds available to help employees and managers to prepare a bid if they should so wish. However, it is not a responsibility of the Government to make up the minds of employees or managers about the nature of the commercial decision that they may choose to take. Our task is to ensure that they have an opportunity to take it, not to take it for them.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The President of the Board of Trade has said that he is not proposing today to privatise, in whole or in part, the Royal Mail letters service or counter service. However, he has conspicuously failed to rule out privatisation in principle. Will he now do so?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman was not listening to what I said. He asked about Post Office Counters and whether I will rule out privatisation. Of the 18,500 post offices in Britain, 17,500 are privatised and 1,000 of them are Crown Offices. A year ago, instead of the 1,000 Crown Offices, there were 1,150. Therefore many have been transferred into the private sector in the past 12 months. It is outside the experience of any hon. Member that I should say that this is all a public-sector-provided service. It is a public service in terms of universality, uniformity and affordability, but the delivery mechanism is spread widely in the private sector.

Points of Order

4.10 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order Mr. Deputy Speaker. In addition to your duties in the House, you are a constituency Member. In that spirit, will you deprecate a decision of Customs and Excise, which is due to be announced on Friday, to close an office in my constituency with the loss of more than 100 jobs and to transfer it to Leeds? That announcement will be made without——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I do not think that I can anticipate anything that might happen in the future.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be aware of the European Commission's outrageous suggestion that the United Kingdom's budget rebate should be reduced by 25 per cent. Not content with taking the powers of the House, it is taking our constituents' money and our privilege over supply. We are about to begin the recess, but this matter has grave implications.

May I, through your offices, Mr. Deputy Speaker, ask the Government to make an urgent statement on the issue? My understanding has always been that we must have unanimity for any change in the budget. If so, why is the Commission making this outrageous suggestion now? It must know that——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman said that it is a suggestion. The Leader of the House is on the Front Bench and will have heard his submission.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): May I raise a matter of which I gave Madam Speaker and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's office notice? I received yesterday representations from staff of the National Economic Development Office about the implementation of the Chancellor's statement on 16 June. Although Labour Members disagreed with the intention behind the statement, there was consensus about the Chancellor's praise for the staff and director-general of the office. In his statement, the Chancellor gave commitments regarding employment opportunities in the Board of Trade.

The solemn undertaking that was given to the House has been acted on in part, but in a memo dated 7 July some of the staff were given only six days to apply and two days for interviews. Some have not been invited at all. I should be grateful, recognising that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are not responsible for Government statements, if you would use your good offices to bring this matter to the Chancellor's attention and ask him to ensure that it is clarified and that the spirit of the statement is met in full.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Madam Speaker was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving her prior notice. Ministers on the Front Bench will have heard the hon. Member's submission. It is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): We have just heard a statement from a senior Minister that he described as a statement of the Government's intent to privatise a nationalised industry. On 7 February 1985 we had a statement about the Government's intent to privatise the nationalised water industry in England and Wales. On both occasions, the Government have recognised their

[Mr. John McAllion]

responsibility to keep the House informed before making any other public statement about their intentions. Yet, all this week, without making a statement to Members, Scottish Office Ministers have been trumpeting in the press their intention to privatise Scottish water services. As this is supposed to be a unitary Parliament, how can the House force Scottish Office Ministers to show it the same respect as Ministers in English and Welsh Departments have shown?

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it on the same point?

Mr. Canavan: Yes. I wish to support the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) legitimately made.

It is part of our parliamentary tradition that, if a Government seek to change the ownership of a major industry or service, they seek a mandate from the people by including it in their manifesto. In neither the English nor Scottish manifesto was there mention of the privatisation of the Scottish water service, which is owned and administered by local authorities. I have raised the matter in written parliamentary questions, but I have received very little information compared with what is being almost deliberately leaked to the press. Initially, Ministers denied any possibility of privatising Scottish water but then started making encouraging, positive noises to welcome such a proposal. It seems that members of the press are better informed than Parliament about the issue.

The Government have no mandate—certainly not from the people of Scotland—to privatise Scottish water. Indeed, even by British standards they have no mandate to do so. If they are intending to privatise Scottish water we should have a statement from the Minister before the House goes into recess.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Both hon. Gentlemen know that I have no responsibility for Government statements. They have made their point and I am sure that it has been heard by the Leader of the House.

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Another point of order?

Mr. Madden: I am sorry to press you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was in no way——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it on the same issue?

Mr. Madden: May I make the point that I wanted to make——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it on the same issue that was raised before—yes or no?

Mr. Madden: It was to urge you——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand entirely the point that the hon. Gentleman raised before and I gave a ruling.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As tomorrow consists of timed Adjournment debates, could you give us notice of any application that might have been made for a statement tomorrow? We need to know today, if possible. Have you received any application for a statement about the wretched, appalling proposal to close the Customs and Excise revenue office in Bradford?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, I have had no application, but I shall be here at 9.30 am tomorrow.

Mr. McAllion *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it a new point of order?

Mr. McAllion: It is to support——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The point of order does not need any support. I gave a very clear answer.

Airports (Town and Country Planning)

4.16 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to bring the operation of certain categories of civil airports and aerodromes within the scope of planning legislation; and for connected purposes.

There is a revolutionary expansion in air travel. Far more people are flying in far more aircraft to far more destinations. Good air links, especially to Europe and within the United Kingdom, are increasingly and rightly seen as an essential element of regional economic development. However, there is a down side to the benefits. More and more airports, many long-neglected, are being pressed into greater use. Those who live under their flight paths see not benefits, but only more noise and more pollution.

Southampton Eastleigh airport is set to expand from 400,000 passengers to 1 million passengers a year. There will be many benefits throughout South Hampshire, but thousands of my constituents in Townhill Park, Bitterne Park, and Midanbury fear that their lives, already disrupted, will become a misery. Living on a rising hillside a mile or so from the runway, they anticipate a future of aircraft flying low overhead from the early hours of the morning until late at night, of unusable gardens on summer afternoons and of noise and air pollution.

Naturally, they expect the planning system and their local council to be able to protect them and to balance their real losses against the potential gains. However, the planning system at present is woefully deficient. Local councils do hot have the necessary powers. Indeed, they have more powers to control the noise from model aircraft than noise from the real thing.

The Government's consultation paper "Control of Aircraft Noise" set out the admirable principle that

"those responsible for causing noise should be responsible for keeping it to a minimum and for incurring the costs of doing so. They should also be accountable to local people."

Sadly, that is not how the system works.

The system is a lottery. If developments take place on the ground—for example, new terminals—there may be some controls over expansion but not if expansion uses existing facilities. The powers which do exist lie with the local authority where the airport is situated but not, as in Southampton, where those most affected live.

Many powers that exist or which might be created—to force the Civil Aviation Authority to take environmental factors into account, to require the soundproofing of buildings or to require airports to agree a statutory noise abatement plan with local councils—are exercised at the whim of the Secretary of State for Transport. Most have never been used and apparently never will be used except for the largest international airports.

Local councils do not have explicit powers to control expanding airport operations. At Southampton Eastleigh, planners have instead negotiated a planning agreement that contains some significant controls. I believe that, within its limited powers, the Eastleigh council, in consultation with the city council, has done a good job, but the agreement falls well short of local aspirations. In any case, planning agreements are always a murky, unsatisfactory process. They lack the transparency and openness that good, accountable planning requires.

The Southampton agreement has yet to be signed. Its most crucial element—a limited ban on night flights—has been postponed for 12 months already. Because the agreement is linked to an airport business park development, there must be some doubt whether it will ever be signed while this recession lasts.

My Bill will give local authorities the explicit right to control directly the expansion of airport operations. These powers would be triggered by any significant expansion in operations, whether sudden or incremental. The powers will cover the times of use, the number and types of aircraft movements and, subject to the proper role of the CAA, the routing of aircraft into and out of the airport. Councils will gain explicit powers to enforce noise control measures and to require monitoring and remedial action for noise, air pollution and vortex damage. Where two or more local authorities are significantly affected they will be required to exercise these powers collectively.

Any local planning system would be subject to appeal and to the balancing of regional and national interests with purely local interests. But my Bill will bring about a much-needed shift in power to local people and their elected representatives. Airports are probably the last major polluters, largely free of pollution control and not subject to rights of redress for individual citizens. Of the 250 airfields in the United Kingdom, only three currently come under the full force of existing powers. It is time that this situation was ended, and that is the purpose of the Bill.

4.21 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): May I say a few words?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Morris): Is the hon. Member opposing the Bill?

Mr. Hill: Yes, I am. I am opposing it because it does not go far enough. This has been a problem in Southampton for many years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House for many years, and he knows that that is not a negative. It is not acceptable, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Denham, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, Mr. Mike Hall, Mr. Terry Davis, Ms. Estelle Morris, Mr. Jamie Cann, Mr. Clive Betts, Mr. Nigel Spearing, Mr. John Garrett, Mr. Kevin Barron and Mr. Ron Davies.

AIRPORTS (TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING)

Mr. John Denham accordingly presented a Bill to bring the operation of certain categories of civil airports and aerodromes within the scope of planning legislation; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 4 December and to be printed. [Bill 61.]

Orders of the Day

Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Disclosure of Information) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

4.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a technical, but very necessary Bill, which seeks to put right certain unforeseen consequences of the section of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 which dealt with confidentiality. The Bill is very narrowly defined. It seeks only to relax the restrictions on disclosure of information by people to whom a licence applies or to whom directions have been given, as contained in section 35(5) of the 1990 Act. Hon. Members may find it helpful if I explain the background to this matter and then briefly describe the Bill.

Information obtained during treatment for infertility can be extremely personal and private. Parliament recognised this in deciding that the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 should impose a stronger duty of confidentiality than existed under the common law in relation to such information.

The 1990 Act therefore introduces a criminal sanction for breaches of the confidentiality provisions in section 33 of the Act. The criminal sanction in relation to section 33(5) of the 1990 Act applies only to the licensed person who initially discloses the confidential information. Breach of that provision is a criminal offence punishable by up to two years imprisonment, or a fine, or both. That sanction is in addition to the existing common law which protects confidential information.

Since the 1990 Act came into force, practical experience has shown that the provisions on the disclosure of information by licensed clinicians were in some respects too tightly drawn. They have led to unintended risks and difficulties. As it stands, the 1990 Act prohibits licensed clinicians, with some specified exceptions, from disclosing identifying information about a patient's treatment to anyone except the patient herself. They are prohibited from disclosing it to members and employees of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority or other people covered by a licence for the purpose of licensed activities. The practical effect has been found to be that the doctor cannot pass on identifying information, even with the patient's consent, for example to the patient's general practitioner.

The intention was that patients should have maximum control over the information about their treatment. However, it has become clear that the restrictions imposed by the Act in certain instances went too far. The following example illustrates this point. In rare cases, the ovaries of a woman may be hyperstimulated as a result of super-ovulatory drugs. This could result in a dangerous, possibly life-threatening condition which may go unrecognised because a doctor other than a licensed clinician who treats her cannot be given details about her infertility treatment. If clinicians were to do all that they might wish to do to protect the health of their patients, they would—under the Act—have to break the law. Clearly, it is not right that they should be put in that position.

Another example of the unintentionally over-restrictive nature of section 33 of the Act is that it prevents the disclosure of information for legal purposes. This means that a licensed person may not be able to defend him or herself if sued by a patient. If a doctor or other person to whom a licence applies is sued by a patient who has undergone treatment, he or she cannot give his or her legal adviser information about treatment given for an identifiable individual. The doctor would therefore be left in an unfair and untenable position in relation to the patient by whom he or she is sued, who is subject to no constraints under the Act.

When the disclosure provisions in section 33 of the 1990 Act were debated, this House and another place both decided that the person to whom the confidential information relates should retain as much control over the dissemination of that information as possible. The Government's view remains that this is right, but it was not the intention that the consequences that I have described should result.

I turn now to the detail. The Bill seeks to make certain specified relaxations in the restrictions on the disclosure of information by licensed clinicians imposed by section 33 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. Section 33(6) of the Act contains exceptions to the general restrictions. The Bill adds further exceptions, removing the criminal sanction from disclosure in specified circumstances and for particular purposes.

Clause 1(2) inserts three new paragraphs into section 33(6) of the 1990 Act. Paragraph (f) relates to the necessary —I repeat, necessary—disclosure of information before or in connection with proceedings, including legal proceedings and procedures for dealing with complaints. This will deal with the problem that I have just described of the clinician being unable to pass identifying information to his or her solicitor. Access to necessary identifying information in connection with complaints procedures, which is also prevented under the existing provisions, will be permitted under paragraph (f).

Paragraph (g) applies to one narrow aspect of treatment involving a surrogate mother. It enables a licensed clinician to confirm, for the purposes only of an application for a parental order under section 30 of the Act, that the gametes of a particular person were used in treatment services which involved the child being carried by a woman other than the wife of the couple seeking the parental order. Without that provision, the couple seeking the parental order—that is, the couple who commissioned the surrogate mother—might have to prove their genetic relationship to the child through DNA testing, which is time-consuming, and an unnecessary imposition. The provision seeks to simplify such proceedings.

Paragraph (h) deals with inconsistencies between the 1990 Act and the Access to Health Records Act 1990. The latter gives rights of access to records in a number of cases and, in particular, access by specified persons to the records of patients who have become incapable or who have died. The inconsistency arises because the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act does not allow access in those circumstances—in cases where infertility treatment has been given. That provision will make it possible for the personal representatives, or for a person appointed by a

court to manage the affairs of a patient, to pursue claims where the death or incapacity is alleged to have resulted from infertility treatment.

Subsection (3) of the Bill inserts seven subsections, (6A) to (6G). Taking those subsections in order, (6A) prevents the disclosure of the identity of a third party whose gametes were used for the purposes of treatment services when revealing information in connection with proceedings provided for by new paragraph (f). Subsections (6B), (6C) and (6D) allow for information to be given with the consent of the individual or individuals receiving treatment.

I stress that consent is an essential feature of those provisions. The subsections will enable a licensed clinician, with the patient's consent, to pass information about treatment to the GP or to others associated with the treatment, or to anyone specifically authorised by the patient. They will also allow—again, subject to consent—access to certain information for the purposes of clinical and financial audit. Subsection (6E) permits the disclosure of information about an individual's treatment without the patient's consent, in the event of a medical emergency involving that person. Such disclosure can take place only when it is not reasonably practicable to obtain the patient's consent.

Subsection (6G) contains an affirmative regulation-making power to provide for further exceptions to section 33(5) of the 1990 Act. The provisions in the Bill deal with the specific difficulties which have come to our attention. However, we cannot be sure that further practical experience will not identify new situations which could create difficulty. Therefore, it seems sensible to anticipate such an event by including in the Bill a limited regulation-making power, subject to the affirmative procedure, enabling provision to be made for future exceptions. This means that further exceptions, should they be necessary, can be provided for and debated in this House without the need for another Bill.

Subsection 5 of clause 1 makes it clear that the provisions in the Bill will apply to information obtained before as well as after the legislation comes into force.

Finally, clause 2 provides for the short title, and for the extension of the Bill to Northern Ireland and to the Channel islands. The Bill has no implications for public funds.

The Government would not be seeking the measure if satisfactory alternative ways of resolving the problems which have come to light were available. In conclusion, I emphasise that the circumstances in which disclosure would be permitted are closely defined in the Bill and, except in specified circumstances, the patient's consent will be required before any identifying information can be disclosed. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.33 pm

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): I thank the Minister for his full explanation of the Bill. As he knows, it was discussed fully by their Lordships, and several matters which might have needed clarification were explained in another place.

As you will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last time the House debated this issue we were discussing the parent legislation, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. This is not the occasion to rehearse the arguments of principle in that Bill—the continuation of embryology research. However, since that Bill was enacted there have been two developments for which we had all hoped and which bear out the fact that the House was correct to pass it. There have been great advances in research into identifying and increasing our understanding of genetically transmitted disorders.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Does my hon. Friend think that infertile couples can still get infertility treatment under the national health service now that hospitals are opting out?

Ms. Harman: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. As it is the responsibility of GP budget holders and district health authorities to purchase services for people who are on their patients lists or who are within the district health authority area, there has been much concern that in vitro fertilisation and other specialist services for people with infertility problems will not be available under the NHS. I take this opportunity to ask the Minister to reassure us that he will monitor the purchasing patterns of GP budget holders and of district health authorities and to confirm that he sees a place for infertility services in the NHS.

The importance of the 1990 Act was that it regulated research and the treatment of infertility. We want to be sure that treatment is not only regulated but available under the NHS, and not just to those who can pay for it. The intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) gives me the opportunity to put that point to the Minister.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The hon. Lady referred to advances in research into genetically transmitted disorders as an important development. There is no evidence that that research could not have been carried out on tissue from babies who, unfortunately, were stillborn or on tissue from naturally aborted foetuses, without the breeding of embryos on which to make experiments.

Ms. Harman: The clear view of people who are engaged in research is that it simply would not be possible to make advances in our understanding of genetically transmitted disorders or to further the treatment of infertility in the way that the hon. Lady suggests. It is wrong to suggest that there is a hidden agenda and that researchers are saying that advances could not be made without human embryology when they could be. There is a clear consensus in the research and medical community that such research would not be possible without the use of human embryos. There are a few people on the margins who believe that it would be possible, but they do not carry their colleagues with them.

Those of us who support the programme for improving treatment for infertility and the programme for discovering more about genetic disorders would not be prepared to sacrifice the great advances on the basis that other methods might be possible. There is no evidence to support that view. I have led the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame. E. Kellett-Bowman) astray by raising the principles of the 1990 Act. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would say that she and I were out of order for raising the matter.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority on its work, which has been well described in its first annual report. I

[Ms. Harman]

am glad to have the opportunity to draw the attention of the House to that report. It is extremely well laid out and informative. It contains much information that professionals and those who may be embarking on infertility treatment may want to see. It is especially important that the report is accessible to the public, because many people who are embarking on infertility treatment feel that they are vulnerable to the blandishments of the private sector about what they could be offered if only they would hand over their money.

The authority will have an increasingly important role to play in providing people who have been offered all sorts of services in the private sector, and for whom all sorts of claims are being made, with an opportunity to consult it. People will have an official body with whom they can discuss the situation in practice. The authority says that one of its responsibilities is

"giving information and advice to donors and prospective donors, to people seeking treatment or storage, or to people considering whether to do so."

I congratulate the authority on its excellent report. What help will the Minister's Department give to ensure that it is widely circulated among the medical profession and people who may want to look at it? My only minor criticism is that the report does not contain the authority's phone number or address. Many people reading the report and seeing the pictures of all those nice people working in the authority will want to ring them up or write to them for further information. Members of Parliament receive many reports and most of them are unreadable, but this is a good example and the authority has obviously done important work.

Human embryology is a rapidly changing field. When we discussed the parent Act, it was impossible to predict the problems that would emerge, which is why it is useful for the authority to identify the problems and discuss them openly in consultation. One issue flagged up was whether the success rates of different clinics should be published. It is important that that is discussed further and I look forward to seeing what the authority decides. Where the authority can iron out problems, we can be confident that it will do so. Its report identifies a problem with the confidentiality clauses in the Act which it cannot sort out by guidance or in any other way, which is why we are required to legislate.

We are dealing only with the extent of criminal law in this matter. Clearly, no one wants the criminal law to extend to such a degree that criminal sanctions could apply to the passing of information between doctors in the interests of patients. Doctors should not face disciplinary charges for seeking to provide information relating to treatment that is being questioned. The Bill should not change the general duty of confidence which doctors owe their patients. General practitioners have no criminal sanctions hanging over their heads if they provide information, but we all know and expect them not to do that. So we can reassure people that the Bill deals simply with the extent of the criminal law and the normal expectation of confidence between doctor and patient would hold true.

I expect that, if that professional duty of confidence were breached, it would be monitored by the General Medical Council, so although the criminal law will be withdrawn slightly from that area, people's eyes will not be taken off it.

I hope that the fact that we are considering the Bill will encourage those who have doubts that, once it is enacted, everybody will forget about it and get on with what they felt was necessary and expedient at the time. The Bill shows that there is an expectation that the letter of the law will be obeyed, even if it makes no sense. We must change the letter of the law, because we do not want practices to develop outside the law. I hope that the fact that we have returned to consider this issue today and change the legislation will encourage those who are worried that, when people are given an inch, they will take a mile.

I thank the Minister for his clear introduction of the Bill. We recognise that we need the legislation and shall support it. I hope that he will deal with the points that I have raised.

4.44 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): It is strange that, although we have been debating this small Bill for about half an hour, no one so far has mentioned the children born as a result of this so-called scientific advance. Since the introduction of the parent Act, some hon. Members on both sides of the House have been concerned about the position of the child.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister say clearly whether the Bill improves or changes the position of those children? When children are born naturally and normally, possibly as the result of a brief affair, it may not be possible to find out health details of the parents, particularly the father. A child may have only one parent—a mother—and if she does not know the child's father well, the child may never know those health details.

We are considering the position of children who have been deliberately brought into the world by a scientific procedure. Some of us believe that that puts a special responsibility on the law, and on the medical profession which has brought the child into the world through somewhat unusual and unnatural means. If a child is adopted, the law gives it a right of access to information. It is often important for doctors to know, for instance, whether there is a family history of heart disease or some other health problem; it is much easier to treat a patient if the parental background is known.

It is less than fair to a child born deliberately in that way to withhold from the child information which is on file and known.

If an adopted child can have access to such information, those children should have the same right. Few people will speak up for children born as a result of such procedures, but this is an occasion on which to do so, because we want the Bill to give those children a better deal than they have had hitherto.

During the Committee stage of the parent Act, I sought to have the same conditions apply to those children as apply to adopted children. In law, it is absolutely clear that the interests of the child are paramount, but in these circumstances the interests of the child are not paramount but secondary to the interests of the mother or father. In many cases where children are born as a result of this procedure, the father and mother will be known—although the procedure is unusual, they will be the genuine father and mother—but I am talking about the many

children born as a result of the procedure where the father is not known. That is to say, he may not be known to the mother, but he will certainly be known to those who keep the hospital records. It is in that narrow context that I wish to speak up once again for the rights of children who come into the world as a result of procedures that we in the House have, rightly or wrongly, blessed.

4.50 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am glad to support the Bill. Many of us present today were involved in the protracted and sometimes heated debates on the original Act. Although we may have had differences of opinion about the original Act, I suspect that there is more agreement on the Bill's provisions, which meet some of the weaknesses that have become apparent in the original legislation. We are debating narrow points, not the broad issue covered by the original Act.

There are two reasons for welcoming the relaxation of the provisions. First, it is important to establish communications between clinicians. I accept the argument of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), although I take a different view from her on the general issue. We must strike a balance between the different interests—including those of the child that we must safeguard.

There are times when there should be better communication between clinicians than is allowed under the narrow interpretation of the original legislation. In an attempt to protect the confidentiality of those receiving treatment to assist conception, the original Act unwittingly outlawed the direct communication between doctors which can be necessary in clinical emergencies.

For example, a rare complication which can occur in the ovulatory stimulation preceding in vitro fertilisation can result in collapse. At present, if a patient collapses in the street, the licensed IVF centre could be barred from informing the casualty department of the hospital where the patient is taken of the ovulatory stimulation treatment. That problem must be addressed and overcome. It is in the interests of the patient and everyone else that legislation should allow prompt and appropriate medical treatment in such circumstances, even though they are rare.

Legislative changes are also needed in respect of legal defence. One of the unintended consequences of the original Act was that it could deprive licensed practitioners of the ability to defend themselves in legal proceedings. Clinicians who provide such treatment may be sued for negligence and may be unable to obtain legal advice or representation, or submit a defence in a court of law without the risk of prosecution under the rules of confidentiality. The original legislation was not intended to create such circumstances.

Whatever our far-reaching differences over the original legislation, we should secure as much agreement in this House on the objective of this limited Bill as was achieved in another Chamber. I hope that we can make rapid progress.

4.53 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I have waited just over five years to prove to the House that I can voluntarily make a short speech, so I shall try not to speak for too long. My interest in the Bill arises from the fact that I, too, served in Committee in 1990 and have followed subsequent developments with considerable interest.

I support the Bill and am delighted that the Government have realised that more people need to know about the treatment—a battle that I fought and lost in 1990. I have only one reservation about the Bill: it does not go far enough. That is why I have tabled amendments, but I shall leave my comments on them until the appropriate time.

I remain as supportive of research and treatment now as I was in 1990, and I have no quarrel with the principle. However, I will not adopt the approach of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) and risk reopening the debate. Now, as then, the strands of support and opposition for the legislation go backwards and forwards across the House as the debate continues. Like the hon. Member for Peckham, I am delighted that experience has shown that the 1990 Act appears to be working well. I hope that it will continue to do so.

4.55 pm

Ms. Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I endorse what has been said and I approve of the Act, but I have one or two worries about the Bill. Will there be any kind of monitoring? Can the Minister assure us that if the rules are relaxed the operation of the Bill will be monitored? Perhaps in two years' time there could be a review of all the law on the subject.

4.56 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The 1990 Act is a bad Act and it is not surprising that it has caused trouble. If the opening speech of my hon. Friend the Minister is to be believed, it may cause further trouble, as the matter has been left open.

I strongly oppose what is inappropriately known as the parent Act—the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990—because I believe that life begins at conception and is sacred. That is why I have consistently opposed abortion, and continue to do so.

I do not oppose—indeed, I support—in vitro fertilisation where the embryo is fertilised by the patient's husband and then reimplanted in the womb, but it is absolutely unforgivable to breed embryos for the purpose of experimentation. As I said to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), sadly there is quite enough foetal material created by accident—by spontaneous abortions and stillbirths—to make it unnecessary to experiment on live foetuses.

The Bill slightly improves an appallingly bad Act. It would improve it still further if the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) were taken up, her amendment accepted and more consideration given to the children.

4.57 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): As hon. Members may imagine, any legislation containing the phrase "human fertilisation and embryology" conjures up for me painful memories of the passage of the original Act bearing that name. The nights of 23 and 24 April 1990 will go down in the history of the House as a time when some of the most momentous decisions affecting human life were taken.

[Mrs. Ann Winterton]

On 23 April, hon. Members decided to allow research on embryonic human life that involved destruction of that life. On 24 April, the House decided to change the law on abortion to allow the termination of the life of an unborn child up to birth. Those of us who talked then of abortion up to birth were accused of scaremongering. However, a parliamentary written answer in column *437* of *Hansard* on 29 June states that the number of abortions after 24 weeks has doubled since the Act came into force, and abortions have taken place up to 36 weeks. As someone who has had the privilege of seeing the scanned pictures of her grandchildren at about 16 weeks, I cannot imagine how abortions could be done at 36 weeks in a civilised country, unless there was a good reason such as the mother's life being in danger, which is rare.

I have deliberately strayed from the Bill to stress the momentous decisions that are being taken under the original Act and the fact that we are already reaping the results of the seeds that we sowed two years ago. I fully accept that the Bill is a technical measure. I cannot recall seeing a Bill of so few pages that was more complicated than this one. I do not object to the Bill's principle: to sort out some of the problems relating to the disclosure of information. I understand that, as the Minister and the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) said, a woman's health may be put at risk because the existing Act prevents some information being passed on to those treating her.

I have no desire to stand in the way of such a proposal. However, I should like to highlight two matters. First, why is the Bill so technical? I think that there is a simple reason. The 1990 Act allowed treatment involving the donation of egg and sperm. It would be quite legal under that Act for a man to donate sperm, a woman to donate an egg, for fertilisation to take place in the laboratory and for the resulting egg to be implanted in a second woman who would carry a baby and eventually pass that child to other parents.

Although that is an extreme case, once we allow life to be created by other than natural means and, in particular, provide for the donation of gametes, we inevitably bring on ourselves a whole range of consequences in relation to what information different people can have. It is a very sensitive matter for individuals to receive the kind of treatments that are allowed under the 1990 Act. Having decided to go down that road, we have brought on ourselves the need to devise complicated legislation. The Bill is a warning to us all of the implications of tampering with the natural means of reproduction.

The other matter that I want to highlight also concerns my hon. Friends the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and for Birmingham, Edgbaston, (Dame J. Knight). It is that the Bill makes no mention of disclosing information to the one group of people most affected by treatment—children born as a result of licensed treatment. That is a sad omission, and I am surprised that the Government have not said anything about it throughout the passage of the Bill. I hope that the Minister will clarify the Government's position when we discuss the matter in Committee.

5.1 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I congratulate the Minister on this necessary Bill. It will correct a technical defect, of which we were not aware when the original Bill was passed. Events since the passing of the 1990 Act have proved its importance and success. I pay tribute to the British doctors who have made advances even greater than any that we expected at the time. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) spoke about that. Those advances are attributed to British scientists, who lead the world, and they would not have been possible without the freedom given by the Act. My hon. Friends the Members for Lancaster (Dame. E. Kellett-Bowman) and for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) who opposed the Act should visit Hampstead hospital to see the work carried out by Dr. Bob Winston to help couples who suffer from genetic disorders and give them the chance to have a healthy child.

One of the disturbing features about Enoch Powell's opposition to such legislation in the 1983 Parliament was his preparedness to sacrifice the interests of couples who suffer from genetic disorders in the name of fears that have proved groundless. The Act paved the way for Britain to continue to lead the world, and set an example for legislation and for science.

Some doctors have spoken to me about their concerns over the defects in the 1990 Act. I am glad that the Government have not hesitated to introduce the Bill and to make provision through regulations for changes that might be required. We do not need to concern ourselves with any other corrections to the Act. It is right to maintain the anonymity of donors, an issue that is addressed by an amendment. I agree with the hon. Member for Peckham, who spoke about controlling the costs of the authority. Everybody was dissatisfied with the workings of the 1990 Act.

5.4 pm

Mr. Sackville: With the leave of the House, I should like to respond to the points made by hon. Members. I thank all those who have taken part, especially the hon. Members for Peckham (Ms. Harman) and for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm). The hon. Lady spoke about the principle of the Bill and the availability of infertility services, especially in vitro fertilisation. We have always made it clear that purchasing authorities, the district health authorities, have to decide, in the light of their knowledge of local priorities and needs, what treatment to provide. That is the current situation.

I thank the hon. Lady for her congratulations to the authority, which I know it will welcome. She is probably unaware of the fact that I spoke at the authority's first conference recently, on the day that the annual report was published. I shall certainly raise with the authority the issue of distribution. The authority can be contacted at Paxton house, 30 Artillery lane, London E1 7LS.

My hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) and for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) spoke about the position of the child. The Bill does not change in any way the right to information of a child born as a result of treatment. It is limited to narrow circumstances, such as—

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Surely the crux of the matter is that an adopted child has the right to know its natural

parents and its background, for reasons of health if for no other. Why have the Government not seen fit to do the decent thing and allow children born by artificial means to have the same rights?

Mr. Sackville: That touches on the wider issue of comparisons between adoption law and the Bill's provisions. As my hon. Friend knows, the original Act left a regulation-making power, so that Parliament could later bring in rights to information on, for example, the health of genetic parents. The matter may be raised later in the Bill's passage.

Dame Jill Knight: Would not the Bill be a perfect vehicle for doing exactly that? The Minister said that there should be no amendments or improvements and then he said that the matter could be raised later. Is there a chink of light there?

Mr. Sackville: As I said, legislation allows for such regulations, but they must be discussed thoughtfully and at length. There are considerable ramifications attached to any change. Perhaps we can discuss that later.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) has taken a great interest in the subject. I am grateful for the benefit of his expertise and his welcome for the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), another leading expert on the subject—I have read some of his previous contributions—welcomed the Bill.

Mr. Wilshire: I am always anxious that *Hansard* should be accurate. I am flattered to be called an expert. I might be an interested layman, but I would not lay claim to being an expert.

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms. Lynne) referred to monitoring. As the hon. Lady knows, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has statutory duties to monitor all the work and will deal with any new matters of concern in its annual report. If the hon. Lady wishes to contact me on any particular, my door is open. We look to the authority to monitor all the work and to be responsible for any changes and advances in techniques that may take place.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) welcomed the Bill in principle despite her considerable doubts about the embryology aspects, of which we are aware. I am glad to hear that she approves of the principle of in vitro fertilisation as a method of fertility treatment.

Lastly, I welcome the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) who has taken a great interest in the subject. I hope that his interest will continue. His contributions are always welcome.

The Bill seeks to relax the impact of section 35(5) of the 1990 Act without departing from the general principle that the person to whom the information relates should retain as much control over the dissemination of that information as possible. It seeks to redress the balance between necessary and appropriate access to identifying information and the sensitivities and wishes of the individual concerned.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my hon. Friend aware of some of the advances that have been made at St. Mary's hospital, Manchester? I hope that he will have an opportunity to visit that hospital to see the work done there by Dr. Brian Lieberman, among others, which shows that advances are being made not only in London but elsewhere in the country, particularly in the north-west.

Mr. Sackville: I am aware of Dr. Lieberman's work. He is one of the leaders in the field and I hope that I will be able to visit in the future.

The Bill will benefit patients and clinicians alike. It is a reasonable and much-needed measure, as many who have contributed to the debate have said. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

Clause 1

Relaxation of section 33(5) of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990

5.11 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 21, leave out 'or'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 23, at end insert

', or

(i) to a person who was born as a result of any treatment covered by a licence.'.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I do not raise this in a disruptive manner, and it can possibly be dealt with by a manuscript amendment. Amendment No. 1 seeks to leave out "or" in line 21, but the word "or" appears twice in that line.

The Chairman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The word "second" should be included in the amendment.

Dame Jill Knight: As I have already spoken, I have no intention of delaying the House. I simply give my hon. Friend the Minister notice that if what we are doing today merely benefits the patients, and if there is a thus far undiscovered loophole somewhere which may benefit the children, we shall seek to find that loophole and to use it because the rights of the children are clear in our minds.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I apologise for the last-minute decision to ask my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) to move the amendment standing in my name. For the record, it should be made clear that my attention was drawn to the fact that in "Guidance to Ministers", now a public document, it states that Parliamentary Private Secretaries cannot move amendments to Government Bills. I apologise for any confusion which may have arisen. I can, however, speak to the amendments and I intend to do so.

The amendments are all about who a person is and whether or not he or she has a right to know that. If the genetic parents are different from one's social parents, both sets of parents are an essential part of the child. That is an issue which I and a number of my hon. Friends raised first in 1990, and I make no apology for raising it again. Now, as then, the matter is one of conscience. These are matters of deeply held personal belief. The amendments are not anti-Government, aimed at driving a hole in a

[Mr. David Wilshire]

central plank of Government policy, and I hope that now, as in 1990, we can approach the debate on a non-party-political basis.

The issue which was fundamental in 1990 and which we are discussing now is simply whether, if you, Mr. Morris, or I or anyone else were born as a result of egg or sperm donation, we ought to have the right to know who the donor or donors were. Let us be clear about this. Over the years, as treatment becomes more and more successful, more than a few people will discover that they were born as a result of such treatment. It may be that their social parents tell them. I hope that they will. It may be that people will find out by accident. With all the good will in the world, with all the safeguards and all the criminal sanctions, people will find out. Therefore, we must have an answer to whether people who discover that they have been born as a result of treatment have the right to know who the donors were. My view remains as it was in 1990 —that people have the right to know.

From time to time, people will realise that they were born as a result of treatment and some of them will take steps to try to find out who the donors were. They will quickly discover that others hold files containing the answer to the question that they are asking. They will readily realise that someone somewhere knows the identity of their genetic parents—information which they will be refused. They will not be allowed to know their genetic origins. If that happened to me, my response would be: how dare this system, or any system, refuse to tell me what others know about my basic origins?

My conviction is deeply held and subjective, but there is another, calmer justification for the approach that I ask the Government to consider carefully. Refusing such information to people born as a result of treatment flies in the face of the spirit of the age. A short list of recent legislation shows that we have discussed access to information and have legislated for the rights of people, particularly in areas of local government, to know certain things that they did not know before. The Data Protection Act 1984 gave people the right to know what is held on file about them. Patients have the right to look at their medical records. Dare I suggest that even the citizens charter is all about the rights of the individual? All those matters, and many more, address the issue of people's rights to know all that there is to know about themselves.

Then there is the argument put forward by my hon. Friends the Members for Edgbaston and for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) of the precedent set by adopted children having the right to know who their parents are. I accept that few of them use it, but some do. To the best of my knowledge—I am happy to be corrected—there is no evidence that an adopted child's right to know its parents has done any harm.

It would be foolish of me not to acknowledge the case against. It is argued that it would harm a child to know the identity of its genetic parents, but the adoptive child experience suggests that that is not so. Even if one accepts that argument, the truth will out sooner or later. Some people would find out, despite all efforts to prevent them from doing so. The only way to prevent the alleged harm would be to end all such treatment—and I would not support that.

Another argument is that, if the child were given the right to know, the supply of donors would end, but there is evidence to the contrary. I cite the experience of King's College hospital, London, based on 100 people who inquired whether they could donate either eggs or sperm. When the 30 who were accepted as donors were asked whether or not they were willing to have their identities revealed, 12 said yes, eight said that they wanted to give the matter further thought, and only 10 said no. Only one third said that disclosure would put them off helping in that way.

Even if the right to know served to reduce or to eliminate the supply of donors, that is not a good reason to block disclosure. If those willing to donate are so worried about their identity becoming known to the child, one questions their reasons for volunteering. Do they simply want the money, but not the responsibility? Do they want to wash their hands of their participation? Are they ashamed of their involvement, or afraid of being embarrassed 20 years later by someone knocking on their door and saying, "Hi, mum," or "Hi, dad"? If donors cannot entertain that possibility, they should not donate. The creation of life and the principle that I support carry responsibilities. Those who cannot face up to those responsibilities should not become involved.

Mr. Wigley: The hon. Gentleman used the word "eliminate". Would he really be prepared to see the ending of such treatment as a consequence of the amendment?

Mr. Wilshire: I most certainly would. If people are not willing to take responsibility and to participate in the full knowledge of the implications and of the effect on the child, that is the price that we would have to pay. We should not cover up the truth or deny an individual his or her fundamental rights as a matter of convenience or to ensure the supply of donors. I would regret that consequence, but we must confront the reality of the argument.

Another argument made against disclosure is that prospective social parents would object and that, if the child could discover the identity of his genetic parents, fewer people would seek treatment. I would be desperately sorry if we started to close the door on the people who seek such help, but if would-be social parents cannot face their children knowing the truth, what are they ashamed of? I cannot think of any better definition of the love for a child or of wanting a child than that a couple should go to such extremes to have one. There is no reason why any person seeking treatment should worry about disclosure. It should be a matter of pride and commitment that one has allowed one's child to the identity of his or her genetic parents.

Sooner or later, and despite the wishes of their social parents, children will discover the identity of their genetic parents. If the social parents do not tell their children the truth, the children will come to realise that they have been living a lie. That would do more harm than making it impossible to attract donors or having fewer people receiving treatment.

Who matters most? On Second Reading my hon. Friend the Minister said that the original Bill intended to give patients maximum control. The House will understand that it is not just a question of the parents. At least three groups of people are involved—donors, treatment seekers, and the resulting children. They all

matter. We cannot exclude any one of them. I argue now, as I did in 1990, that we should not seek to deny the rights and the interests of the resulting child.

We cannot duck the issue by saying, "It is better to leave matters as they are; the system works well." Donors have a choice: either they donate or they do not. Patients have a choice: either they seek treatment or they do not. The resulting child has no choice. He or she comes into this world as a result of the decisions of others. If I must choose between those who have a choice and the child who does not, I will come down on the side of the child and do my level best to defend it.

I suspect that it is not a question of the Government refusing to accept the amendments but of their being unable to do so. The amendments were not drafted by lawyers, and I shudder to think what complications they might create. I have made the point that I am not an expert, and I cannot profess to have played a part in drafting something that is legally watertight.

I shall be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister will clarify one point, so that we may be absolutely clear. Would the regulations allow the Government, after mature thought and having taken the advice of lawyers, to make it possible for children to learn the identity of their genetic parents? If so, the argument of principle has been won and I can leave for my summer holidays deeply satisfied and very reassured. The Government may not like the arguments, however, and they may prefer to come down on the side of withholding information. I can only say that that is democracy.

Democracy is all very well, but this issue will not go away. Those who raise it whenever an excuse is made are labelled the awkward squad on the Government Back Benches. We are reasonable people, and we understand the score, but we shall take every opportunity to pursue the matter. I suspect, however, that sooner rather than later our battle will be joined for real by a child who demands to know its genetic origins. When that happens, it will not be the awkward squad but the people of this country and the media who will be asking how the system, under whichever Government, the medical profession, and those who speak in the name of science and progress can dare to deny a child his or her absolute right to know his or her origins. That will ultimately force the Government of the day to act, and the sooner that happens, the better.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): It is appropriate that one of the awkward squad should have caught your eye, Mr. Lofthouse, and follow in the footsteps of my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who made a powerful and impassioned speech. It is extraordinary in this day and age that, on a non-party political issue of conscience and belief, a Parliamentary Private Secretary should be debarred from tabling an amendment. I was delighted to put my name to an amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) to deal with the problem, because this small amendment again focuses attention on the group of people most affected by the treatment provided under the 1990 Act.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne was very active during the passage of that legislation, especially in Committee. He succeeded, for instance, in putting a child's need for a father on the statute book. He worked extremely hard to do that, and he should be congratulated on his tenacity.

5.30 pm

Children born as a result of in vitro fertilisation, artificial insemination or egg donation are not protected in the same way as other children, and many of us want that to be put right. As the 1990 Act currently stands, individuals born as a result of treatment can discover from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority only whether they were indeed born as a result of it, and whether a named person may be related to them in some way. No information that might identify the true genetic parents of such individuals can be released.

As has already been shown, the Bill makes no change in those arrangements. Instead, it extends the number of people who can have access to information about those involved in treatment, whether they are donors or recipients. It allows information to be provided in court proceedings and it allows doctors involved in the treatment to be provided with such information. Any doctor is allowed access to identifying information, as are servants of the authority, but children born as a result of fertility treatment are not allowed such access. My hon. Friend's amendment seeks to rectify that omission; as I said earlier to my hon. Friend the Minister, for some years adopted children have been able, at the appropriate time, to try to discover the identity of their true parents.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne said many times, this is one of those issues that will not go away. It will be raised in the House of Commons time and again, because an injustice is being perpetrated. That injustice should be put right, and the sooner the Government recognise it, the better.

During the Committee stage of the 1990 Act, the then Minister of State for Health—now Secretary of State for Health—said that the Government intended to keep under review the kind of information that should be given to individuals born as a result of treatment. She stressed that regulations could be made under section 31 of the Act to allow identifying information to be provided. Two years have passed. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has been established—we have referred to its report today—yet no word has been forthcoming about regulations on the matter, or even about consultation.

I hope that the Minister will tell us precisely what the Government believe and will assure us that they have not forgotten that many people—both inside and outside the House of Commons—are anxious that children should not grow up in the dark, but should be able to obtain appropriate information about their origins. Children who are born as a result of fertility treatment are treated as second-class citizens in comparison with adopted children and those who are born to their parents in the natural way.

I am happy to support my hon. Friend's amendment.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Let me complete the process that began with the great, proceeded to what we now know as the expert and then reached the awkward squad. I am not sure where that leaves me in the resulting Conservative quartet, but I am happy to be categorised if my hon. Friends insist on it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) need not fear for my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). We are seeking not to introduce a measure that is opposed to Government policy but to clarify that policy and, indeed, to extend

[Mr. John Bowis]

Government commitments in the earlier legislation. It was said then that the matter would be kept under review; we are seeking that review now.

I want to highlight the practical realities to which the amendment relates. It is not simply a case of "Wouldn't it be nice to know where I came from?", although that may justify the provision of a right to information. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne used the phrase "living a lie". We must be careful about using such terms in this place; I think that my hon. Friend meant "living a life in which it is impossible to be truthful"—impossible, that is, if the person concerned does not know the facts. That is what concerns me. If a person does not have the right to know his parents, who created him—even if he was born from the womb of a third party—he will not be able to tell the truth about his origins.

Decades after his birth, that person may suffer from a disease that requires the doctors to know his medical history. If he is asked whether there is a record of heart disease in his family, all that he will be able to say is, "I do not know"—or, worse, he may assume that the people who brought him up are blood relations, and give a false picture on that basis.

The individual has a right not just to know, but to be told. If, long after his birth, one of his real parents was found to have contracted a disease such as AIDS, how would it be possible to ensure that he was aware of it? The disease could have passed into the next generation through the bloodstream, unbeknown to the real parents, the adoptive parents and the child. The child would then be unable to protect himself, because he would have no right to be told of the development in his blood line.

There is another consideration. In a sense, it is much less serious, but it might be important to a young adult who took out insurance against, for instance, having twins. Insurance companies providing such cover must be told of the family history and informed whether twins have been produced regularly. The person whom we are discussing would not know that, or might think that he knew, although he would be thinking of the wrong family. He would be unable to tell the truth, or, at best, he would be discriminated against: if he could only say, "I do not know," he would be excluded from insurance benefit.

I want such children to be able to live the truth rather than a lie. I want them to live without the fear that something unknown to them may have happened and to live without discrimination. For those reasons, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give careful consideration to the reasoned arguments presented by Conservative Members. They have a purpose beyond the desirability of knowing the facts: they relate to problems that will face people in later life if they are deprived of the right to know.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): May I say to those on the Tory Back Benches who describe themselves as the awkward squad that we are not prepared to accept the implication that they care about the children and that we care only about the parents. That is unacceptable. We have to look at the question from all sides.

Mr. Wilshire: If the hon. Lady drew that implication from what I said, I apologise to her. When I spoke in the debate, that point was the furthest from my mind.

Ms. Harman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his clarification. We can therefore proceed on the basis that we all have an equal interest in the future of children who are born in these circumstances and that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are concerned about the position in which parents find themselves.

On the anonymity of donors, the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) referred to what I believe to be the key issue: would donors come forward if they felt that at a later date somebody would come knocking on their door and say, "Hi, Dad, I'm your son"? We do not want to jeopardise the artificial insemination by donor programme because people are worried that if they donate sperm they will be identified at a later date.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne said, in a kind of menacing way, "We'll keep bringing up this issue and bringing it back to the House of Commons." Of course it needs to be raised regularly. I do not doubt that the Government want it to be discussed regularly. The authority says in its report that it wants the issue to be discussed. The awkward squad need not therefore feel that they are beleaguered champions and that, were it not for them, nobody else would raise the issue. The authority highlights on page 27 of its report the fact that the Government are concerned about the issue. It also voices its own concern.

I hope that there will be more research into whether it might be possible to identify donors without deterring them from becoming donors. If the Government get it wrong and require donors to be prepared to be identified and the result is that donors do not come forward, an informal process will come into existence. It is easy to practise artificial insemination by donor. The awkward squad might not know that, but in fact it is very easy and——

Mrs. Ann Winterton: What the hon. Lady says is an insult to anybody's intelligence. First and foremost, not all my hon. Friends are members of the awkward squad. I am, unashamedly, a member of the awkward squad and I shall continue to be a member of it for as long as the good electors of Congleton are prepared to return me to this place to be as bloody-minded as I want to be.

Nobody believes what the hon. Lady says about her interest in children, because she supports abortion up to birth. No one who does that, for social reasons, can have a genuine interest in children. Nevertheless, some of my hon. Friends agree with the hon. Lady and not with me.

I am the first to admit that a very delicate and sensitive balance has to be achieved when it comes to the rights of a child who is born as a result of one of the infertility processes and the rights of a child who is conceived in the ordinary way. The hon. Lady has not yet, however, mentioned the rights of the child. She has referred to the rights of the donor, the feelings of the donor and the feelings of the parents. Has the child no rights at all?

Ms. Harman: When I said that I was not prepared to accept what had been implied by at least two of the self-styled members of the Tory Back-Bench awkward squad—that I am concerned only about the interests of the parents and that they are the custodians of the true interests of the child—the hon. Member for Spelthorne got up and asked me how on earth I could have got that idea. We know the answer now from the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton). I shall not respond, however,

to her point about abortion. I want to deal with my concerns about the amendment. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid that I missed the point of the heckling by Conservative Members, so I shall proceed with my speech.

If the Government require donors to be prepared to be identified after they have donated sperm and the result is that people do not come forward to donate sperm, that will not kill the demand for artificial insemination by donors. It will simply drive it away from medical supervision. It will result in informal artificial insemination by donor. That will be far more risky when it comes to the health of the child. It is far better for artificial insemination by donor to be carried out under medical supervision.

5.45 pm

I hope that the debate about identification of donors will proceed. I am confident that it will. I hope, too, that there will be more research. However, this is a complex issue and, when we address it, we have to be sophisticated and intelligent. If we do not talk in terms of tabloid headlines, we may make progress. I take it that the hon. Member for Spelthorne intends to withdraw the amendment, but I look forward to debating the issue on future occasions. I am sure that I shall agree with what the Minister is about to say.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): That may be something that I shall not hear very often, Mr. Lofthouse, so I shall enjoy it.

This extremely lively debate has highlighted many of the issues that surround this extraordinarily difficult topic. The amendment, so charmingly moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), was developed by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). The arguments that he put on both sides amounted to a veritable tour de force, although he put the arguments on one side more effectively, perhaps, than on the other. My hon. Friend asked whether the Bill provides for the formulation of regulations to achieve what he wants. It does not do so. However, the 1900 Act makes provision for a regulation-making power. That provision is still available.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) referred to a number of ethical concerns. All donors are screened for HIV. As my hon. Friend may be aware, no one with a history of genetic disease would easily be accepted as a donor of gametes.

Mr. Bowis: I am absolutely aware of that. My hon. Friend will also be aware that HIV could be contracted at a later stage, long after the donation had been made. It is at that stage that there appears to be no means of notifying the child, who might be affected through the bloodstream.

Mr. Sackville: I take that point.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton). Her views are well known and she put them eloquently.

I was warned off mentioning any of the technical defects in the amendment, of which there are several. There are, however, substantial objections to it. The main one that springs to mind is that the 1990 Act already contains a provision that would allow part of what my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne wants to be brought into being. If any moves were to be made down this road, they would have to be considered carefully. They would have to be the subject of wide consultation and debate in the House of Commons. Views on the subject differ widely.

My hon. Friend's amendment is defective in the sense that it appears to give clinicians the right to pass on this information. In effect, the HFEA would be charged with handling the information. Many other compromises could be considered along the route, such as the provision of information on physical characteristics, family background or whatever, stopping short of actual identification. All those matters would need to be debated at some length.

I do not believe that it would be easy to achieve a consensus. Perhaps that is why Parliament left the matter open, to be decided by affirmative resolution in the future. There are widely differing and passionately held views on both sides of the Committee, some of which have been aired today. In an ideal world, no child would be without an identifiable father or a chance to live in a proper family unit. We are all aware of that. In reality, there are infertile couples, and they have rights, too. It is thought by clinicians and many others that, if we were to identify donors, we would put enormous pressure on infertility treatment. That must be taken into account.

This is a difficult subject and I can only tell the Committee that it will be kept under review by the Government. I am aware of the passionately held feelings on the subject, but I do not believe that the amendment is the way forward. A more appropriate mechanism for disclosure of information already exists in the 1990 Act and, for that and other reasons, I cannot recommend to the Committee.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Many of us were a little disappointed to hear one or two of the remarks by the Minister, especially the fact that nothing in the Bill would improve the status of the child. That is a matter of great concern. While listening to the debate, I was thinking about the sort of people who would object to having it known that they had been involved in this procedure. We have already mentioned a man who might object to someone coming up to him and calling him dad. I suppose there is also the issue of a wealthy man who might be afraid that a child might at some point ask for a share of his money. I do not have any sympathy for a man who does not wish to be identified for that reason.

It is a matter of balance—the rights of the child as against the rights of the donors or mothers. I can understand, in certain circumstances, the feelings of a woman who might want to have a child in this way and have it remain a secret. However, I cannot entirely accept that her feelings are more important than the child's rights. There are some women who do not want to have a husband. I can understand that in some circumstances, but I cannot accept that such a woman's rights are greater than those of the child she wishes to bear. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members seem to find amusing the idea that children have rights too.

Ms. Harman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: No, I will not.

In the light of what the Minister has said, we have no alternative but to withdraw the amendment, bearing in mind that he has said that he understands that this matter will come up again and can be rectified under existing law. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

[Dame Jill Knight]

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.
Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.
Bill reported, without amendment; considered.
Bill read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Education (Assisted Places)

5.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Eric Forth): I beg to move,

That the draft Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 3rd July, be approved.

The draft regulations are quite specific in their purpose in that they amend the principal regulations, which are the Education (Assisted Places) Regulations 1989. The amending regulations provide for the uprating of the parental contribution tables which set out how much parents must pay towards their child's assisted place, together with certain other technical amendments.

As hon. Members will know, the assisted places scheme was established in 1981 for the prime purpose of opening up educational opportunities for able children from less well-off families. It provides their parents with assistance towards the fees at some of the best independent schools in the country. That assistance is on a sliding scale based on gross parental income, and the principal changes embodied in the amending regulations are concerned with the routine revision of those scales.

There are, of necessity, several other technical amendments in order to keep the definition of "total parental income" for the purposes of the scheme in line with tax legislation and to update the working of the regulations to reflect current practice and circumstances. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will find that the amendments that I shall describe are quite straightforward.

Regulation 1 of the draft regulations deals with citation, commencement, application and interpretation. The regulations are to come into force on 28 August 1992. Regulation 2 is a technical amendment, necessary to ensure that the assisted places regulations remain up to date in relation to those with refugee status.

Regulations 3 and 5 update the provisions of regulations 7 and 12 of the principal regulations. A school is prohibited from awarding an assisted place if the whole of the child's first year fees are required to be paid under a court order. Schools must also take into account fees required to be paid under a court order when assessing the amount of fee remission for existing assisted place pupils. The amendments will require the schools in such circumstances also to take into account fees required to be paid by virtue of a deed of separation and corrects an existing anomaly.

Regulation 4 increases the allowance made when calculating parents' total relevant income for each dependent child, other than the assisted place holder. The amount is raised from £1,065 to £1,105—by the same percentage which applies to the uprating of the parental contribution scales, to which I shall address myself in a moment. This allowance is helpful to parents with large families, and uprating it will ensure that their position is not worsened.

Regulation 6 is consequential on the Finance Act 1991. Relevant parental income for the purposes of the assisted places scheme is total taxable income, gross of all allowances. Each year we make any necessary amendments to nullify the effects of specific new allowances introduced in tax legislation to keep the definition of income constant for the purposes of determining income

under the scheme. This year the Inland Revenue has confirmed that sections 32 and 33 of the Finance Act 1991 provide for tax relief on the costs of vocational training. Therefore, a small technical amendment to remove the effect of such allowances is required.

I now come to the main purpose of setting the regulations before the House today. Regulation 7 sets out the income bands used for assessing parents' contributions towards fees. These bands have been uprated to take account of the movement in the retail price index to April this year—that is, by 4 per cent. The threshold at or below which parents pay nothing towards fees is raised from £8,714 to £9,056, with corresponding increases in the thresholds for higher percentage contributions from income. The effect of this amendment is that parents will not be asked to increase contributions above the rate of inflation; they will continue to contribute roughly the same proportion of their income as they did last year. I believe that the House will find this an equitable measure, taking into account the fact that, on average, parents in the scheme earn considerably less than the national average income.

Assistance under the scheme follows the principle that the lower the income is, the greater Government assistance should be. The threshold for full remission of fees, to which I have just referred, is set deliberately low so that the least well-off families benefit most. The scale then rises sharply so that better-off families get reduced assistance and finally no assistance. I believe that to be right and in keeping with the aims of the scheme; to open doors of opportunity to those who would otherwise never be able to contemplate paying fees.

Even so, participating schools have made representations to us that they should be allowed greater freedom in the use of their own scholarship and bursary funds for the benefit of assisted pupils. Under existing regulations, schools are effectively prohibited from using such funds to reduce the parental contribution to fees—for example, in cases of sudden hardship or where the school wishes to give a merit award or to retain a particularly promising pupil. Regulation 7 provides for parents' residual liability for fees to be reduced or extinguished by a bursary or scholarship awarded by the school in such cases, and we hope that this small amendment will enable schools to use scholarship funds in the most beneficial way and to have flexibility to assist those in most need of help if and when the need arises.

As we reiterated in our election manifesto, the Government believe firmly in the principle that parents in every part of the country should have access to the opportunities offered by a scheme such as this. The assisted places scheme is now in its 11th year. The Government have supported and will continue to support the scheme as part of our policy of widening educational choice and opportunity. With many parents throughout the country, we are immensely encouraged to see the successes—in music, the arts and sport, as well as in academic subjects—which assisted pupils have recorded. Over the years since this excellent scheme was introduced, more than 55,000 children have benefited from education at some of the best independent schools in the country. There are now more than 27,600 pupils in the scheme, well over a third of whom are enjoying totally free education at those schools.

The provisions and amendments that I have described are necessary technicalities to ensure the continued smooth running of the assisted places scheme and to continue to provide for a realistic contribution both from the Government and from parents. I trust that they will find favour with hon. Members.

6.1 pm

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): This is the fourth year in which I, on behalf of the official Opposition, have opposed such an order. In that spirit, I welcome the Minister to the debate. On each occasion, I have faced a different Minister, which says something about the short time that they have spent in education. I hope that the present Minister and other Education Ministers will stay longer, and that that will show the Government's determination to take education seriously and to recognise that it needs a little continuity and stability.

Mr. Forth: Perhaps the hon. Lady should tell the Prime Minister that.

Ms. Armstrong: I shall come to the Prime Minister later.

We oppose the order, once again, because it fails to meet the objectives that Ministers set when they introduced the scheme under the Education Act 1980. We oppose it because it does not ensure value for money and because it fails to apply the criteria established in the citizens and parents charter for this aspect of public spending. We oppose it because it prevents attention from being focused on improving the overall quality of work and on raising standards generally. And we oppose it mainly because it puts ideological dogma before educational opportunity and achievement.

In the parents charter, the Government state that standards will be raised by improving information on and inspection of schools. We had many debates on the philosophy which underlies that when we considered the Education (Amendment) Bill earlier this year, but, remarkably, the assumptions which underlie the order are that the brightest children, whom the scheme is supposed to support, will be excluded from those aims.

Unless the independent sector deals with special needs, it is excluded from the provisions of the parents charter. Despite the increasing amount of public money spent on the scheme, on which the Government based their education philosophy in their election manifesto, that sector is excluded. During the passage of the Education (Amendment) Bill, we moved amendments to make the inspection of and information on schools in the independent sector——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Lady is straying rather wide of the regulations, which apply to the financing of the scheme, as I am sure that she appreciates. It would be helpful if she would keep her remarks to the financing of the scheme.

Ms. Armstrong: I am trying to relate the principle of the assisted places scheme to expenditure. The order specifically increases expenditure, but I will try to ensure that I do not stray outside your instructions. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I would be the last person to seek to do that.

[Ms. Armstrong]

It is important that the Government's aims are examined by the Opposition. The Government are trying to get away with double standards, and it is the job of the Opposition to point out where double standards apply.

There is no accountability for expenditure on the assisted places scheme. There is no inspection of or information about independent schools and whether they provide the most effective education opportunities for children who benefit from or participate in the scheme. I am sure that the Minister would not expect me to speak without mentioning the inspectors' report on the education of very able children in maintained schools. The report says:

"It should be possible to cater for the majority of very able pupils within the context of the normal school curriculum if proper consideration is given to their particular special needs and some flexibility is introduced into both organisational and teaching strategies . . . Evidence suggests that those schools which focus sharply on what very able pupils might reasonably achieve are likely to be more successful in improving the overall quality and raising standards generally."

We have contended for many years that it is the responsibility of the education system to raise standards generally and to open up opportunity for all children. The report makes it clear that one of the most effective ways of doing so is to teach very able children in normal schools. The Government are rejecting that idea through the underlying philosophy of the order and of the scheme to which the order grants money. The programme carries with it the assumption that adequate education for very able children can be achieved only by taking them out of the maintained system and putting them into the private sector. Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools does not agree, and nor do we: not only can the needs of the very able be catered for within the maintained sector, but the overall quality of work is thereby improved and standards generally are raised. That is what we are supposed to be trying to achieve.

The scheme also fails to secure value for money. There was something of a crisis following the order last year. A sum of money was granted and the Audit Commission was called in to examine how the money was being spent by the Department of Education and Science. In preparation for the citizens charter—which is why I consider this point to be relevant—the Audit Commission discovered that the assisted places scheme was about £3 million overspent, even though it was not achieving its target in terms of the numbers that the House had intended the money to cover. There was an overspend of about £3 million, and the Minister had to cap the amount of money that public or private schools were able to claim through the order.

Schools had been able to set their own fee limits and increase their fees without reference to Government. In the middle of last year, the Minister had to state that fees could be increased only by 12 per cent. I need hardly remind the House that the cap set for the maintained sector was substantially lower, at 7 per cent. Even though the cap was set at 12 per cent. in the independent sector —substantially higher than in the maintained sector—it had great difficulty in keeping to it and, indeed, some girls' public schools were increasing their fees by up to 15 per cent. or 18 per cent. and boys' schools by as much as 30 per cent. It is clear that the scheme does not offer value for money. What does the Minister intend to do this year to ensure that the scheme does not run into similar problems? What level of increase will he set for fees?

All the research and HM inspectorate's report show that the assisted places scheme plays no part in raising overall standards or ensuring that the system for which the House is responsible is able to provide improvements. Research into the programme has shown forcefully that the scheme fails to secure the number of children from poor schools whom it was originally established to recruit. Yet, despite all the evidence from HM inspectorate and others, the Government continue and expand the scheme and put more money into it. One can only conclude that the Government do so because of ideological dogma.

These days, expert opinion in education does not seem to mean anything to the Government. Indeed, the Government seem to think that flying in the face of such opinion is somehow clever, and that the less anyone knows about education the better. I am afraid that we have seen some evidence of that from the Prime Minister in recent days.

I hope that Ministers will begin to deal with the facts, with the need to raise standards and to ensure that all our energy is committed to that aim rather than to narrow, divisive schemes fuelled only by ideological dogma.

6.14 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I shall be brief. I enjoyed the style and elegance of the speech of the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong), but it contained very little with which I could agree.

The Minister said that this is the 11th year of uprating under the regulations. For five of those years, I performed the ritual that he has performed so ably today. I do not accept the notions advanced by the hon. Member for Durham, North-West, for reasons that I have already stated. I welcome the changes in the regulations relating to the use of scholarships and bursaries because it is wise to enable schools to have greater flexibility in the application of their funds.

I listened with some interest to the hon. Lady's reference to Her Majesty's inspectorate's advice and its comments on the passage and work of the scheme. I have always disregarded that advice. I always thought that Her Majesty's inspectorate was a creature of the 1960s and, indeed, of the Labour party. Nothing it has ever said has given me any reason to change my mind.

The hon. Lady talked about children being "put into schools", as if there were a mechanism by which the state took hold of children from a variety of backgrounds and forced 55,000 people and the 27,000 currently benefiting from the scheme to enter good, well-respected private schools. In fact, it is the parents themselves who, for their children, elect to take advantage of the opportunities available in the private sector through the agency of the regulations.

I also welcome the uprating details, as they relate to the numbers of parents on low or benefit-related income. The scheme always aimed to give an opportunity to parents for whom the state and local comprehensive school were the only available choice. For that reason, the House should support the proposals.

The hon. Lady referred to an issue of which the Minister could perhaps take note for the future. Under the regulations, there is a strong case in time for widening the

application of choice to parents whose children perhaps do not have the same academic ability as their peers. The hon. Lady's point about special needs children should be considered. Why should the parents of special needs children be denied the same opportunity as parents with normal, mainstream, high calibre children? In that sense, the hon. Lady has a point. If her argument were accepted, perhaps her objection to the regulations would diminish.

The regulations are worthy of consideration on an annual basis because that gives us the opportunity to emphasise the philosophical divide between the Conservative and Labour Benches. The hon. Lady talked about compulsion, ideology and doctrinaire stances. I have never adopted a stance that was not ideological or doctrinaire because I pursue my beliefs. I share a philosophy. If I did not folow my philosophy, I would be on the Labour Benches, where philosophy, ideology and doctrine are now things of the past, according to the new-style Labour party.

I firmly believe in parental choice. I believe that parents who do not have the financial means of richer parents should have the same opportunities as richer parents to exercise choice for their children if they so desire. The point of the regulations is that they give parents the opportunity to choose. It is not an enforced choice—parents elect to send their children to private sector schools.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his delivery today, and I wholly support the regulations, as amended.

6.19 pm

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): I wish, first, to reply very quickly to the points that were made by the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn). This scheme is not about parental choice; it is about schools choosing their pupils, which is exactly what happens when an application is made under the assisted places scheme. Often, a pupil has to sit an examination set by the school that his parents wish him to attend; thus it is the school that does the selecting. There is a political and philosophical difference between the Opposition and the Government. We believe that high-quality education opportunities should be available to all children, not just a minority. The regulations are another example of the way in which a minority of schoolchildren are given an advantage over the majority. It is for that very basic reason that we shall oppose the regulations.

The assisted places scheme has been in operation for more than a decade. Since 1981, £500 million of public money has been spent on it. At the time of its introduction, the Government's stated aim was very clear—to assist children from less well-off backgrounds to attend high-quality independent schools. I submit that, even in the Government's own terms, the scheme has been a failure. Do the children come from less well-off backgrounds? The Minister said that only one third qualified for full remission of fees. He could have gone further and told the House that more than one third of the parents receiving support under the regulations are on incomes above the national average. This is not a scheme that benefits the less well-off but one that benefits people on incomes above the national average.

Mr. Forth: I am no statistician, but I should point out that if one third of those parents are on incomes above the national average, two thirds are on incomes below the national average. Inexorably the scheme benefits the less well-off.

Mr. Byers: The Minister leads me to my next point. I want to look at the backgrounds of those parents who are less well-off. The assisted places scheme is helping people from middle-class backgrounds who have fallen on hard times as a result of the Government's recession. The figures show clearly that 61 per cent. of the mothers and more than half the fathers of children who receive assisted places were themselves at either independent schools or selective schools. That is the reality. The Independent Schools Information Service has itself admitted that only 16 per cent. of people whose children receive assisted places are from unskilled or semi-skilled backgrounds.

The Government's stated aim—that those from less well-off backgrounds should be helped—is not being fulfilled. The Government intend, under the regulations, to spend slightly more than £70 million on the assisted places scheme in the coming academic year. Will that public money buy high-quality education? In many respects it is difficult to judge.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) said, these schools are not subject to inspection. We do not have the right to inspect the quality of education that the young people in them receive. They do not have to follow the national curriculum, and there are no league tables of comparative examination results in the independent sector. Indeed, the independent sector heads have expressed strong resistance to the establishment of such league tables. But this autumn the Department of Education, at a cost of more than £650,000, will publish league tables for the state schools.

It is interesting to note which schools have opted out of the assisted places scheme or have never opted in—schools like Eton and Harrow. There is no evidence that a child who has been given an assisted place does any better than he would have done had he gone to a state school. The Audit Commission, which looked into this issue, has said that the evidence suggests that the children who are assisted into the private sector do not receive a measurably greater added value from their schooling as a result.

The message is quite clear. The regulations throw a financial lifeline to the private schools that are suffering because of the recession. The independent sector itself recognises that at present there is a record number of bankruptcies among private schools. It is for that reason that we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the fees charged under the assisted places scheme. In 1989, the average was £2,364; just two years later it went up to £3,100—an increase of more than 30 per cent. in an amount coming out of the public purse.

The right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) said that in his view the scheme was a rescue operation for distressed gentlefolk. I agree, but it is becoming increasingly clear that it is also a rescue operation for the financially distressed and failing private schools. The regulations represent a misuse of public money to subsidise a private industry. It is a public subsidy on a massive scale. If the regulations are approved, at least one school will receive more than £1·5 million of public money in the next academic year through the assisted places scheme, and many will receive more than £1 million.

[Mr. Byers]

They call themselves independent schools. What an absolute misnomer. Those schools are totally dependent on state subsidies for their very survival.

There has been no attempt to see whether we are getting value for the expenditure of public money. Some schools charge fees of more than £7,000 a year, others less than £2,000. Is any attempt made to see whether schools that charge more than three times as much as others in the independent sector provide real value for money? Will the Minister say that he intends to cap fee increases that can be charged to the public purse? If so, will the capping be at the current inflation rate of 3·9 per cent.? The House deserves answers to those questions.

The regulations will commit about £70 million of public money under the assisted places scheme. With a view to identifying the Government's priorities, it is worth reflecting on where else the Department is spending money. During the period to which the £70 million relates, only £14 million will be spent on teacher appraisal, although that is a vital initiative to improve the quality of the teaching force; reading recovery, which was announced in the full glare of publicity earlier this year, will get a grand total of £3 million to assist primary schoolchildren; governor training—so vital at present—will get the grand sum of £10 million. That is a clear sign of the Government's priorities. The sum to be spent on the assisted places scheme could employ an additional 3,500 teachers in the maintained sector. That could be a vital first step in reducing the ever-increasing class sizes in our schools. But, instead, the money is being used for the assisted places scheme.

The regulations are deeply damaging to the Government. They are an admission that, after 13 years of Tory rule, the condition of our public sector education is so poor that 30,000 of our most able pupils must be given an escape route. There can be no clearer condemnation of the failure of the Government's education policies than the fact that we are debating the regulations this evening.

The assisted places scheme is deeply flawed and divisive. It was born of dogma and it continues through prejudice. Even at this late stage, the Government should think again and redirect resources to benefit all our children.

6.30 pm

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) started in fine style. I assumed that I would be able to agree with him because he said that the objective was to obtain high-quality education for every child. The trouble was that he seemed to assume that he and his party colleagues should define high-quality education. The point is that the definition is surely open to discussion. As there is no agreement between us on what sort of education is most suited to each child, it is a case for parental choice.

The Opposition would apparently deny parental choice of an independent school to those who could not afford the full fees. But some parents who are not well off wish to choose the independent sector. I do not know why the hon. Gentleman did not wish to help those who had fallen on harder times during the recession. In my view, they are particularly worthy of assistance. Some parents cannot afford to take the choices that are available to those with higher incomes.

It is essential that parents who are convinced that their child would be best educated in an independent school have an opportunity to take that route. After all, as the hon. Members for Wallsend and for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) said, although one third of the parents of children on the scheme receive full remission of fees, the parents of the remaining two thirds make contributions out of their own pockets to the fees of the school that they have chosen. There is no need for the hon. Member for Wallsend to decide whether the school that costs £7,000 or the one that costs £2,000 a year is better. The parents should choose.

Ms. Armstrong: Does the hon. Gentleman support our call for more information about what is happening in the independent schools? If the Education (Schools) Act 1992 is to mean anything in the maintained sector, it should also apply in the independent sector.

Mr. Griffiths: My answer to the hon. Lady's first question is yes, but my answer to her second question is no. Certainly, information should be available so that parents can make informed choices.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Griffiths: Let me finish the paragraph. Information should be available. I have not yet heard of an independent school which hides its light under a bushel. Equally, in legislation we have ensured that the state schools provide information so that parents can make an informed choice.

Mr. Stern: Does my hon. Friend agree that organisations such as the Independent Schools Information Service have set standards in the provision of full, comprehensible, comprehensive information about independent schools which we have wished for many years the state sector would match?

Mr. Griffiths: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. There is a mechanism whereby independent schools make information available. They are open to questions and visits long before parents decide to invest their own funds in the education of their children, having already paid for the education of those same children within the state system; so the information that the hon. Member for Durham, North-West wants is definitely made available.

I take issue with my hon. Friend the Minister, if he will not be unhappy at my doing that. Towards the end of his speech, he said that the regulations were technicalities. I am aware that he means that they are technical changes to an existing structure, but the fact that the regulations have been introduced, changes have been made and we are having this debate will be an encouragement and comfort to many parents.

During the events just before 9 April, the same comment was made to me time and time again in Portsmouth, which is not a city marked by individual wealth—it is a working-class city like any other great city in Britain. People said that they were worried about the effect of a change of political control on education

opportunities for children whose parents could not afford full fees in independent schools. That was a genuine and serious worry.

If the hon. Member for Durham, North-West is keen to know about independent schools, she should visit some in places such as Portsmouth. Some of the parents are bus drivers. A nurse who is a single parent provides for her daughter in an independent school. We should encourage such parents. They make an investment and decide for themselves.

When one comments on previous speeches in the debate, one often feels constrained to say that misleading points were made. I hope that the hon. Member for Wallsend accepts that his comments about Eton and Harrow showed an utter lack of knowledge about those schools. He is surely aware that, for at least the whole of this century, both schools have sought gradually to widen the range of the backgrounds from which their pupils come. Bursaries and scholarships are available to children who need them.

Eton and Harrow reject the Government's assisted places scheme, not because they do not want a wide social background of parents but because they are sufficiently well endowed from the past to offer those facilities themselves, but schools in cities such as Portsmouth need Government assistance.

Mr. Byers: I welcome the fact that Eton and Harrow make their own arrangements and do not rely on public subsidy. My point was that those schools are well known for the quality of education that they deliver. We cannot say the same for the 295 schools that are part of the assisted places scheme. As my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) said, there is no way of judging the performance of the schools which are part of the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Dunn: Is that a reason to abolish the lot?

Mr. Griffiths: Of course it is not a reason to abolish the lot. It is not possible to say that every independent school is a perfect educational institution. Four institutions in the city of Portsmouth receive assistance under the Government's scheme. They are all first class, and the parents who send their children there are grateful for the opportunity that they have been given.

I realise that this is a short debate and I shall merely mention a few further matters to my hon. Friend the Minister. I am sure that parents will welcome the flexibility allowed by the regulations. From time to time, it is essential for us to ensure that we relate our assistance to new problems that may emerge. If schools offer small bursaries and scholarships to children with ability in certain subjects—for example, the arts—it is important that the receipt of such a small sum does not prevent the parents of a child on the assisted places scheme from receiving any financial benefit. The advantage of the amendment to the regulations is that if children on the assisted places scheme receive a small financial award from a school, they will benefit from it, as will children whose parents can afford the full fees. Surely the Opposition will welcome that and will want less well-off children to be able to take advantage of such awards.

The Opposition have made much play of the fact that not as many children benefit from the assisted places scheme as we should like. If the Government return to the House to seek further funds to ensure that that target is met, I shall certainly give them my enthusiastic support.

6.41 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): In view of the way in which the debate has ranged widely, it is important to state that Liberal Democrats have no antipathy per se to the independent sector. We are more than willing to discuss ways in which the state and independent sectors could work together. I was interested to hear what the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) said about the possibility of the independent sector making a contribution by providing support for children with special educational needs. Those issues could be debated.

Today we are debating the assisted places scheme, and it is vital to find out what the order will do. Figures which show how much the assisted places scheme is costing have been mentioned. I should be grateful if the Minister would confirm in his winding-up speech the information that I have obtained from his Department, which suggests that in the current financial year approximately £76 million will be spent on the assisted places scheme, but it is estimated that next year, in 1992-93, spending will rise to £87 million. That is an increase of £11 million which, by my calculations, is 15 per cent. in cash terms and 10 per cent. in real terms. I should be grateful for confirmation of those figures.

Mr. Forth: Yes.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the Minister. We have heard it already.

In view of the fact that we are expected to support the large real terms increase contained in the order, it seems perfectly proper before we do so to question whether the scheme has been successful, according to the conditions originally laid down for it, and whether it has provided value for money.

As other hon. Members have said, when the scheme was initiated in 1980, it was clearly stated that the aim was to provide assisted places to bright children from less well-off backgrounds at high-quality independent schools. In last year's debate on the order, the then Under-Secretary of State, Mr. Fallon, said that the scheme was for "parents of humble means". Since the scheme's inception, there has been much research on the matter, and some hon. Members have referred to it. About a year ago, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) quoted research suggesting that only about 10 per cent. of children on the assisted places scheme were from families of manual workers. That was contradicted by research for the Independent Schools Information Service, conducted by MORI, which suggested that 38 per cent. of children helped were from working-class backgrounds.

As I was confused by that conflicting research, I asked the research division of the House of Commons Library for its opinion, having collated all the relevant information on such research, and was told:

> "Much of the research on the operation of the scheme has suggested that it has failed in its prime aim of giving good education to children from relatively poor backgrounds and is mainly subsidising middle class parents."

I should be interested to hear whether the Minister agrees with that assessment and, if not, what evidence he has to substantiate his claim that the scheme is a success.

[Mr. Foster]

Secondly, there is the question whether the scheme is providing value for money. Other hon. Members have referred to that, but I hope that when the Minister responds we shall find out how he believes that it is providing value for money and value for the increase that he is asking us to support through the order.

The question of value for money was raised last year, when the then Under-Secretary of State said:

"The value for money that is obtained from expenditure on the assisted places scheme is beyond question."—[*Official Report*, 17 July 1991; Vol. 195, c. 459.]

He justified that value for money in two ways: first, because of what he described as the "breadth and quality" of the curriculum offered within the independent schools. Presumably that was something of a slap in the face for state schools, which are constrained by the national curriculum, unlike independent schools which are allowed to do things better and to produce a "breadth and quality" not allowed to state schools.

Examination results were the only other justification that the Under-Secretary of State could find, and he quoted some figures for pupils on assisted places schemes. One would certainly expect such pupils to get good examination results. After all, they have been selected for their high level of ability, so that can hardly be a justification in its own right. We need clear evidence that the scheme is giving added value for pupils who take up the places offered. As hon. Members have already said, there is no evidence that the scheme is giving value for money, or to justify our support for the increased money in the order.

Mr. Stern: If the hon. Gentleman is looking for added value for the money being spent, why does he not consider every parent who, by choice and without constraint, sends his or her child to such a school on an assisted place basis? Why does he think that they do it if they do not think that they are getting added value?

Mr. Foster: I am grateful for the intervention because it suggests that the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) does not support many of the detailed schemes that the Government have introduced. The Government have told us that the only way to assess success in schools is through a complex testing and reporting of results procedure. Clearly the hon. Gentleman does not support his Front-Bench colleagues in that respect.

I was referring to added value. I suggest that no one has given—I hope that the Minister will in his winding-up speech—any evidence of added value being provided by the scheme. There is no evidence of value for money.

Other hon. Members have referred to the Audit Commission having suggested that no added value was being provided. On 28 February, *The Times*—hardly a supporter of the Opposition—went further in its comments on the Audit Commission report and said:

"The Assisted Places Scheme is a misuse of public money to subsidise a private industry."

In seeking more money for a scheme that neither meets its own criteria nor provides value for money, the Minister will have to put forward some very convincing arguments.

The Liberal Democrats do not seek to damage the education of pupils who are already on the assisted places scheme. However, we see no justification for continuing the scheme. It provides no value for money and it is not beneficial to the education of the 93 per cent. of children who are in the state sector about whom we should be concerned. We should far prefer the energy of the Minister and of the Secretary of State, whom I see in his place, being directed to providing improvements in the state education system which has been so badly neglected in recent years. There are crumbling schools and teacher morale is low. Many concerns have been expressed not only by members of the teaching profession, by governors and by parents, but by Opposition Members. We will not support the regulations.

6.50 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few remarks in support of the regulations. I confess that I was not surprised to hear the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) attack the assisted places scheme and the regulations. The continuing hostility of his party is not a cause for amazement. I had the opportunity of a council free place at a direct grant school. I remember that Mrs. Shirley Williams, the then Secretary of State for Education and Science and the spiritual and philosophical grandmother of the Front-Bench spokesmen of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, put the knife into the direct grant scheme in the 1970s. As with so many of the education reforms introduced by the Labour Government, she kicked away the ladders of opportunity up which so many Opposition Members had managed to ascend.

I am delighted to speak in support of the order. There are three reasons why the House should give the order its wholehearted support. First, as my hon. Friend the Minister mentioned, the assisted places scheme increases the choice of education available to parents on middling and low incomes. As has been mentioned, approximately one third of parents whose children receive assisted places get those places free. MORI research shows that the average income of the typical family benefiting from the assisted places scheme is about £10,000 per year. The average family benefiting from the scheme gains about two thirds of the average national household income. There is firm evidence that the scheme benefits the families and children for whom it was designed.

Secondly, in the context of the Government's broader schools policy, the assisted places scheme adds to the diversity of educational provision within the state sector. It provides an element of competition which we should welcome and not condemn. When Opposition Members complain because parents choose to send their children to independent schools through the assisted places scheme, they ask the wrong questions.

The question that the House should ask and the question which should be posed to local education authorities, to head teachers and to other members of the teaching profession, is why individual parents opt for places under the scheme rather than for the places available to them in neighbourhood schools.

I have the good fortune to live in and to represent part of Buckinghamshire. I know that our system, in which we still have both grammar and upper schools, formerly secondary modern schools—*[Laughter.]*—is such that on the whole we produce schools of fine quality to which parents wish to send their children. In response to the laughter from Opposition Members, I should point out that I meet parents who explain to me that not only the

grammar schools in Buckinghamshire, but the good upper schools are over-subscribed and have a queue of parents waiting to send their children to them. If one has a good, dedicated teaching force and a supportive local education authority rather than one which seeks to import once modish and now outdated education philosophies, one can produce in grammar and upper schools alike a quality of education from which parents will be pleased for their children to benefit.

Thirdly, the assisted places scheme helps to break down the barriers of class and social background. I should have thought that all hon. Members would have that objective in common. I am especially pleased that regulation 7 improves and strengthens the scheme to make it easier for schools to give help to parents of relatively modest means so that the independent schools taking part in the scheme can continue their work of reaching out beyond the category of parents who can afford to pay the full fees.

I find it surprising that the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats continually snipe at the independent sector for its alleged exclusivity.

Mr. Don Foster *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Lidington: I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Bath shaking his head. I should be delighted if the Liberal Democrats are gradually coming towards the Conservative party's position. Only a short time ago, the Liberal Democrats said that the charitable status of independent schools needed to be thoroughly and critically reviewed. In my constituency, the Liberal Democrats at local level still display hostility not only to the assisted places scheme, but to any selection within the state system of secondary education, even if their national spokespeople now choose to keep quiet about that objective.

The assisted places scheme promotes opportunity. I hope that the Government will take on board the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) about encouraging public schools further to get involved in the provision of education opportunities for people other than the academically gifted. My hon. Friend's suggestion about children with special educational needs was valuable and I trust that the Government will take it on board.

I do not pretend that the scheme of itself provides a complete or anywhere near complete answer to the challenges facing our education sytem. However, I believe that it is a valuable contribution to the promotion of excellence and quality in our system of state education. The regulations will have my wholehearted support.

6.58 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): Many hon. Members have spoken with great knowledge of the education system. Many hon. Members have been teachers or administrators of the education system. I will turn to the parents' viewpoint of education. I do not pretend to be an expert on education, but I know quite a lot about being a parent. Many jibes are thrown at the Opposition about the Labour party being opposed to the independent sector, but it is not true. The Labour party is opposed to the subsidisation of the independent sector, whether through favourable taxation or the assisted places scheme.

It is all very well the Government talking about choice, free enterprise and competition. I had no choice as a parent in 1983 when my 13-year-old daughter was prevented from going to the split-site comprehensive school that she was attending because it had to close due to lack of resources. At a time when school governors have to decide whether to replace a teacher or repair the fabric of the building, it does not bode well to be told that the Government can spare £80 million to prop up the private sector.

I am a great believer in parents being able to choose to send their children to a private school if they can afford it. That applies to only a small percentage of the population. What I find objectionable is that those who are less well off have to subsidise the better-off through taxation so that they latter can send their children to private schools.

If we are to talk about competition and free market forces, let us see independent schools operate under that stricture. Let us see the end of tax relief and of the assisted places scheme. If there is money to spare, I assure everyone concerned that it is badly needed in the state sector. If the Government do not believe that, they should get out and talk to some of the poorer parents who do not want to send their children to private schools but to decent state schools. It is the Government's duty to provide the greatest good for the greatest number and to start putting resources into those schools.

7.2 pm

Mr. Forth: Listening to this brief debate, one would have thought that we had not just had a general election in which page 18 of the Conservative manifesto said:

> "We will maintain the assisted places scheme, which gives access to independent education to many families who could not otherwise afford it."

That was a clear statement by the party that won the election.

It is sad that so many hon. Members should have taken this occasion to re-run the tired Opposition arguments to which we have had to listen and to which, no doubt, my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) had to listen in the distinguished years in which he occupied my present position.

The assisted places scheme is now established. As my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) pointed out, many parents of modest means throughout the land, in his constituency and others, look to such a scheme to give their children opportunities that would otherwise be denied to them. The whole spirit in which Conservative Members have approached the debate is so different from that of the Opposition that it epitomises the differences in attitude. The Opposition's attitude is carping and bitter whereas we constantly emphasise choice and diversity and the desire, through a relatively modest scheme, to give the maximum number of parents an opportunity to have access to schools to which they would like their children to go.

The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) seemed to be mystified about how any sensible parents would want their child to go to such a school or how they could make that choice without information. He then answered his own question by revealing that a large proportion of parents whose children go to assisted places scheme schools had gone to schools in the independent sector. What better recommendation could there be than that people with first-hand experience of the benefits of the independent sector should want their children to go—in this case, through the assisted places scheme—to similar schools? The hon. Gentleman provided the answer to his

[Mr. Forth]

own question. If he studies his speech in *Hansard* tomorrow, as is traditional, he will see that what I say is correct.

Two or three Opposition Members asked me what limit we have set on the fees increase for this year. The figure is 7·5 per cent., which is based on the increase that the maintained sector will receive this year. We want parity of treatment and I hope that that meets with the approval of the Opposition. It is straightforward.

I was asked several times how we can ensure quality in that sector. There are a number of ways of doing so. I have already suggested endorsement by parents. Others might be the examination results that those schools achieve, despite the fact that—I do not conceal it or dissent from it—the schools select in any case. Nevertheless, they then produce such consistently good and outstanding examination results that that in itself shows the sector's success.

Ms Armstrong *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Forth: If the hon. Lady does not believe me, I shall send her some figures that will illustrate the point extremely well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford asked an important question about children with special educational needs. There are encouraging signs that many independent schools are now providing facilities for children with dyslexia or other special educational needs. Provision is growing. That shows that the independent sector is keen to play a full and rounded part in our education system and that it does not wish to be perceived as elitist, as many Opposition Members still portray it. The sector still has not gone far enough, but it is showing good signs, which we wish to encourage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North asked whether we expected to give further funds to the scheme. It is true that we are already making further funds available. We must strike a balance, as must any Government Department in that matter. Part of the increase is accounted for by the fees increase to which I referred, although we have effectively capped that. An important element of the increase is our desire to see more and more children having access, through the scheme, to the independent education of their choice. That was endorsed in the election on the basis of our manifesto, and it is enjoying increasing support through parents' choice.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) cannot have it both ways. I should think that his constituents will be interested to hear his apparent opposition to and doubts about the scheme. I suspect that they may also be interested in his views about grant-maintained schools, to which I gather he is also hostile. How he squares that with the great former Liberal principles of maximum choice for the individual in society is for him to answer. Somehow, the move from Liberal to Liberal Democrat seems to have removed almost all the classical elements of liberalism at its best and introduced something more akin to latter-day socialism, which we used to associate with the good old Labour party. That, too, seems to have got lost, but I shall leave it to Opposition Members to sort it out among themselves.

This is an important annual occasion for the House to consider whether this well established scheme, so recently endorsed by the electorate again, and explicitly so, as a result of our manifesto commitment, should be given modest but realistic additional resources to enable an increasing number of parents and children to have the choice and diversity that it provides. We are convinced that it was right to introduce the scheme, that it is well founded and properly funded. We are pledged to continue that. The regulations endorse that, and I ask the House to support them.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 3rd July, be approved.

Value Added Tax (Cars)

7.8 pm

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): I beg to move,

That the Value Added Tax (Cars) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 1992 (S.I., 1992, No. 1654), dated 9th July 1992, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th July, be approved.

As the first motion on value added tax is of smaller account than the second, it will be helpful to the House to take them separately.

The House will know that, in general, cars are not allowable as VAT inputs by businesses. However, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget that, from 1 August, private taxi operators, car hire firms and driving schools will be able to recover VAT on their purchases of new cars. That was provided for in the Value Added Tax (Cars) (Amendment) Order, SI 627.

That order provided the new relief for those taxi firms and driving schools operated by self-employed drivers and instructors, because otherwise they would have been unfairly penalised. It granted relief on cars to be let on hire on condition that they were used as taxis, or for self-drive hire or driving school cars. It did not extend relief to purchases by leasing companies. Since the order was made, we have learnt that some leasing businesses intend to execute leasing arrangements, including a clause restricting the use of leased cars to one of the uses that qualify for relief, thereby, in their view, entitling them to recover input tax. Such terms would not have commercial validity or rationale, and the lessors would have no interest in enforcing the restrictions or any way in which to do so.

We therefore thought it right to introduce the order to clarify the previous one, thus avoiding uncertainty. The order makes it clear that such a scheme would not succeed in avoiding tax. I support the order and commend it to the House.

7.12 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I welcome the Paymaster General's explanation of why SI 627 has been superseded by SI 1654, and in general I agree with what he said.

Sir John Cope: Not superseded, but supplemented.

Dr. Marek: Yes, supplemented. I was looking at SI 1654, which states:

"Article 2(a) of the Value Added Tax (Cars) (Amendment) Order 1992 is hereby revoked"—

but it is then re-enacted in the provisions. How much will the original order and the new omnibus order cost the Revenue? It would be useful if the Paymaster General could give us an estimate.

There is a lesson to be learned on how to legislate. The Government should not table statutory instruments and then find that they have faults. I am not saying that the Government are not acting properly but, as a result of consultation, they often realise that the original order is insufficient or flawed, and so have to table another one. The more openness in government—especially on non-controversial issues such as the order—the better.

I would welcome it if, when the Government were tabling such orders, they could be made available for consultation in the House or published by the Government, as the Government did with the new value added tax regulations in anticipation of our entry into the single market in 1993. Much of the relevant draft legislation was published in advance of the Finance Bill.

The Opposition support the order, but it would be useful if the Paymaster General could tell us the cost. I see that a paper is being brandished, so I shall stay on my feet for another 10 seconds to allow it to reach the Paymaster General.

7.15 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): When it examined the statutory instrument, the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments thought that the explanatory memorandum provided by the Department was useful, and better than that on the original one. It was a much longer memorandum and we printed it in our third report, House of Commons Paper No. 52 for the 1992-93 Session. Apendix 1 contains the full explanatory memorandum, which I hope will be of use to the House and users of the instrument.

We should remember that such legislation has to be applied by the user and has the force of law. The number of orders and instruments produced by the Government is now approaching 3,000 a year. We hope that the memorandum will assist in clarifying the instrument.

SI 1654 blocks a loophole that the Revenue did not realise existed, and it is only a short order. The tatty draft order that we have does not give a price. Is the order replacing the previous one to be issued free of charge? The Government are partly responsible for ensuring that an order is as comprehensive as they want it to be. I do not blame the draftsman for the loophole as there are always smart alicks looking for such defects. That is why provisions sometimes have to be drafted in a complex way.

However, the Government do bear some responsibility and, as it is such a short order, it would be helpful if the Government issued it free rather than charging an additional sum. It should certainly be free to purchasers of the original 1992 order, which was an amending order, as was SI 959 which, in 1989, amended the original statutory instrument of 1980. As there are now three amending statutory instruments, will the Department consider producing a consolidated order? It may be of help to the user to have all the amendments in one document instead of having to purchase several at a time.

It should be the primary concern of both the Government and the House to make legislation as clear and succinct as possible. I know that it is difficult, for the reasons that I mentioned. The Government should consider a consolidation provision at some stage. I hope that they will do so sooner rather than later.

Sir John Cope: The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) asked me about the cost of the order. The legislation stops a loophole and, as far as we know, there will be no extra cost. Indeed, it may save us money that we might otherwise have had to pay had the order not meant what we thought the original order meant. SI 1654 is for clarification.

The original order, SI 627, cost £50 million to produce. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) explained that the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments had issued an explanatory memorandum. He was right to say that it would be useful to users of the order. He asked if we were to give away the order. That is most unlikely. It is a matter for the Stationery Office to decide, and it has to recover its costs. The original order cost only 65p, so it is not expensive, and we should recover the cost of producing such documents.

Mr. Cryer: When the fault clearly lies with the Government, it is usual for them to issue a replacement order to purchasers of the original order. While it may not be fair to ascribe all blame to the Government, they should bear at least some of it. As the Paymaster General seems reluctant to show concern for the user from the Dispatch Box, perhaps he will consider the matter further after the debate. When the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments finds that an instrument has to be amended as something is seriously wrong, it is common for the Government to issue a free replacement. Will the Paymaster General give consideration to the matter?

Sir John Cope: I shall consider the issue outlined by the hon. Member for Bradford, South. We do not consider that the original order, SI 627, did not fulfil our intentions. However, it seemed that there might be a challenge in the form of an avoidance scheme and, by issuing the clarifying order before either of them took effect, we avoid time and trouble for the Government and for others. The hon. Gentleman asked whether we had thought of producing a consolidating order. We are paying attention to that and will probably produce some VAT consolidating orders. However, we have not yet decided to do so. The hon. Gentleman's recommendation is sensible and we shall certainly consider it.

Question put and agreed to.

Value Added Tax (Payments on Account)

7.20 pm

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope: I beg to move,

That the Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) (No. 2) Order 1992 (S.I., 1992, No. 1668), dated 13th July 1992, a copy of which was laid before the House on 13th July, be approved.

The order introduces a scheme of VAT payments on account for the largest VAT payers from later this year. Commissioners regulations will also be necessary, giving a little further detail on the operation of the scheme.

As the House knows, the instrument has had a long gestation period. In October 1991, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that postponed accounting was to be reintroduced on goods received from the rest of the European Community. About 90,000 businesses will gain a cash flow advantage from that change in 1992-93. To prevent an increase in the public sector borrowing requirement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor decided that the largest VAT payers should account for VAT monthly, as happens in most of the Community, rather than quarterly. About 1,600 businesses will be affected, and they are those with a VAT liability in excess of £2 million in the year ending 31 March 1991.

Following wide consultation with representative bodies, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in the Budget just before the election that he had decided to modify the original proposal so as to require monthly payments on account instead of monthly returns from the largest VAT payers. The traders will continue to submit VAT returns quarterly and their liability will be adjusted by the amount that they have paid on account in the two previous months. That will minimise the admistrative burden on businesses and avoid exposing them to extra penalties while still protecting the PSBR.

Customs and Excise issued a draft leaflet on Budget day and invited comments. As a result, we have made some changes which should be helpful to businesses. First, we intend to exclude from the scheme businesses for which, although the VAT liability in 1990-91 exceeded the £2 million threshold, the figure for the year immediately preceding and the year immediately following were below that level. That is intended to take account of exceptional transactions arising in 1990-91 which might otherwise mean that a smaller business would be unjustly caught in the net.

Secondly, we have allowed for payments to be reduced if the VAT liability falls to less than 80 per cent. of that in the reference year used to calculate the payments. That is more generous than the two thirds originally proposed by the Chancellor. A short time ago, I was able to announce that the selection criteria for inclusion in the scheme will be reviewed when some experience has been gained of its operation.

As hon. Members will be aware, there have been representations from several bodies to the effect that it was unfair to put the burden of payments on account on the largest VAT payers. They said that it would be fairer to target the businesses that would benefit most from the new postponed accounting arrangements, that is, those who import goods from Community member states. We have carefully considered that but have concluded that such a scheme would run an unacceptably high risk of challenge in the European Court. Accordingly, the Chancellor was unable to accept those proposals.

In each VAT quarter, payments on account will be due by the last day of the second month and the last day of the third month and subsequently adjusted to the correct quarterly amount when the VAT return is sent in. Each payment will be one twelfth of the total VAT due, excluding the VAT on goods imported other than from member states in the reference year. For the first year, the reference year will be based on the 12 months ending in March, April or May 1992, depending on the VAT return cycle for the business in question. Provision is made for VAT periods of other than three months.

I am glad that in Committee the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) gave some support to the changes that we have made since the Budget. However, the Chancellor has made it clear that it would be wrong for the Government and the taxpayer to stand the cost of the postponed accounting arrangements on the PSBR for this year. In response to issues raised by business in the consultation exercise carried out by Customs and Excise, the scheme allows substantial easement of the original terms proposed in October 1991.

When the first version of the order was considered by the Statutory Instruments Committee, it thought, as hon. Members may have noted from the Committee's report, that some aspects of the order might be outside the vires provided. Therefore, last week we thought it right not to move the first order and to replace it with the second order, which the Statutory Instruments Committee considered yesterday. That is all documented in the Committee's report, and the order had been revised to take account of the Committee's comments.

7.26 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The order results from the Budget proposals in March. It replaces the original order No. 1510, and I again question this apparent waste of paper, time and money. I shall be interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has to say about the Joint Committee's findings. Not much time was allowed for comments because people were given until the end of March following the Budget. It is unsatisfactory once again to have two orders, the first of which is not being proceeded with although it has been laid on the Table.

The instrument takes account of changes in the VAT rules which are to be implemented on 1 January 1993. The Opposition do not quibble with that, and will not force a Division. The order is clearly the result of protracted discussion with interested parties in various industries and in the House. It proposes that large traders with a VAT liability of more than £2 million in the year to 1 April 1991 would have to make monthly payments on account from, I think, the end of November. I am told that there are about 16,000 large companies to which the order will apply. Normal quarterly returns would be made. The on account figure is to be calculated by reference to actual payments in the year to March, April or May 1992, depending on the exact time of the quarterly return.

However, there are likely to be some problems. Traders over the £2 million limit might suddenly, as a result of the recession or some other unforeseen, or even foreseen, circumstance, fall below that threshold, thereby falling outside the scheme. But they will have to persuade Customs and Excise that they should come off the scheme. The original statutory instrument, 1510, paragraph 4, headed

"Persons to whom this Order applies",

said:

"Save as the Commissioners may otherwise allow, a taxable person falls within this article if . . ."

I shall not read the whole paragraph. The important phrase was

"Save as the Commissioners may otherwise allow".

That seemed to allow the commissioners some discretion about whether a person should be taxable under the scheme.

The new statutory instrument, 1668, does not have those words. It is completely rewritten. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South may wish to comment on that in due course. Has the ability of Customs to decide whether someone should be in the scheme disappeared as a result of the new statutory instrument?

If the percentage of VAT due is down to 80 per cent. or less, adjustments can be made to the monthly payments. That provision has been carried forward from the old statutory instrument to the new one. Paragraph 11 of statutory instrument 1668 says:

"with effect from the date of the written approval by the Commissioners of a written application by the taxable person to that effect, the lesser amount shall be substituted for the greater amount and the amount of each payment on account beginning with the first payment on account which falls to be made after the date of that approval shall, subject to article 10 above, equal one twelfth of that lesser amount."

But Customs has to be satisfied that the total amount of tax due is less than 80 per cent. There could be delays. If there are delays, can the Minister assure the House that they will be kept to a minimum and that the commissioners will act as expeditiously as possible? It clearly cannot be right for the commissioners to wait a month, perhaps because they are snowed up with other work, and to insist on certain traders paying sums on account which are clearly well above the sums that they would be paying if an up-do-date view were to be taken of their trading activities. That is a problem on which the House requires assurance.

As the Paymaster General said, domestic traders will be affected rather than traders who import and export, who will be able to take account of the postponed accounting system. The Paymaster General also said that there will be a review of the criteria for selection for inclusion in the scheme. Can he give some idea of the timing of that review? Clearly the sooner the consultation is undertaken and the decisions made by the Government, the better. One year, a trader may be above the £2 million threshold, and the next below it. The Government might want to increase the threshold to take account of inflation from time to time. That can lead to uncertainty for a trader which cannot be good for his business.

Therefore, I make a plea to the Government to get on with the review. No doubt it is right that there should be some experience of how the present system works, but it should not take a day longer than necessary. After that, I hope that, as a result of the review, there will be a generally accepted view of how the system should operate.

A further problem may arise as a result of the related rules on groups for companies that can be sold out of a large group. There seems to be an inability to leave the club. Will the commissioners have any power to ensure that such difficulties do not develop? That could easily be an important issue, particularly as the original statutory instrument seemed to give the commissioners the power to

[Dr. John Marek]

take a particular trader out of the scheme without having to give any reason, which is not the case in the new statutory instrument.

A problem arises as a result of traders whose liability last year exceeded their liability this year. They will have an adverse cash flow to bear as a result of the proposal. Paragraph 11 provides that taxpayers may apply for a reduced payment if their total tax is likely to be below 80 per cent., but no other situation is covered.

I have dealt with some of the difficulties that traders may have with regard to the 80 per cent. rule and the fact that there is no immediate way of ensuring that a trader falls out of the scheme's remit, except perhaps by waiting a year in order to demonstrate to the commissioners that his total tax revenue is below £2 million. That is too crude and it needs to be refined. It is a bit hard on traders, particularly domestic traders, for example in the service industries, who will not receive any corresponding cash flow benefits from the new intra-EC rules.

Will the Paymaster General think ahead to 1996-97? If there is such an adverse effect on domestic traders when we move to an origin-based VAT system, can the situation be redressed in any way? For the sake of equity, there should be such redress. Will the Government bear in mind that domestic traders will have to bear extra costs as a result of this statutory instrument and any new legislation leading up to 1996-97, and if possible to redress the cost?

I am also advised that the Customs leaflet issued in 1992 —I have not seen it so I could be wrong; I usually check everything, but I have not been able to obtain the leaflet —contained some ambiguous statements. The statutory instrument will affect it and it will need to be rewritten and reprinted. Has the Paymaster General or his Department had any representations on that? If so, I hope that he will take them on board and will print a new and unambiguous leaflet so that traders know their position exactly.

I am concerned about the validity of the Government's proposals. This could be a serious point, depending on the Government's legal view. There is the problem that the Government have conceded the practical difficulties of submitting monthly returns, but the relative provisions of the sixth directive, article 22(5), may be read as restricting the ability of member states to deviate from the rule requiring payments one month after the VAT return period to the case where interim payments are required for every taxpayer.

Are the Government satisfied that that proposal and the statutory instrument are permitted by the fifth directive? If they are not, will they seek an appropriate derogation? Article 22(5) of the sixth directive states:

> "Every taxable person shall pay the net amount of the value added tax when submitting the regular return. Member States may, however, set a different date for the payment of that amount or may demand an interim payment."

If that provision applies to some, does it apply to all?

I hope that the Paymaster General can say that there is no risk of infraction proceedings, or whatever, initiating in Brussels as a result of the statutory instrument. With those reservations, I hope that the order will be passed this evening.

7.40 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I commend my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General for his courage in introducing this statutory instrument today. I appreciate that there may be budgetary reasons for doing so before the summer recess, but I refer to my right hon. Friend's courage because the scheme that the measure introduces has come under considerable attack—and will continue to do so.

Some time ago, representatives of the 1,600 companies most affected were assured by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that, if an alternative were submitted, it would be considered. In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General dealt effectively with one alternative—to load the burden of the new impost on to importers. He did not refer, however, to a suggestion made by the companies most adversely affected by the order. I refer to the so-called Danish solution, which would negative at least part of the resultant adverse cash flow that companies fear will result from the order. Perhaps my right hon. Friend will explain why the Government decided to reject the Danish solution.

A more serious concern was touched on by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek)—the relationship between the order, the treaty of Rome, and the European Court. My right hon. Friend is aware that a legal opinion is winging its way to the Treasury, where it is expected to arrive on Friday—from Maître Waelbroeck, who is regarded as an expert—to the effect that there is a serious risk that the order will provoke infraction proceedings under article 1 of the treaty on the grounds that it will distort competition, introduce tax neutrality, and discriminate against importers.

I have neither the knowledge nor the foresight to say whether that opinion has any validity, but given that copies will reach the Treasury as soon as they are available, it is legitimate to question my right hon. Friend as to the robustness of the Government's opinion that there is no risk of infraction proceedings under article 101. I shall be grateful if my right hon. Friend can provide reassurance on that point.

7.44 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): This change will affect 1,600 large businesses. It seems harsh that the firms which will be adversely affected by the requirement for monthly payments will often be domestic concerns trading at home, whereas the businesses which may benefit from the windfall advantages will in many cases be companies which import goods into this country. I appreciate that we cannot devise a procedure that will have the reverse effect, because that would be contrary to Community law, but that unfortunate feature strengthens the case for examining the grievances of those large companies on their merits.

Value added tax is not the property of the businesses which collect it from their customers; it is handed over to Customs and Excise. Nevertheless, the realities of life are such that many businesses will not have collected on VAT invoices to their customers by the time they are required to remit their monthly VAT payments on account. They therefore make an interest-free loan to the Government.

That is a significant burden, particularly at a time of recession. Once a company is included in the monthly

payment scheme, it incurs a significant cost. That is relevant to the timetable issue and to the selection criteria for inclusion in the monthly payment scheme. Whether or not a company is in the scheme could make a significant difference, and might adversely affect its competitive position.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) pointed out that the potential move to an origin-based system in 1997 or later could bring a complete change and result in additional Government revenue. The businesses concerned wonder whether there will be alleviation at that stage for firms which have been adversely affected.

The businesses which will be most affected by the order have gone to considerable lengths to make alternative proposals. They share the feeling that they are not being fairly treated, but that they are being unjustly used to make up a hole in the Government's finances, being singled out merely by size. That is the kind of thing that people often describe as rough justice, but in my experience it is really injustice incorrectly described.

Customs and Excise may take the view that the largest firms have the broadest backs, on which such an injustice can more easily be laid, but in these recessionary times few large firms can easily bear unreasonable and additional burdens, or make tax payments for which they may not be liable and which amount to interest-free loans to the Government.

7.48 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The front page of the statutory instrument states:

"This Order supersedes S.I. 1992/1510 published on 2nd July 1992 and is being issued free of charge to all known recipients of that Statutory Instrument."

That demonstrates a point that I made in respect of the previous order. The cost to the public of this legislation is absolutely outrageous. A couple of sheets of printing costs 55p, and a 50-page document can cost £10, £12 or £15. It is no excuse to advance the argument that a copy of legislation was too expensive to purchase. The Government do not allow any exemption because of cost.

The order has had a chequered career. It was originally tabled for debate on 7 July. On that day, the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments was also due to consider it. Hon. Members probably do not know that the Committee has a duty to report to the House whether a Minister is making unusual use of his powers, whether the order that he is presenting is within his powers or is ultra vires, whether the order is ambiguous and whether certain other criteria have been observed. The House, not the Committee, lays down those criteria. If the Committee is to report an instrument, the Department concerned must have an opportunity to defend its position.

It was clear that, if the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments decided, for instance, to take evidence and not to report the incident to the House on 7 July, the statutory instrument would, in effect, slide through. However, the Committee determined that, because certain parts of the original order were ultra vires, it should be reported to the House. Fortunately, we had a memorandum, and we decided not to take evidence.

Because the Government are producing so many statutory instruments, they are turning the House into a sausage machine. They are not allowing the Select and Joint Committees on Statutory Instruments adequate time in which to do their job properly and report fully to the House. I am pleased to say, however, that, because of the Select Committee's report, the Government decided to withdraw the original order. My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) alluded to the reasons for the report.

Articles 4, 5, 6, 11 and 14 of the original order were all prefaced by the words

"save as the Commissioners [of Customs and Excise] may otherwise allow".

Nothing in the parent legislation allowed the commissioners that discretion. It was clearly a powerful discretion, for it allowed the commissioners to decide whether a person was subject to all the powers set out in those five articles; and it was not contained in the primary legislation. The Committee's view was that the discretions were ultra vires—that is, that they were not within the powers of the Minister.

Following advice from counsel, the Committee decided that another section of the order was ultra vires. The order imposed a duty to make advance payments on divisions of a corporate body; the primary legislation allowed such impositions to be made only on a corporate body—and divisions of a corporate body do not constitute corporate bodies. We considered that to be outside the Minister's powers, and accordingly reported it to be ultra vires.

I am pleased to tell the House that—as can be seen from the report that we have placed in the Vote Office—the order that we are debating has removed that discretion from the commissioners, thus conforming with the Value Added Tax Act 1983. Taxable persons are now regarded as corporate bodies, rather than as divisions of a corporate body: that, too, brings the order within the vires set out in the primary legislation.

On that occasion the Government behaved very sensibly, but that is not always the case. On other occasions, after the Committee has claimed that elements of similar orders were ultra vires, those orders have been tabled for discussion. In such instances, I have raised points of order, asking the Government to withdraw the orders and defer debate so that they could be examined with a view to tabling correct versions. The Government have simply pushed the instruments through the sausage machine, which is not good enough.

The Minister must accept the commendations of the House—although he may feel uncomfortable about doing so—for his sensible withdrawal of the order, and its retabling in a correct form. That should happen more often. If the Select and Joint Committees on Statutory Instruments are able to identify a vires point—a point relating to the powers of Ministers—there should be an automatic requirement for the House to see the Committee's report before any order is debated. In my view, nothing less than that will do. Sometimes, however, the Government simply press ahead when the Committee is about to report on a vires point, ignoring the work that it has done.

Let me add that the Select and Joint Committees are not the most televised parliamentary Committees. They are not a focus of great publicity; their business is a fairly dull routine, which is carried out in the public interest. That may sound precious, but it is true. I think that the Committees' work at least merits recognition by the House.

Dr. Marek: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Difficulties are likely to be caused for traders, however, by

[Dr. Marek]

the withdrawal of that phrase from the order. I am beginning to wonder whether we should not proceed with the statutory instrument, and whether the original wording should be reintroduced. That could be done as part of our proceedings on next year's Finance Bill. I should be interested to know what my hon. Friend and the Minister think of that proposal.

Mr. Cryer: Delegated powers are conferred by primary legislation. If the primary legislation does not contain powers for the Minister to award discretion to the commissioners, he cannot award that discretion. If discretion is needed—this is a particularly onerous system, requiring advance payments; as has already been said, 1,600 companies will be affected—it is a requirement for primary legislation.

The Select and Joint Committees do not examine instruments on their merits—which, incidentally, makes it even more iniquitous that the Government should, at times, ignore the views of the Select Committee, which has a Conservative majority. It is not as though its members were seeking to undermine a Government policy on merit; they are simply carrying out the task allotted to them by Parliament, which specifically excludes debate on merit. My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham has made a perfectly fair point, to which the Minister must reply. We must establish whether further primary legislation is required.

Customs and Excise has provided the explanation given to the Select Committee. It sets out the position fairly, explaining the original faults in the instrument, their recognition and their replacement by the new Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) (No. 2) Order, which takes those faults into account and—as far as the Committee is concerned—remedies them.

On the question of merit, if the order leads to companies having difficulty in making advance payments, the Government must take that into account. We are in the middle of a deep and, alas, deepening recession. I emphasise the dangers of making decisions about value added tax or other tax payments in the middle of a recession that would further exacerbate the recession.

I hope that other Government Departments will follow the example set by the Minister and his Department and make sure that the recommendations of the Select and Joint Committees on Statutory Instruments are taken into account before a debate is held. About 1,600 companies will be affected by the order. I repeat that the legislation that affects the vast majority of the British people is not primary legislation. That goes through the House in dramatic circumstances, with a crowded House for the Report stage and with great interest shown in the Standing Committee proceedings. The debates are lengthy. Delegated legislation generally goes through the House in an hour and a half.

We are not considering the majority of instruments—negative procedure instruments—that are not even debated yet frequently contain criminal sanctions. On this occasion we are, fortunately, able to deal with a corrected instrument, but on many occasions faulty legislation that was delegated to Ministers and their Departments to draft goes through the House without examination. That is an imposition on the British people. They have to implement the legislation, but they are often inhibited from going to court for a clarifying decision because of the expense. It is our fault if defective legislation leaves this place. It is not the fault of the people outside who have to implement it. Mercifully, on this occasion we have corrected the legislation.

I hope that the Minister will not mind my few words of approbation. His political career will, no doubt, suffer as a result. Other Ministers had better look out, therefore, for if I crucify them with praise they will have to look towards a dreaded occasion—unless they wish to avoid it by taking similar corrective action.

8.6 pm

Sir John Cope: The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) commended me both at the beginning and at the end of his speech. He need have no hesitation in doing so. I am delighted to accept any commendations from him that are on offer, because I know that he would condemn me if he thought that I was not doing the right thing at any point. He need not worry about my political career. I know that Whips have very short memories. I do not believe that there will be any difficulty in that respect, whatever happens to my career.

The debate provides me with the opportunity sincerely to commend the work of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments. When I was in the Whips Office I came to know a little about its proceedings and how hard the hon. Gentleman in particular and his colleagues on the Committee work on behalf of the House. We had an exciting debate earlier this week about membership of some of the more glamorous Select Committees. I know, however, how difficult it sometimes is to get Members to serve on some of the less glamorous Committees, such as the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, which does extremely important work on behalf of the House.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said—that in some respects it was unsatisfactory not to proceed with the first order. However, I considered it right not to do so, but to amend it in the light of the Select Committee's report. There is always legal doubt in these cases. I do not say that we were necessarily 100 per cent. convinced that the vires points raised by the Select Committee were exactly correct. Nevertheless, there was sufficient evidence to convince us that it would be right to redraft the statutory instruments and avoid a potential difficulty. That is what we have done by bringing the revised order before the House.

Therefore, the words that the hon. Member for Wrexham quoted—

"save as the Commissioners may allow"—

have disappeared from the instrument and have been replaced with more precise wording to cover the two points that we were anxious to amend as a result of consultations since the Budget.

The hon. Member for Wrexham also asked me whether there would be any delay over deciding about the 80 per cent. rule that has been mentioned so many times. We shall do our best to avoid any delay. About 1,600 traders are involved in the scheme. The number of traders who will make applications in connection with the 80 per cent. rule is much smaller. I do not anticipate, therefore, that there will be a huge burden of work. I hope that we shall be able to deal expeditiously with the applications.

As the hon. Member for Wrexham acknowledged, the review will take place after we have gained some experience of working the scheme. We expect to consider

how the scheme is working next spring or summer. The hon. Gentleman also asked me whether this provision will be reviewed if and when we move to an origin system of value added tax. It will, of course, need to be reconsidered at that time, but I cannot anticipate either when that will be or what the results of the review will be.

The hon. Member for Wrexham mentioned that representations had been made to him about the leaflets. In the light of the order, assuming that it is agreed tonight, we shall issue revised guidance as soon as possible.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman referred to the sixth directive and asked whether we were satisfied that we had authority under that directive to pursue the order. The answer is yes, we are satisfied that we have that authority. Any Minister will be concerned about technical and legal matters. I am not a lawyer. There is bound to be slight concern, therefore, as to whether all its provisions can be upheld. We have received clear legal advice on the point, however, and I am in no doubt about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) referred to the Danish solution, as he described it, to a similar problem. Denmark is one of the few countries in the European Community that has three-monthly returns. The time allowed for payment at the end of that period is one month and 20 days. That is 20 days longer than is allowed in the United Kingdom. The effect of the Danish system in shaving a few days off the time allowed for payment here creates no difficulty as it would in this country, where it would shorten, I think unacceptably, the time allowed for payment. That course is not therefore open to us.

My hon. Friend referred also to a legal opinion which we were told the day before yesterday is now on the way and which casts doubt on the order in relation to article 101. We have considered that point. Without the benefit of the new legal opinion that was promised to us recently, our clear advice is that the order is in order in that respect. Although there has been a fairly long consultation period over the order, I cannot help but remark upon the fact that that legal opinion has been promised to us a day or two after the House rises for the summer recess.

The timing is obviously extremely difficult from our point of view. It is essential that the order is passed so that businesses know where they stand and we have time to make proper arrangements. Were we to hang on for a few days until we saw the promised new legal opinion, there would be a much greater effect on our ability to have the order approved by the House, with consequent disorganisation for Customs and Excise and for the traders involved.

Mr. Stern: Speaking as one chartered accountant to another, does my right hon. Friend agree that the delay in providing the legal opinion is only what one can expect from a lawyer?

Sir John Cope: My hon. Friend has made his point and I do not need to add to it.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that VAT money collected by firms is not the property of those firms. I agree with that and it is part of the rationale for the process.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South drew my attention to the cost of the order, or at least to the fact that it is free because it is a replacement. It is a complete replacement and the previous order is now of no value and can be thrown away.

There was a suggestion during the debate about monthly payments. The House will know that in some circumstances businesses can pay their VAT or send in their VAT returns monthly. Some seasonal traders have said that the one twelfth rule would be difficult for them because of the arithmetic workings and the seasonal nature of their trade. Customs and Excise will allow such businessses, upon application, to make their VAT returns and payments monthly as an alternative to quarterly returns with payments on account if it is judged to be right. It is for the businesses involved to consider that and to make an application if they think that it would be helpful.

Mr. Beith: The Minister quoted my observation that the money collected in VAT is not the property of the business but should be remitted. He omitted to refer to the other side of the coin, which is that money not collected in VAT and not yet returned through the normal business invoicing and terms of trade is not money that the business has to hand over. Therefore, the business is making an interest-free loan in circumstances that do not apply to the majority of traders. I hope that the Minister will continue to keep that in mind, because that is what this is all about.

Sir John Cope: As the right hon. Gentleman said, the order is all about cash flow. If we did not have the order, the Government's cash flow—the public sector borrowing requirement—would suffer considerably. There is no way in which we can reverse that painlessly for the businesses and place the Government in a position where their PSBR does not suffer. That is the underlying reason for introducing the order, and why I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) (No. 2) Order 1992 (S.I., 1992, No. 1668), dated 13th July 1992, a copy of which was laid before this House on 13th July, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

DATA PROTECTION

That the draft Data Protection (Regulation of Financial Services etc.) (Subject Access Exemption) (Amendment) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 22nd June, be approved.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

RIGHTS OF THE SUBJECT

That the draft Access to Personal Files (Housing) (Scotland) Regulations 1992, which was laid before this House on 30th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Heywood Magistrates Court

8.14 pm

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): I have no wish to detain the House, but I wish to present a petition that has been signed by 4,000 of my constituents in Heywood protesting at the proposed closure of Heywood magistrates court. It was given to me by Miss Susan Emmett and states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled;

The humble Petition of Residents of Heywood and others;

Sheweth that Heywood Magistrates' Court is part of Heywood's heritage and a familiar landmark in the town; that if it is closed, all proceedings which currently take place in Heywood Magistrates' Court will be transferred to Rochdale or Middleton, to the inconvenience of the local community.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will ensure that a magistrates' court is retained in Heywood.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

RN Stores Depot, Eaglescliffe

8.16 pm

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): I am grateful for this opportunity to present a petition in the name of six of my constituents. It concerns the proposed relocation of 180 jobs from the Royal Naval stores depot, Eaglescliffe to the Bath area. The petition was handed to me by Mrs. Eileen Sharp of Park End, Middlesbrough and is signed by Miss Bruce of Ormesby, Mr. Weighell of Marske, Mr. Wheatley of Marton and Miss Sykes of Eston.

While understanding that the idea of losing jobs to another part of the country is never particularly welcome and recognising the ever-increasing need to improve efficiency in Government Departments, which can be achieved by economies of scale and centralising Departments, my petitioners would have me suggest that the relocation should not move the jobs to Bath, but that the Bath jobs should be relocated to the Eaglescliffe area. That would provide significant cost savings. The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the members of the workforce of the Royal Naval Stores Depot at Eaglescliffe.

Sheweth that a proposal has been endorsed to create a centralised Naval Support Command in the Bath area which necessitates the loss of 180 jobs from the Royal Naval Stores Depot at Eaglescliffe near Stockton-on-Tees.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the Secretary of State for Defence to abandon the proposal to transfer the 180 jobs from Eaglescliffe.

And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray &c.

To lie upon the Table.

AWD (Bedford) Trucks

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

8.17 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): This short Adjournment debate is an appeal for help to try to save AWD (Bedford) Trucks in Dunstable in my constituency from total collapse. I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) is listening to the debate, because he shares with me intense concern about the current position.

AWD (Bedford) Trucks is now in the hands of the receiver. It went into the hands of the receiver on 4 June this year. In my view, the company can be saved if a large order for civilian—I stress the word "civilian"—lorries for Libya can be given the go-ahead.

I shall give a brief history of the company. Bedford trucks have been made in Dunstable for 40 years, and for longer than that in Luton next door, part of which is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North. It used to be part of the giant American firm, General Motors, which has owned Vauxhall Cars, manufactured in Luton, since 1925. Over the years, Bedford Trucks has provided employment for thousands of men and women in the Dunstable area. In addition, the prosperity of many suppliers to Bedford Trucks has been sustained by a viable truck plant in Dunstable.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as Vauxhall cars in Luton struggled desperately with huge financial losses and product problems, Bedford Trucks made a substantial contribution to keeping the car plant going.

Bedford Trucks stopped being part of the General Motors group as a result of the collapse of the General Motors-Leyland deal in the mid-1980s. That severe commercial setback had bad economic consequences for Dunstable and the vehicle industry in this country. I am looking forward to reading about what the people at the top thought about it and Lady Thatcher's memoirs on it. I hope that I shall be around 30 years on from 1986 to see the Cabinet papers. I know how keen the Government are to publish more detail of what goes on. Who knows—the 30-year rule may be changed to a 20-year rule.

As a result of that great commercial crisis, General Motors pulled out of Bedford Trucks, which left Dunstable dangerously exposed. Although the David Brown family, who took over the plant, and the work force have made tremendous efforts to keep the plant going, everybody in the Dunstable area knows that the number of people employed in the plant has gone down since the crisis of the mid-1980s.

The present position is summed up in the receiver's letter of 1 July to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. It says:

"Our role, as you will be aware, is to maximise realisations and our view is that a going concern sale of most or all of the business would not only enhance realisations but would also preserve employment and contribute to exports . . .

We have been attempting to encourage interest in the business and it has become clear that prospective purchasers of the business as a going concern have generally required of us, not unreasonably, confirmation of the precise status of the contract to supply trucks to Libya. I understand you are aware of the background to this contract and the current impasse . . . We now understand that the matter lies with you for a decision. From our analysis of the situation, I should say that we do not accept that the trucks are 'military goods' and

that there is, therefore, any basis on which the contract should not be allowed to proceed . . . We have been led to believe that governmental approval is required, has not been forthcoming to date, but remains 'under consideration'."

The penultimate paragraph of page 2 reads:

"If we are unable to resolve this issue within the next few weeks"—

this letter was written on 1 July, two weeks ago—

"the chances of a going concern sale will be, in our judgment, much diminished with the regrettable consequences this may entail and I therefore would be grateful if you could give this matter your early attention."

That is the current position, and that is why I have raised the matter the day before we adjourn for the summer recess.

The contribution of the Dunstable truck plant to the economic well-being of Dunstable and Bedfordshire over the years has been enormous. The plant's industrial relations have been superb. Indeed, Dunstable avoided the spectacular industrial relations smash-ups of the 1960s and 1970s because of the imaginative and co-operative spirit between management and trade unions.

I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and his civil servants for the helpful and courteous way in which, for a long time, they have listened to me pleading the case for the order for civilian trucks to go ahead. I end as I started, with an appeal for AWD (Bedford) Trucks to be allowed to sell civilian trucks to Libya. Time is running out at a terrifying speed. We must save the Dunstable plant from total collapse. I appeal to the Government for help.

8.25 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): The workers of AWD in Dunstable have no more doughty champion than my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel). He has done everything possible to assist in trying to resolve the difficult position that the company is now in, not only because of the unfortunate fact that it has gone into receivership but because of the complexities of the order. My hon. Friend and I discussed the order in detail on 9 July.

I have the utmost sympathy with the predicament in which the company and its employees find themselves. My hon. Friend forcefully spelled out the history of that. I understand and share the distress and uncertainty that the employees must feel about the company's future. As my hon. Friend said, that is doubly distressing given the past of the business, which has acted professionally and innovatively and has upheld the high regard in which the vehicle industry has been held. We are all aware of the quality standards that AWD (Bedford) Trucks has set over the years.

It might help the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West—I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) present—if I give the background to the difficulties that we must jointly try to overcome. The receivers believe that the sale of AWD as a going concern is largely dependent on the export order which has been the subject of protracted negotiations in the past year. AWD has been at pains to draw those negotiations to the attention of the Government so that we know what is going on.

Exports are actively encouraged by the Government. Indeed, most of my work involves the promotion of exports. Having said that, everyone in government and in the House will accept that some exports need to be controlled because of the nature of the goods or because of the countries to which they are being exported. The Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989 lists goods which are prohibited for export without an export licence from my Department. The list of goods is extensive and is included in the order for a variety of foreign policy or defence reasons.

I shall not weary the House by giving a long list of the prohibited categories of goods, but, subject to certain conditions, the export of civilian lorries to any destination is not prohibited by the current EGCO which came into effect on 31 December 1991. My officials have made the position clear to the company and have been in regular contract with it since the proposed export of civilian lorries to Libya was raised with the Department.

On 16 January, Mr. Coolican, who is the head of the export control organisation, wrote to the company stating that the export of civilian lorries to Libya does not require an export licence under the EGCO. As with all such inquiries, the letter from Mr. Coolican also warned that the advice was conditional on the lorries not being used in contravention of the article within the EGCO with regard to activities associated with weapons of mass destruction.

The letter also warned that the order is subject to change very quickly. To be able to make such changes is, of course, essential if one is to be able to respond quickly to different and changing threats. All exporters of goods covered by the EGCO are or should be aware of the dynamic way in which the order can be changed. My officials constantly remind companies of that.

For those not usually involved in export controls, I accept that such qualifications may seem rather heavy-handed, but when advice about licensibility is sought, it is important that the Department should make those points plain to alert exporters as regards the way in which the controls operate and the way in which things could change. Mr. Coolican wrote in similar terms to one of the former directors of AWD on 13 August 1991, when the issue of exports to Libya was first raised.

I said that my Department advised that civilian lorries for export to Libya did not require a licence under the EGCO. Unfortunately, as we all know, that is not the end of the matter, and we now come to one of the complex issues I mentioned. The House will be aware that, from time to time, trade sanctions are imposed on various countries. The United Nations sanctions imposed on Libya are not the same as those imposed on Iraq or Serbia and Montenegro. The key difference is that the sanctions imposed against Libya are selective. To put it another way, the United Kingdom does not have a complete trade embargo against Libya.

The House will recall that the United Nations adopted Security Council resolution 748 on 31 March 1992, following Libya's refusal to abide by resolution 731, which called on Libya to, among other things, hand over the two suspects for the Lockerbie atrocity. On 15 April 1992, an Order in Council came into effect which implemented the sanctions adopted by the Security Council under resolution 748.

The two key elements of the sanctions against Libya are, first, an arms embargo and, secondly, an aviation-related embargo. The precise prohibition in United Kingdom law is on the provision of arms and related material of all types, including the sale or transfer

[Mr. Richard Needham]

of weapons and ammunitions, military vehicles and equipment. I suggest that the aviation issues are not relevant to this debate in any case.

When my Department was first made aware of AWD's proposals to sell civilian lorries to Libya, it was not clear that some of the items were to be used by the Libyan armed forces. Subsequently, in September 1991, we were advised that some were for use by the Libyan armed forces. It has never been entirely clear, however, precisely who was the intended customer or end user of the lorries.

There have been various indications by the company, as negotiations continued, of changing demands ranging from some to none to all of the lorries being used by the military. The use of lorries by the Libyan military has naturally and understandably caused concern and increased the complexity of the issue, althought it is important to stress, as I have repeatedly done, that these are civilian vehicles—open trucks, trucks with winches, cesspit cleaning vehicles and ambulances—and that none are to any military specification of which we are aware; nor have any military adaptations been requested by the Libyans.

I remind my hon. Friend and the company that the responsibility for deciding whether to apply for an export licence under the Libya Sanctions Order rests with the exporter. A key decision that the company will need to make is whether the export of the lorries requires a licence under that order because the goods are arms and related material. My officials are perfectly prepared to offer help and guidance but, at the end of the day, it is only the exporter who has all the relevant information and only the exporter who therefore knows whether the goods will be caught by a control. That is the normal procedure for all exporters. If the company believed that to be the case, it would need to make an application for a licence which would be considered in the same way as any other application for a licence under the Libya Sanctions Order. As my hon. Friend knows, no such application has been made.

I should point out at this stage that there is still a considerable amount of trade with Libya which is unaffected by sanctions. In 1991, the United Kingdom's total exports to Libya were £225·7 million. That figure represented approximately 10 per cent. of all Libya's imports. Although it is too early to say, it is expected that only a small proportion of the goods that the United Kingdom trades with Libya are likely to fall within the scope of the current sanctions order. It has been Government policy for some years neither to encourage nor to discourage trade with Libya, but clearly many United Kingdom companies are continuing to do business with Libya in areas unaffected by sanctions.

It is only recently that I became aware that the receivers believe—as my hon. Friend read out from the letter—that Libyan order is crucial to the company continuing as a viable business. That has never been made crystal clear to my Department, but we now understand this to be the case, and we understand it doubly having listened to my hon. Friend's powerful speech.

In conclusion, there is no requirement for an export licence under the EGCO. Whether a licence should be sought under the Libya Sanctions Order is a matter for the company to decide in the light of its own legal advice and after speaking to my Department.

As for Libya, it is impossible to say what will happen in the future. Much will depend on the Libyan Government and, in particular, on Colonel Gaddaffi. I can assure my hon. Friend that I and my Department will continue to do all that we can to assist him to find a way for the company to get its trucks through this especially difficult minefield.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 16 July 1992

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Vulcan Bomber (Auction)

9.34 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I wish to present a petition which reads:

To the Honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the Parliament assembled the humble petition of Robert Neil Franklin, Nigel Glen Pearce, Brian William Palmer and Judith Ball and 9,000 other signatories sheweth that the planned disposal of the world's last airworthy Vulcan is by public auction in the last quarter of the year of 1992 as ordered by the Ministry of Defence.

Nigel Pearce, my constituent, Bob Franklin, Brian Palmer and Judith Ball have been instrumental in getting together a countrywide petition with 9,000 signatures which is designed to void the auction because they believe that this entirely British-built bomber—British-built to the last nut and bolt—which last saw distinguished service in the Falklands should not be auctioned but should be saved for posterity. The bomber has given distinguished service and has countrywide—perhaps worldwide—support.

The petition continues:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House halt this planned public auction and obtain the XH558 B2 Vulcan as part of our national heritage as a flying work of art; it being the only flying Vulcan left in the world. It is totally British made, being the very first B2 strategic bomber in service in the RAF and the last. Statistics show that every Vulcan sold previously has never flown again. We beseech you to determine this does not happen again; and your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Civil List

9.36 am

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder whether during the recess you would care to reflect on the issue of questions on the recipients of the civil list. A number of issues are now being raised, through questions and early-day motions, about expenditure of the civil list. My motion has been submitted to the Clerks and has been altered. I make no criticism of that because it has probably been improved since my original draft.

As a result of the scrutiny of questions and early-day motions, there are sometimes unnecessary delays. Questions on the expenditure of the civil list are not reflections on the Sovereign, but are an essential component of the functions of Parliament. People who are in receipt of taxpayers' money are subject to questioning without much delay in the Table Office. Such questioning should extend to recipients of the civil list.

All I ask, Madam Speaker, is that over the recess you reflect on the matter to see whether the caution that affects the procedure for tabling questions and early-day motions can be reduced to ensure that access is given to Members of Parliament to ensure the scrutiny that has been a function of Parliament over many years.

Madam Speaker: I have heard what the hon. Gentleman says. There are procedures about these matters. I will do as the hon. Gentleman requests. I am always interested to look at these matters, and during the recess I will reflect on the point he raised.

"Options for Change" (Transitional Arrangements)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

9.38 am

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I thank you for calling me, Madam Speaker, and for giving Wirral Members the opportunity to debate the issue. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) is here and I know that he hopes to catch your eye, Madam Speaker. As in the first debate on shipbuilding in which I participated, I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) is in his place. There was never a shipbuilding debate in which the two of us did not take part.

I will set the background to the debate, and I hope that others will continue it. We shall then wait with great interest for the Minister's reply. I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box on the first occasion on which we have met in debate in the Chamber. I welcome him to his position not only because of his ability, but because he represents a seat, not in the north but in the south, which has been hit by high unemployment. Unlike many Ministers, this Minister is well acquainted with the underlying theme of our debate.

Perhaps I might begin with a comment on the role that Cammell Laird plays in the Wirral. It is very difficult to think of Birkenhead and the Wirral without a shipyard —not that the men and women who work in the yard believe that they are owed a job or that they have the right for ever and a day to build ships. I happen to believe that there is a role for shipbuilding at Cammell Laird in the future, and not just the immediate future. The men and women working in the yard look forward to other opportunities of deploying their skills for the good of themselves, their families, their town, their area and their country.

This debate is an attempt to persuade the Government to give our town and other towns similarly placed the breathing space that they need to move from being wholly dependent on military contracts to obtaining contracts in the civilian sector. Other Wirral Members will want to catch the Chair's eye today to make this point, too.

Shortly after the 1979 election, the shop stewards wished to set up an all-party group of Members to protect and promote their interests in this place, and although the electorate have made changes in the composition of the Wirral group of Members who represent them in this House, there has been no change in the commitment on the part of those Members to honouring the pledge given back in 1979.

My predecessor, Edmund Dell, was a Cabinet Minister; he made sure that no shipping order was agreed to by the Cabinet before Laird's interests were fully debated. Equally, without the expertise of the yard it would have received no orders at all after 1979. The Wirral group of Members made sure that the yard competed on equal terms; had they not done so, no orders might have been placed after 1979.

The President of the Board of Trade told the shop stewards when he met them recently a little bit of the history of the placing of a crucial order after a sit-in in the yard. I should like to tell a little more of that story, because it is highly relevant to this debate.

I recall the horrendous experience that we went through in the yard when Lord Tebbit was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. A small group of workers thought that, if they called everyone out on strike, Lord Tebbit would be more inclined to give them an order than if they were working. At three mass meetings of the yard, the workers had refused to follow that line, but this tiny group persisted with their strategy and in the end managed to persuade one of the smallest groups in the shipyard to declare a strike and put up barriers around the yard.

It is entirely to the credit of the men and women who walked through rent-a-mob back to work at that time that we are holding this debate today. Had they not shown that courage, the yard would certainly have closed. Many of those men and women are still working in the yard and are having to accept redundancy quietly and with dignity. They walk away down the road without causing industrial strife, knowing that if they caused it to protect their own jobs they would bring every other job down around their ears at Cammell Laird.

After the men and women of the yard broke the sit-in, the Government were about to place a number of frigate orders for which Laird competed. When he met the shop stewards recently, the President of the Board of Trade said that there has been no special treatment for Laird. The yard won the order by fair competition.

As the Minister of State for Defence Procurement knows, when the Government are about to place such orders, there is a frenzy of activity among hon. Members on both sides anxious to win the orders for their areas —knowing that if they win them they will put at risk jobs in other areas. Their first moral duty, however, is clearly to the people who sent them here.

During the negotiations for this key order, the Wirral Members were sure that the competition was being rigged against Laird, but they did not know how. Late one night, one of the Members who was sure that his yard had won the orders came out of the bar and poked me with his finger saying, "Our tender has won both orders." I prayed that my face did not betray the crucial information that he had given me. We had had to put in tenders for the two boats, so we immediately knew that the Department of Trade and Industry, as then run, was asking for our fixed costs to be spread across both orders, whereas other yards were being allowed to submit a single order for both boats.

I relayed this information to the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), who relayed it to the man who is now President of the Board of Trade, who, in turn insisted in Cabinet that the then Prime Minister should not have her way and award the order to Swan Hunter: he insisted that it was his responsibility to place the order. There was no discussion in Cabinet; the Prime Minister decided that she, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would meet afterwards to agree the order, whereupon a prime ministerial minute would be noted.

That was the first time that I realised how Cabinet is run. Far from everyone joining in and debating an issue, everyone meekly accepted that there should be no debate around the Cabinet table and agreed that this crucial question should be decided separately.

The then Defence Secretary, now President of the Board of Trade, won the order for Laird not because he

favoured it or felt a special attraction for Merseyside but because he had taken the trouble to phone the yard to ask what its single tender for both boats would be. On that basis, Laird won the competition fairly and squarely on price.

Even in its current desperate situation, Laird is not asking for special treatment. We are asking the House to reflect on the consequences of the Government's "Options for Change". There seems to be no dispute in the House about the correctness of the strategy. Given the massive changes in eastern Europe, it seems right to adjust our defence budget accordingly—although I would enter a note of caution. We welcome the changes in the east, but for the past nine months or more tribalism has been emerging across much of Europe—not merely the old-fashioned tribalism that we experienced before the rise of the nation state, but tribalism armed with weapons, some of them nuclear.

I therefore do not follow the conventional wisdom, often expressed in this Chamber and more often outside it, that the world is a safer place now that the Soviet empire has disintegrated. I think it is a much less safe place. The Government have begun the necessary task of debating and implementing "Options for Change" and the sort of strategy and weapons that we will need to back up the programme in a world in which tribalism reigns. This will necessitate a very different procurement programme from the one that we have followed since the war.

I end with the need for the Government to think about how badly placed some of these communities are. They have served the Government well by expertly fulfilling their procurement programme in the past. We do not hold out a begging bowl or ask for outdoor relief from the Ministry of Defence or anywhere else. Our plea is that we be given time to adjust. I hope that the Minister in replying will discuss the programme of the immediate future for placing naval orders. Perhaps more importantly than that for our shipyards, I hope that he can tell us something about the placing of refit work. If he can, I trust that he will give an undertaking that when those orders, particularly for the refit work, are placed, the Government will consider any serious bid and not confine themselves to the bodies which normally compete for refit work.

We do not simply need work; we need work behind which there is a business programme—I am happy to use that buzz phrase—which considers how yards will make the adjustment over the next few years to ensure that we can continue to build merchant and naval ships in this country. We should be able to take the massive skills in our shipyards safely into other employment which is unconnected with military trade.

That is the plea that I make this morning, and I am sure that other hon. Members will wish to reinforce it. I am grateful for this opportunity to open the debate and to set out the needs of my constituents before we rise for the summer recess.

9.50 am

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I am obliged for this opportunity to speak in the debate. I cannot hope to match the eloquence of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), but I hope to match him in the intensity of feeling that we share on the Wirral.

The hon. Gentleman has the honour to represent Birkenhead, which is perhaps not the prettiest town in the world, but it is our town. It is my town in the sense that I was born there and I count that as great an honour as the hon. Gentleman has in representing the town. My first memory of the shipyard was the launching of the Ark Royal by the Queen Mother in 1953. The history of Birkenhead and the Wirral is of a people who, if they did not work in the yard, certainly had a relation who worked in it or was in some way connected with the yard. It has that proud history, but it has it in common with many other shipbuilding towns, some of which no longer have yards.

I agree entirely with what the hon. Member for Birkenhead said. Compassion is not a word that springs easily to the lips of hon. Members when my name is mentioned, but that cannot be said of the hon. Member for Birkenhead. We are not here today on a compassionate basis. We are not here to ask for money, because I know full well that there will not be any. In fact, we have been told that.

Over the past few years, we have, in our various guises, explored every avenue: we have scraped, scratched, seen potential purchasers and looked for orders. With the help of Ministers and others, and especially with the help of the work force in the yard, we have been able, in our own small way, to keep the yard in existence.

If the yard were to disappear, it would not simply be a disaster for the people of the Wirral; in view of what the hon. Member for Birkenhead has said, it would be a disaster for the country as well. The hon. Gentleman was correct to say that the world is not a safer place: it is an infinitely more dangerous place. While I can understand the reasons for "Options for Change", I believe that we should be moving cautiously.

To stray from the subject of the debate for a moment, I must say in respect of "Options for Change" that I have reservations about the merger of the Cheshire Regiment with the Staffordshire Regiment. Indeed, I do not simply have reservations about the merger; I oppose it root and branch and I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind.

We are not here to ask for money. We are not holding out the bowl. We are here to try to find a way forward, and the hon. Member for Birkenhead has already said what that way forward might be. He encapsulated in a phrase what we are asking for when he referred to a "breathing space".

It is possible that there will be other types of work in the vicinity around Liverpool and Morecambe bays which the yard could take up in future. We might not build ships in future, although I hope that that is not the case. There is certainly other work on the horizon and that horizon is not too far distant.

We have nearly a year before Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. closes down Cammell Laird unless something happens. I do not believe that it is beyond the wit and ingenuity of the Government to find something during that time to allow the yard to continue and so allow the people of the Wirral to maintain that proud heritage.

9.54 am

Ms. Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for his ingenuity in securing the debate. I also thank other hon. Members with interests on the Wirral and elsewhere for taking the time to come to the Chamber to put their case today.

[Ms. Angela Eagle]

I want to supplement what has already been said and consider the effect that closure of the yard will have on the local community. The view is that closure would be catastrophic. At the moment, about 1,000 people are directly employed at Cammell Laird, but some 5,000 to 6,000 other local jobs in supply industries are thought to be dependent on the yard.

The Wirral saw a dramatic collapse in its economy during the 1980s. There was a 15 per cent. fall in the proportion of people employed in manufacturing over that period. Of the nine divisions of the standard industrial classification, there were modest rises in only two of them in the Wirral over the period—in banking, insurance and financial services and the public sector. There were serious falls in the other seven divisions. There was a 22 per cent. fall in the shipbuilding, engineering and vehicle industry division, and that was above the national average.

We are talking about a closure against the background of an already seriously depressed manufacturing sector and local economy. In 1971, 10,000 people were employed in the yard in shipbuilding. I agree with the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) that most people who live in the area have worked in the yard or have relatives who have worked there. If the yard were to close, the effect on the psychology of the area for manufacturing and commercial investment and on individual confidence would be hard to grasp as being anything other than catastrophic.

Unemployment in the Wirral is currently 14 per cent., although there are patches of much higher unemployment, particularly of the long-term unemployed who often tend to be skilled people who used to work in manufacturing and who simply cannot find jobs in other areas. There is also a very large youth unemployment problem which causes social problems. There are 19,088 officially unemployed people in the Wirral—one in seven of the work force. It is estimated that closure of the yard would add 2 per cent. to that total.

We must bear in mind the fact that many of Cammell Laird's materials and services are bought locally. More than 600 local firms supply goods and services to the yard to an estimated value of £30 million. It is clear from what I have said that closure would have a serious effect. The local authority estimates that closure would cost the public exchequer about £111 million at current prices as a direct cost in lost tax revenues, increased welfare payments and retaining costs.

The solution to the problem has already been outlined to some extent in our debate. All Wirral Members want to keep the yard open. Indeed, it is crucial that it remains open. In the past decade or so, demand in the yard has been influenced by two effects. The first has emerged over the past two years in the form of "Options for Change" and the implications of a reduction in naval building as a result of welcome changes in the world's political environment and our defence needs. The second effect was the general shrinking of shipbuilding.

However, there is evidence that there will be an upturn in shipbuilding over the next decade if we can just maintain our capacity long enough to take advantage of it. It has been suggested that almost three quarters of the world's tanker fleet is more than 10 years old. The normal life span of a tanker is approximately 20 years. There will therefore be plenty of business in that area and we will be in a good position to compete for that so long as the yard exists.

Diversification made necessary by "Options for Change" involves an attempt to move to civil engineering. There is the Hamilton oil development at Point of Ayr, and, as the hon. Member for Wirral, South said, there is much potential work to be had in the Liverpool bay oilfields and in the Morecambe bay area. Cammell Laird would be in a good position to take advantage of that.

I add my voice to pleas for a breathing space, so that, after 1993, when what is left of our contracts will have run out, we can diversify and renew our ability to compete in a revived shipbuilding market and ensure that that crucial manufacturing sector for the Wirral and for the country can be maintained and protected.

10 am

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on his success in choosing this subject. It is an important and timely debate. My hon. Friends the Members for Birkenhead and for Wallasey (Ms. Eagle) and the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) expressed the earnest hope of my constituents in Barrow that the Cammell Laird shipyard is able to remain open and enjoy a successful commercial future in the decades that lie ahead. We share a common heritage. We are shipbuilding communities and we are immensely proud of our traditions and contributions to the economy and defence of this country over many decades. It is tremendously sad to see a great shipyard such as Cammell Laird struggle and be unclear about its future. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments offering a decent future for the shipyard at Cammell Laird.

My constituents and I look to the Government to give a sign that they are conscious of the immense upheaval and distress that "Options for Change" is causing. Hon. Members welcomed the end of the cold war and recognised the immense opportunities that that offered the peoples of the world. At the same time, many constituencies have more to lose than anyone else as a result of the changes. As hon. Members have said, we do not have a begging bowl, but we are legitimately entitled to ask the Government to recognise that reductions in shipuilding capacity are tremendously difficult to replace. The shipyards are strategically important, and not only for our defence needs. As we know, it is immensely difficult to predict 10 or 15 years ahead—perhaps even three or four years ahead—what our defence needs will be and it is virtually impossible to replace a reduction in capability and investment. I hope that the Government are taking that point fully into account.

I do not believe that, as a maritime nation, we can afford to see great shipyards such as Cammell Laird, Birkenhead and VSEL in Barrow go down the plughole. It would be criminal for the Government to sit back and allow that to happen.

I want the Government to recognise that it is incumbent upon them to encourage a policy which will reward innovation and promote investment. We have heard about the immense opportunities that are available in offshore marine engineering, oil and gas exploration, submersible vehicles and perhaps remote-operated vehicles. We have a capability in our shipyards, not only in my constituency

but in others, to take advantage of what many believe will be a buoyant, worldwide market for marine engineering products. The Government have a responsibility to tell us what steps they will take to promote those developments.

Underpinning those points is a requirement that the Government recognise the immense economic potential in many shipbuilding communities. In the past, many of our constituencies have been dependent on providing ships for the Ministry of Defence. In my constituency, we have exclusively worked for the Ministry of Defence for at least the past 20 years and for a long time before that, but we have a wider capability than that. My interest in the matter leads me to conclude that the Government should introduce an expansion of the intervention fund scheme so that naval yards such as VSEL and Cammell Laird can take advantage of that source of funding.

Hon. Members who represent shipbuilding communities want clearer information from the Government about their future naval procurement policies. In 1986, when VSEL in my constituency left British Shipbuilders and became a private company, we were expecting 27 SSNs from the Government and, along with our colleagues in Cammell Laird, we expected to build 15 of the Upholder SSK class. Following "Options for Change", those projections of 27 SSNs and 15 SSKs became 19 SSNs and only four SSKs. That is a huge reduction in the work load of Cammell Laird and VSEL. We want clearer information about the Government's future procurement policies and their strategy in respect of maintaining a vibrant shipbuilding industry. I am confident that our shipyards and shipbuilding communities can make a huge contribution to revitalising British engineering. The success of British engineering lies at the root and heart of the success of British manufacturing.

10.5 am

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): I have found today's debate a rather moving experience, because what the House of Commons does best is what has been happening in this short Adjournment debate—Members of Parliament fighting articulately for the interests of their constituents, particularly at a time of considerable anxiety and worry over the future of Cammell Laird.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for the realistic way in which he opened the debate. He certainly struck a chord with me when he said that it would be hard to think of Birkenhead and the Wirral without a shipyard. Almost my first job in politics was to work as private secretary for some years for the right hon. Selwyn Lloyd, who was born and bred in the Wirral. I spent many weekends working for him and sometimes answering mail from his constituents who worked at Cammell Laird. It is obviously a fine tradition of the area to have not just profound local pride but deep local roots, as exemplified by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) who, like Selwyn Lloyd, was born there. Hon. Members could hear in my hon. Friend's speech great commitment to a local area.

I was glad to hear expressions of deep pride in Cammell Laird. They were entirely justified, because the yard has an enviable record of building warships and a wide range of merchant vessels to a high standard.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The Minister will recall that, a week ago last Monday, he met a delegation from my constituency about the future of Inchterf, the proof and experimental range. Unfortunately, we have had an official decision to close the range. That has deeply saddened my community on the eve of the Glasgow fair holidays. I repeat the request from Strathclyde regional council and Strathkelvin district council that the Minister should visit the location before September when the decision is to be implemented.

Mr. Aitken: I will certainly consider that request sympathetically. I do not want to respond off the cuff when we are dealing with an entirely different subject. I took carefully into account the hon. Gentleman's representations when he saw me with his delegation only a few days ago.

I again refer to Cammell Laird and remind the House of how great its record of service has been, particularly during the second world war when it made a significant contribution to our defences, with the work force putting their efforts into completing an aircraft carrier, five destroyers, four frigates and seven submarines. Since the war, there has been a continuous record of fine service and achievement. The Ministry of Defence has been very happy with the high quality of work undertaken by Cammell Laird not just over the years but recently on the three Upholder class submarines which are being built in the yard. That order was won in open and fair competition with other yards, and the timely achievement of the build programmes for the submarines was a great credit to the work force and management of the company.

In the few remaining minutes, I shall respond to the specific questions that hon. Members asked, all of which revolved around the plea for a breathing space. I listened sympathetically to that plea. It focused on two main areas —the shipbuilding programme and the ship refitting and repair programme.

The Government currently have in hand a major programme of work in naval shipbuilding aimed at the re-equipment and modernisation of the Royal Navy. We have on order 19 ships and submarines which have not yet been accepted into service by the Royal Navy. The total value of those orders, including the weapons and equipment to be fitted into the ships, amounts to the equivalent of approximately £5 billion at today's price levels.

However, as we have previously announced, there is to be a reduction in the submarine force levels. I have discussed the matter at length with the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton). The reduction applies to both conventional and nuclear-powered submarines as well as to frigates and destroyers. However, I am sure that the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness was heartened by our announcement last week of the firm order for the fourth Trident submarine.

All the changes on the world international scene and in our shipbuilding programme inevitably mean that a reduction is likely in the work load of the industry generated by Ministery of Defence orders. Overall, the potential capacity is in excess of the likely requirements of the United Kingdom warship building programme. That means that the shipbuilding industry will have to turn to new markets. In some yards, notable successes have been made in winning export orders, such as those for frigates for Malaysia, corvettes for Oman and fast patrol craft for Qatar.

[Mr. Aitken]

I am afraid that I do not have any great expectation of new naval orders during the period of particular anxiety at Cammell Laird—which I take to be the next 18 months before the work on the submarine programme is completed. I say that simply because we now have in place such a large shipbuilding programme that we do not plan to go to tender for the next batch of type 23s until autumn 1993. The possible order for the helicopter carrier is not likely to go out until late 1993. I am sorry to say that we have no plans to order more patrol submarines in the Upholder class.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead referred to ship refitting opportunities, which are of particular interest to him. All shipyards with the required capability and capacity will be invited to compete for ship refitting work. In the next year or so, that is likely to be predominantly work on the ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. We think that there will be approximately half a dozen refits, mainly of ships of the RFA. The contracts are always well publicised in the MOD contracts bulletin.

If hon. Members are interested in following the procedure, they should look at the recent advertising of the ship refitting requirements for the minesweeper HMS Atherstone. The adverts were published in April and the closing date for the bids is the end of July. Provided that a yard can produce the right price and meet our contractual requirements, there is no reason why it should not win some of the work. The House will appreciate that I cannot give precise details of what work will be offered for competition in the next 18 months or so, but I assure hon. Members that all the contracts will be fully advertised in the contracts bulletin as they arise.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead raised the possibility of a bid from Cammell Laird and asked how it would be treated. It is our policy to consider even unsolicited bids from all those who are qualified to undertake the work. From everything that I know about Cammell Laird, I am sure that it is likely to be fully qualified to undertake such work. All such bids must be received within the published time scale and meet our general requirements of financial guarantees and so on. That is a matter which Cammell Laird could usefully examine.

The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms. Eagle) referred to the knock-on effects of unemployment at the shipyard. She said that 5,000 or 6,000 ancillary jobs could be lost in other areas. Of course, I understand that well. The hon. Member for Birkenhead was kind enough to refer to the high unemployment in my constituency. I understand how heartbreaking it is to have the scourge of unemployment, at the levels which exist in both Wallasey and Thanet, South, and on top of that to face the major hammer blow of the closure of a major shipyard. I am well aware of the need for a breathing space and the compassionate view for which my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Wirral, South argued.

It is difficult for the Ministry of Defence to be specific in such cases. I was glad that there was consensus that the world had changed and that "Options For Change" went in the right direction. However, we must continue to recognise that the world is a dangerous place and that we shall continue to need a Royal Navy and well-built and refitted warships.

I recognise the grave effects on local communities when circumstances such as those we are discussing arise. I wish that I had a magic wand to wave to solve the problems. I can only say that we have listened seriously and sympathetically to the good arguments made by all the hon. Members who have spoken in this short debate.

Jubilee Line Extension

10.15 am

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): In recent days, at the approaches to Westminster, vivid yellow signs have gone up, warning that there will be no access to Parliament square from Westminster bridge as from 17 July. The significance of that date is clear. The House of Commons rises today for the summer recess and closure before then would be in breach of the Sessional Order requiring Members of Parliament to have free access without let or hindrance to this place.

The purpose of the closure is a £2 million operation to safeguard gas mains and telephone lines in the vicinity, in advance of work on the Jubilee line extension. The closure emphasises the significance and imminence of the issue and the urgency of the problem which I seek to raise this morning. The Jubilee line extension, one of the most exciting infrastructure projects for decades, now hangs in the balance.

London Underground's scheme to extend the Jubilee line from the west end to Stratford in east London via south London, docklands and Greenwich has received all-party support, has passed all the parliamentary hurdles of the lengthy private Bill procedure and is ready to start. However, there must now be real concern that the scheme could be delayed indefinitely.

It is a truism that the strength of a chain lies in its weakest link. It is ironic that, in the case of the Jubilee line extension, the weakest link has proved to be Olympia and York, perhaps the largest developer of property in the world. Under the pressure of the recession, which is especially acute in inner-city areas, both across the Atlantic in the United States and Canada and here at home in London, Olympia and York has been brought to the point of collapse. It is in administration.

Olympia and York was to have made a contribution to the construction costs of the Jubilee line extension. That was right, because the benefits of the underground railway link would greatly enhance the value of the property developed by Olympia and York at Canary wharf.

The contribution was to be £40 million last March, £60 million to follow next year, and £300 million—the balance of the £400 million obligation—over about 20 years. The lengthy period of payment means that with inflation the calculated net present value of the contribution is about £160 million. That is a large sum, but when it is compared to the £1·5 billion value of the whole project, it can be seen as a relatively small amount. If the project foundered for want of this one private sector contribution, it would be like choking to death on a crumb.

Yet the Jubilee line extension is not being built simply to assist the fortunes of property developers. It must be stressed that it is a strategic necessity for south and east London and for our capital city as a whole. Some way must be found to build the line without further delay.

What are the benefits of the Jubilee line extension? First, it would serve inner-city areas in Southwark, Bermondsey, Surrey docks, the north Greenwich peninsula, Canning Town, West Ham and Stratford. The extension would be the first west-east line south of the river, in an area with a traditional paucity of underground lines. Of 272 stations in London, only 28 are south of the river. I speak as one born at Blackheath, who has lived for most of his life south of the river as a south Londoner, apart from a few years spent in north London during the war. I have suffered, with many south Londoners, the disadvantage of not having the ease, convenience and comfort of an underground line. It is long overdue in our part of London.

The line would revitalise and regenerate areas of inner London that have so much need of that process. I note that the Secretary of State for the Environment announced the winners of the city challenge competition this morning—£750 million of public money will go to places such as Hackney and Newham. The latter would benefit from the Jubilee line extension, as would all east London.

The extension is important for local reasons and for the regeneration of London, but it is not simply a little local difficulty. The line would improve access to London's first channel tunnel terminal at Waterloo, thence to Stratford on the proposed fast rail link, and to London City airport. Another irony, which I have already mentioned in the House, is that that part of London which is closest to our new home market of continental Europe should be the least developed. That also points to the fact that the strategic development of east London, which is so close to Europe, is long overdue.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): While he is focusing on the European importance of London, does my hon. Friend agree that Paris—a competing capital for European business—is already much better served by modern public transport systems than London, and that we need the line to keep London competitive?

Sir Michael Neubert: I concur with my hon. Friend's judgment. I am about to mention the importance of international competitiveness between capital cities.

The line will provide 11 new tube stations, nine of which will have a major rail interchange and three a major bus interchange. Four new crossings of the Thames will be created.

At Westminster, a station will be created which is appropriate in stature to the legislative and executive heart of the United Kingdom, a station which will reflect the importance of Westminster in the capital city. As Members of Parliament, we must be conscious of the throngs of tourists—especially at this time of year—who come to see the finest of our parliamentary and executive buildings and who find that the station at which they arrive is grossly inadequate for their numbers and for the prestige and importance of buildings in the vicinity.

My hon. Friends may not altogether understand that the development of Westminster station is a crucial part of the proposed phase 2 development of the parliamentary buildings. Our new parliamentary building depends on the reconstruction of Westminster station, as it will be built on top afterwards. As parliamentarians, we have a direct interest in the outcome of this matter.

By promoting the location of part of London's additional commercial activity away from the traditional and crowded central area, the Jubilee line extension will indirectly help to relieve congestion on the central London rail system. By shifting the focus of activity a little to the east, it will ease the problems of London, which has tended to develop in the centre and, since the second world war, has developed intensively in the west because of Heathrow. As a result, there has been a great imbalance in the development of our capital city.

[Sir Michael Neubert]

London, along with New York and Tokyo, is recognised as one of the major world cities but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) said, its position is under the most intense pressure from two European rivals—Paris and Frankfurt, representing the axis between France and Germany.

The start of work on the Jubilee line extension would be a signal that the first step, to redress the common conception of London as a congested city lacking modern transport infrastructure, is being addressed seriously.

The Jubilee line extension has received Royal Assent, and contracts are ready to be let. Construction could be under way within weeks, which would enable the line to be opened by mid-1996. In connection with construction, I must mention my interest as parliamentary adviser to the Federation of Master Builders.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I entirely agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman has said so far. His mention of contracts reminded me that valuable contracts for train manufacture, as well as construction contracts, will depend on the extension of the Jubilee line. I do not know whether he will agree that that means that the extension is important not merely to London but to the national economy, and not least to my area, where many jobs depend on train manufacture. If the line does not go ahead, we will be lucky to maintain the train manufacturing industry in this country.

Sir Michael Neubert: I am glad to have heard the hon. Lady's intervention because I also want to stress the national importance of the project, even though I speak as a London Member and am obviously concerned about the implications for London.

If the Jubilee line extension does not go ahead, London will have no significant underground developments until the turn of the century. No other scheme could be built sooner, and funds have not been allocated for any other scheme. There would be serious implications for transport and development prospects. Even with no further development in the Isle of Dogs area, transport to and from docklands would be seen as fragile. The whole area would depend on a single mass transit system—the docklands light railway—funnelling all access to the area through Bank and Stratford stations. That line has experienced considerable teething problems and is not out of them yet. Both those stations are overloaded and in need of upgrading.

Connections to important British Rail railheads at Waterloo, Victoria, and London Bridge, among others, are inadequate and would be seen as such by decision makers and prospective tenants. Firms which have moved in to the Isle of Dogs might well move out again. There has already been some sign of that since the collapse of Olympia and York. Existing buildings there would remain partly let, and the momentum for achieving full occupation would be lost. More importantly, the potential for remaining sites in the Isle of Dogs, Leamouth, the royal docks and Greenwich would be undermined. Those sites would certainly be restricted to users with low intensity transport requirements, severely limiting opportunities for east London where much-needed jobs would fail to materialise.

There is also the question of the amount of money already spent on the Jubilee line extension. It has cost London Transport more than £100 million to bring it to its present stage, and the contracting industry has spent nearly £20 million preparing tenders. The London Docklands development corporation has spent nearly £0·5 million on legal and other fees to secure an agreement with London Transport to protect the corporation's land interests and to ensure a good quality scheme through docklands. If the project were abandoned now, it is estimated that further abortive costs would range from £35 million to £85 million.

The issue of the Olympia and York contribution must be seen in the context of those established costs to the taxpayer. Any delays in starting the project would increase costs for rebuilding teams and mean higher bid prices. Each increase of 1 per cent. adds £15 million to the final cost.

Having stated all those factors in the equation, I would not wish my hon. Friend the Minister to conclude that I am suggesting that the Government should waive the private sector's obligation to contribute the sum agreed with Olympia and York. Of course that obligation must be met, for the reasons that I have already given, but the Government have the key role and responsibility for organising the collective act of will which is necessary on the part of all parties. The failure of Olympia and York to come up with the cash must be seen as a temporary impediment, something to be overcome with ingenuity, a degree of free thinking and negotiating skill. It is self-evidently in everybody's interest for the project to proceed without delay. The administrators of O and Y would be failing in their duty if they did not secure the potential value of their stake in the extension of the Jubilee line.

It is not simply a matter of the Jubilee line extension in isolation; docklands as a whole depends for its future on the rapid development of adequate infrastructure. New roads and rail links are imperative if the project is to reach its full potential. The pace of a private property development has outstripped the much slower provision of public infrastructure. As a result, spectacular state-of-the-art office developments stand surrounded by continuous road and construction works—an unattractive prospect for prospective tenants. At a time of high real interest rates, under-occupation of property constitutes a burden on the resources of the entrepreneurs who have opened up these new opportunities, as we have seen with the biggest of them, O and Y.

Canary wharf accounts for only 150 acres, as opposed to the 5,500 acres of docklands. The development of docklands is an immensely exciting project. From the start, the concept has been bold and imaginative. Our response to this setback over funding must be equally bold, equally imaginative. Docklands is our gateway to the 21st century. We must ensure that it succeeds.

10.30 am

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I congratulate the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) on his success in initiating this debate and on drawing attention to the crucial importance of the Jubilee line extension for the whole of east London. The case is incontrovertible. The development of large parts of east London depends on this

line above all extending proper communication networks and links into an area which is seriously lacking in them now.

I should like to say a few words about the specific implications for the London borough of Greenwich, which is badly served by public transport. Because of that, it suffers from acute problems of traffic congestion. The Minister is well aware of that problem, and I am grateful to him for taking time a few weeks ago to come to Greenwich to see at first hand the appalling problems of traffic congestion and pollution resulting from the inadequate public transport network. I know that he recognises the importance of improving the facilities for the Greenwich area and other parts of east London.

The hon. Member for Romford talked about the paucity of underground stations in south London—a mere 28. Greenwich has none, so even by south London's disadvantaged standards, it is particularly disadvantaged. The improvement in the network of underground trains and other links to the Greenwich area, such as the docklands light railway extension, are vital for the future well-being of the area.

The Jubilee line is particularly important because it is a link to the Greenwich peninsula—the largest single site available for development in the whole of inner London, comprising 296 acres of land, largely derelict, heavily contaminated and in urgent need of action. It is a real blot on that approach to London. The line is the key to the successful development of the area.

During the past two or three years, intensive discussions and negotiations have been proceeding, involving British Gas, which owns much of the land on the peninsula, the London borough of Greenwich—the planning authority, local authority and landowner of some sites in the area—and many other parties, including a consortium of housing associations that would play a crucial role in developing a substantial number of affordable homes for people in the area who face chronic problems of homelessness and bad housing.

The development must go ahead in the interests of the area as a whole and London as a whole, but it will not go ahead without a proper rail link into the area. As I said, there is no connection between Greenwich and the underground network. Although the Greenwich peninsula is central—it is across the river from docklands—it is isolated, with poor links and communications. Its development potential will not be realised without that extension. Only one station is proposed for Greenwich, but it is critical and holds the key to the successful development of the peninsula. Bearing in mind the considerable transport needs of the area and the development potential of the peninsula, I have no doubt that it is crucial that the Jubilee line extension, including the station at north Greenwich, goes ahead.

Labour Members have serious reservations about the Government's approach to infrastructure investment in London and their view that the development of underground links must depend on contributions from the private sector. The folly of that approach is demonstrated by the problem affecting the Jubilee line: the whole project has been cast into uncertainty because of the failure of Olympia and York to make its contributions. Having said that, I should stress that British Gas has made it clear to the Government that it is prepared to make a contribution to the north Greenwich station. There is no obstacle in the way of the Government proceeding with the line to Greenwich.

We look with real trepidation across the river at the disaster in docklands and the acute problems in the wake of the Olympia and York bankruptcy. We know that the vitally needed infrastructure development and transport connection that our area so urgently requires are in the balance simply because of an agreement reached some years ago by the Government, which required a contribution from Olympia and York as a condition for building the Jubilee line extension. In its absence, the whole project is uncertain.

I would not suggest that the Government should let Olympia and York or its successors off the hook. As the agreement has been reached, it is absolutely right that the Government should seek to hold the developers to account. I must stress, however, that the wider economic interests of east London and the communities so badly served now make an overwhelming case for proceeding with the development. It is essential that the development proceeds.

The Minister has been kind enough to meet a delegation of representatives from Greenwich and other local authority areas affected by the line. He has shown his support and sympathy for their view. That interest, support and sympathy is welcome, but the ultimate test for those of us in south-east London who are concerned about the future of the whole area and, in particular, the interests of the people of Greenwich is whether the Jubilee line extension proceeds, as it must. There must be no doubt that it must proceed as quickly as possible. The development of the area and its future depend entirely on that line.

10.37 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I shall be brief, as I know that two colleagues wish to contribute to the debate. I shall try to facilitate that, and the Minister's reply. I hope that he has some significant comments to make.

I, too, welcome the persistence of the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) in getting this subject on the agenda before the summer recess. The debate is timely because, in the judgment of many of us, a decision on this matter needs to be made before the House returns from the recess. There are all sorts of reasons why we cannot afford to wait until October or later. I think that the Minister will leave the Chamber today convinced of the completely generic view held across the House, and in political parties, constituencies and geographical areas, that this issue is important.

Having come nine tenths of the way towards going ahead with the first new and substantial underground extension for many years, we have shuddered to one of those temporary halts such as passengers experience when coming into a mainline railway station, when they are close to the platform but cannot get out and there is nothing to be done about it. What we need now is to restart, get to base, and continue the journey.

As the Minister is aware, this is a matter not just of economic regeneration, but of the social regeneration of isolated communities. The project would have an enormous impact in terms of increased mobility and

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accessibility to work, shopping and recreation. Those communities would then be part of the network of the capital.

The Jubilee line extension would also make an enormous difference to the quality of life of Londoners, because it would greatly reduce congestion in those parts of London where it is at its worst, and would speed up journey times in those areas where completing a journey is most difficult. It is also important to connect London Bridge and Waterloo. Those two mainline termini are on the same side of the river and not far apart, and it is absurd that one cannot get from one to the other with facility. That journey often takes a ridiculously long time. In fact, getting to London Bridge from other parts of central London, including this place, is extremely difficult. That terminus is used by millions of people, and it must be properly included in the transport system. The Jubilee line link would achieve that.

It has been reported that some Department of the Environment Ministers believe that the development corporations should be rolled back as soon as their development programme is complete. It would be inconceivable to roll back the London Docklands development corporation without confirming the Jubilee line extension. One of the preconditions of the regeneration programme was that the necessary infrastructure should be included.

The Minister and I were at Greenland dock pier recently, and I know that he will be pleased at the good news about the river bus. It has been given a lifeline for a further three months as it continues to improve its economic viability. It has now started to take passengers again from the Greenland dock on the Surrey quays peninsula. That is exactly the type of encouragement that we need for the community. It is a signal of the possibility of London leading the way out of the recession.

Nothing could be more encouraging for the capital city this summer than hearing the news that the Jubilee line extension has the green light. That would persuade people that the corner could be turned. If that happened, people in the boroughs along its route and in the City would believe that there is not only a vision for London, but the imminent prospect of realising it. There is a great opportunity to be grasped, and I am sure that the Minister will use all his ingenuity to ensure that that is achieved soon.

10.42 am

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert), who is a fellow Essex Member—inaccurately described in Collins dictionary—on securing this opportunity to discuss the docklands. Our constituents have been involved in building the Canary wharf development, of which we can be rightly proud. It is an exciting combination of building and water. If we can overcome the present difficulties, it will be a great attraction for visitors, who will seek to copy that development in their own countries.

The worldwide economic slump that we have suffered in the past three years has impacted in a serious way on docklands. However, the Government's economic strategy is entirely right. We must do all we can to reduce inflation and to continue to reduce interest rates. Above all, we must keep a firm control on public expenditure.

The docklands development is important for jobs. It has already provided 26,000 jobs; if the buildings at Canary wharf are occupied, that will provide 62,000 jobs. In total, the development offers a potential 150,000 jobs. Therefore, it is extremely important that the docklands development is a success.

I have a real interest in docklands because I was born in the eastern part of it at Stratford and Plaistow. I can recall the way in which trading patterns altered as I grew up. It was sad to see the docks, which were once so busy, eventually decline and wasteland appear. I pay tribute to the developers for having the vision to undertake the development of docklands.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is committed to the docklands development, as is evident from his LDDC tie. I know that he wants the docklands development to be a success—and it must be a success. We owe it to the people who had that vision to go ahead with the Jubilee line extension. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Romford, my hon. Friend the Minister and I will celebrate the year 2000 with a party on the top of Canary wharf, having enjoyed a speedy and efficient journey to the docklands.

10.45 am

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I shall be brief, as I am keen to hear the Minister's reply. I shared the vigil of the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) last week when he tried to debate this matter on the Consolidated Fund, but unfortunately his debate was not reached. I congratulate him on his persistence in achieving this debate today.

I wish to ensure that the project is not seen simply as a London issue. Often, London and the rest of the country, especially the north-west, are portrayed as locked in conflict. I must emphasise that many people in Preston are desperately keen on the Jubilee line extension. Obviously, what happens to the transport system in London is important to the capital, but it is also important in the day-to-day lives of Preston people, because we have a large factory which is desperate to bid for the substantial orders for trains which will immediately follow the go-ahead for the extension. With the privatisation of British Rail, railway orders will be subject to confusion and probably delay. I am worried that that privatisation, and the possible delay, if not abandonment, of the Jubilee line extension, could mean that, by the time orders for trains for the underground and the rail system are made, we shall not have a train manufacturing capacity left. That would be a disaster.

The problems are only too vivid for me, because on one side of the street I have a British Aerospace factory, which is in the process of closing, and on the other there is GEC, which is desperate to bid to build the trains for the Jubilee line. I hope that the Minister will bear that factor in mind. The Jubilee line extension is important for the national economy as well as for London.

10.47 am

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) on securing this debate. In all

sincerity, his speech was a masterly introduction to the subject. It rendered nine tenths of my prepared speech entirely redundant because he outlined exactly the implications of the Jubilee line in an extremely competent way.

I should also apologise to my hon. Friend for the fact that he did not reach his debate on Thursday. I know that, such is his assiduity in such matters, he was up all night, as was the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), waiting for his debate to come round. I replied to the debate preceding the one on the Jubilee line, so I bear some responsibility for the fact that we did not reach my hon. Friend's debate. I am delighted that he secured the debate today.

I acknowledge the contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess). I shall ensure that my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon gets a docklands tie from the chairman of the development corporation, Michael Pickard, who will appreciate my hon. Friend's support. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) spoke about the particular importance of Port Greenwich and the area that he represents.

In the Adjournment debate on 18 May initiated by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), we made a thorough review of the technical background of the Jubilee line and to some extent debated the benefits that the line conveys to individual parts of its route, so I hope that the House will forgive me for not going over much of that ground in the short time that we have for today's debate.

We should not lose sight of the fact that there is no doubt of the Government's firm commitment to the regeneration of docklands. About £9 billion of private investment commitments exist in Docklands. Over 28 million sq ft of new floor space has been built or is currently under construction there. To correct a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon, employment there was 27,000 in 1981 and is now 60,000. That shows the tremendous development that has taken place there.

I say that because we should not lose sight of the appalling condition of the vast majority of the area before this whole exciting and imaginative concept of regenerating docklands became a reality under Conservative Administration. In terms of the involvement of the Department of Transport, I remind the House that nearly 60 miles of roads in the area have been upgraded or built so far. We have completed schemes on the Royal Albert dock spine road, the Connaught crossing and the lower Lea crossing. We have under construction the Limehouse link—that scheme will be opened in 45 weeks' time, as we read on the sign that we pass on our way to God's own county at the end of a busy week in Parliament—the Poplar link and the East India dock link. There are to come substantial improvements to the A13, and the east London river crossing scheme will open up docklands in a tremendous way.

The first phase of the docklands light railway opened in the summer of 1987. That is a £77 million project involving seven and a half miles of light rail system. It has been a tremendous success in stimulating development in the Isle of Dogs. The Bank extension, which opened in November 1991, did much to expand the attractiveness of the DLR, and the Beckton extension, to be opened next year, will go a long way towards enhancing the attractiveness of the area.

Let us not lose sight of the social regeneration of docklands, and I underline the point that hon. Members have made about employment. Unemployment in the area has fallen since 1986 against the background of the regrettable rise that has taken place elsewhere. The number of residents has increased, from 39,500 in 1981 to 62,000 today, and 17,000 homes have been built or are under construction. Home ownership has risen from 5 per cent. in 1981—my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon knows from experience the type of environmental improvements that come from home ownership—to over 40 per cent. today.

About £122 million has been spent on social and community projects up to March 1991. A further £105 million has been spent on the Limehouse link housing programme. There is the new post-16 college and a 1,000-place city technology college in Rotherhithe. My hon. Friends in particular will warmly welcome that development. Over £13 million has been spent on listed buildings and conservation areas, and more than 100,000 trees have been planted in Docklands during the period of its regeneration. Our record in docklands, apart from the considerations of the Jubilee line extension, has been exceptional. It is a clear demonstration of the extremely substantial commitment by the Government to that area of London.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford set out the broad parameters of the Jubilee line extension. It is a 10-mile railway, about seven and a half miles of it underground, and that is the key to the extraordinarily large amount of money that the line will cost. It is very expensive to undertake that amount of tunnelling in a major city such as London. I was interested to learn from officials that the crossings under the river are no more expensive than tunnelling under some of London's most expensive property, which the line must also do.

Three new stations on the route from Green Park to Stratford will be constructed at Southwark, Bermondsey and north Greenwich. There will be eight other stations, with many interchanges to London Underground and British Rail lines and, as we have heard from hon. Members who represent constituencies south of the river, there will be improved connections between the west end and docklands, improved access to those inner-city areas south of the river which are not at present served by public transport as well as they could be, reduced congestion on existing railways, and four new river crossings.

I acknowledge what the hon. Member for Preston said about the way in which, in addition to those immediate transport benefits, there are beneits to the economy as a whole—particularly for the construction industry, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romford pointed out—and for the railway industry. It was a fair point for the hon. Member for Preston to make, but, bearing in mind the substantial cost to the public purse that the scheme entails, the House will know that the traditional and classic cost-benefit case for the Jubilee line was not as strong as, for example, other major projects in London, such as crossrail or the Chelsea-Hackney line, which will also bring tremendous advantages.

Despite the fact that on a mechanistic, cost-benefit basis, the line was not particularly top of the list, the Government were prepared to proceed, recognising that

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there were substantial, if not quantifiable, regenerative benefits. On that basis, the Government's commitment was essentially of partnership—a concept recognised not newly in this debate, but three years ago, when the then Secretary of State made it clear that it was a partnership commitment. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford outlined the details of that partnership.

I come to the heart of today's debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford said that we should regard the failure of Olympia and York as a temporary impediment, and I hope that that is exactly how it will be regarded. It is not inconsistent for us to seek contributions from the private sector when the public purse is being asked to disburse billions of pounds for projects that identifiably and specifically—as in this case, for the owners of Canary Wharf—convey substantial material advantages, in this case running into many hundreds of millions of pounds.

In those circumstances, I hope that I will be forgiven for injecting unfamiliar controversy into our deliberations, which have been commendably all-party so far. "You cannot have it both ways" is a phrase to be remembered. Either we recognise that there is a huge benefit here which is to be conveyed to whoever owns the Canary Wharf development, or, because of the temporary impediment to which my hon. Friend referred, we simply transfer that impediment, regardless of the impact, on to the public purse. Should not the Government, on behalf of the taxpayer, recognise that we have a responsibility and say that we shall, on behalf of the taxpayer, negotiate a contribution from those who will benefit so much, recognising a small proportion of the amount of gain to them?

Bearing that in mind, we must recognise that, as I said, one cannot have it both ways. In my view, we must continue to make it absolutely clear—as the Secretary of State has done repeatedly, and as I have reminded the House in other debates—that it is our clear obligation on behalf of the taxpayer to insist on that partnership agreement, which will secure a huge advantage to the developer and a contribution to the hard-pressed taxpayer. No one is more committed to the regeneration of docklands than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and myself. To underline the strength of that point, all the Government's and London Underground's planning has proceeded on the clear basis that the private sector contribution to which I alluded will be forthcoming. We see no prospect of authorising the start of construction unless and until that contribution is assured.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey referred to a train that halted just a few yards from a station. Let us all hope that, in the ensuing weeks, the train will reach its destination and work on the line will proceed.

Royal Assent

11 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Appropriation (No. 2) Act 1992.
Finance (No. 2) Act 1992.
Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Act 1992.
Carriage of Goods by Sea Act 1992.
Protection of Badgers Act 1992.
Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992.
Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Disclosure of Information) Act 1992.
Peterhead Harbours Order Confirmation Act 1992.
Ulster Bank Act 1992.
Cattewater Reclamation Act 1992.
River Humber (Upper Pyewipe Outfall) Act 1992.

Social Fund

11.1 am

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The object of this debate is to draw attention to a report which the Minister has done his best to stifle at birth. Far from being stifled, it is crying aloud for action.

The report, by Meg Hubey and Gill Dix of the social policy research unit at York university, entitled "Evaluating the Social Fund", presents the findings of a major survey commissioned by the Department of Social Security. I presume that the Minister then responsible expected the survey to confound the social fund's many critics by showing that it had been a success. Sadly for the Government, the report reached them at a time when the social fund is under attack once again from all sides. It has no friends. Included in its critics are the Social Security Advisory Committee, which has called for radical changes in how it operates.

We do not know exactly how long the Minister sat on that report before allowing it to be published a week ago, but we know that it was a matter of months rather than weeks. When I tabled a question three weeks ago, asking what stage arrangements for publication had reached and for a copy to be placed in the Library, the answer that I received on 25 June was:

"The report will be published following examination by Ministers."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1992; Vol. 210, c. *308*.]

It is wrong that publication of an important research report, financed by public funds, should be held up pending examination by Ministers.

On receiving that answer, I wrote to the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, who is in his place today, seeking clarification. I asked him whether that meant that he was examining the report to see whether it needed doctoring before publication. If so, it was outrageous that academic research should be subjected to political censorship. Was publication being delayed so that the Minister could make policy decisions without first allowing an informed public debate to take place? Or had he deliberately delayed publication until the House rose on 16 July to prevent any possibility of parliamentary debate until the autumn? Those questions remain unanswered; I have had no reply so far.

Meanwhile, the report has been published. It was published last Wednesday in strange circumstances. It was published much to the surprise of its authors, who had been told that publication was to take place the following day. They learned of the change not from the Minister but from an unofficial tip-off two hours before publication. They also discovered that the announcement of publication was being tagged on to the end of a written parliamentary answer. The only indication of the York report's contents in that written answer was the Minister's final sentence, which said:

"I am pleased to note that the findings confirm the message of the Secretary of State's annual report that the fund has provided cash assistance for exceptional needs to millions of people; and also recognise the excellent job being performed by social fund officers."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1992; Vol. 211, c. *224*.]

Although those words are in the report somewhere, they are not obvious. But the report shows that the social fund totally fails in its objective of concentrating help on those in greatest need. It shows that, by any measure that the authors could devise, those whose applications to the fund were refused were in great need—sometimes in greater need than those who applied successfully.

The Minister's answer, reproduced faithfully in a DSS press release, was a gross misrepresentation of the findings of that major research project. I hope that he will dissociate himself from it.

It is impossible, in the time allowed for this debate, to do more than pick out some of the more striking findings of this important report. The survey, carried out in October to December 1990—allowing long enough for the social fund to bed down since 1988—investigated 1,724 people on low incomes, including 968 social fund applicants. It also involved a novel technique of in-depth interviews with a small number of applicants and simulated decision-making exercises in which 15 social fund officers took part.

The fundamental fact that emerges throughout the report is the inadequacy of the basic weekly rates out of which people are expected to meet the whole of their normal living expenses. As a result of the policy pursued since 1979—freezing the real value of benefit while other incomes rise—people living on income support find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet.

By an amazing coincidence, another report was published today giving damning new evidence of how the poorest in society have become relatively even poorer in the past 10 years. Is it not a strange fact that those reports are coming in a great rush at this time—the dog days of Parliament when Members are thinking of their holidays and the recess ahead of them? It is disgraceful practice that that flood of reports is arriving now.

Part of the evidence of that report is that, in the 1990s in Britain, even food is a problem to many families. The report states:

"The main problem facing all the families and particularly emphasised in households with children and by pensioners was simply providing enough food at each meal."

The in-depth interviews revealed that some families were economising on fuel

"by going without heating for parts of the day, not using the central heating at all, sitting in the dark in the evenings, or going to bed early."

Only four of the 15 applicants interviewed in depth had a telephone. The others, including people with disabilities, regarded a telephone as essential both for emergencies and to maintain social contacts, but it was

"an expense beyond their means."

Some had had to give up their telephones when their incomes fell.

Holidays were virtually unknown. Only 6 per cent. of social fund applicants reported spending anything on holidays, and fewer than one in three spent money on leisure activities of any kind. There was little possibility of saving. The report said:

"60 per cent. of survey respondents said that they never managed to put money aside for expenses that did not come up every week, and a further 17 per cent. said that they hardly ever managed to do so. Only 3·3 per cent. of respondents had any savings at all at the time of the interview."

In their attempts to manage, they left the less urgent bills unpaid, especially the poll tax,. Of the 15 in-depth interviews, only seven people had paid the poll tax in full, a few had made one or two monthly payments, and the rest had paid nothing. Given the choice between food, fuel and the poll tax, who can blame them?

These facts are shameful in themselves. In relation to the social fund, their significance is that, with weekly

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benefit rates as inadequate as this, any system of one-off payments for special needs is bound to come under enormous pressure, and the social fund tries to contain that pressure by screwing on the lid, imposing totally unrealistic cash limits, and placing increasingly rigorous restrictions on the purposes for which payments can be made.

As a result, most of the needs which the social fund was supposedly designed to meet remain unmet. One third of the lone parents in the survey and more than a quarter of the couples with children did not have adequate bedding. One in seven of all those interviewed did not have adequate floor covering.

Where help was forthcoming from the social fund, it was usually in the form of a loan, which people had to repay by deductions from their already inadequate weekly benefit income. The report states:

"Most respondents expressed very negative feelings about the experience of living on reduced incomes following loan deductions . . . over a third of loan recipients in the survey dealt with social fund loan repayment by cutting back on spending and going without other things."

The "other things" were most often food, clothing and the payment of fuel bills. They paid their debt to the social fund by getting in debt to the gas board.

Because social fund payments are discretionary, making an application is always a gamble. A lone parent said:

"They never give you any information as to what you are entitled to and not entitled to. They just give you the forms and tell you to send them in. That's it. Sometimes you come out feeling terrible."

There were twice as many negative as positive comments about the process of applying to the social fund. Some 34 per cent. of the comments described it as

"terrible, ridiculous, unfair, depressing, humiliating, degrading."

Applicants for crisis loans were particularly critical, 21 per cent. complaining that it took too long. That complaint was made recently by the Social Security Advisory Committee. In a chapter about young people in its latest annual report, the committee says that a 16 or 17-year-old who is awarded income support on grounds of severe hardship has to wait one to two weeks for it to come through. Meanwhile, they have to go through the additional hassle of applying for crisis loans. The committee fairly quotes the view of local office staff that that is

"a waste of staff time, social fund resources and an unnecessary difficulty for the claimant."

I asked the Secretary of State what it would cost to pay income support immediately instead of one to two weeks later and received a reply, not from the Minister but from the ubiquitous Mr. Bichard of the Benefits Agency, who assured me that, because wages and other benefits are paid in arrears, payment of income support in advance in these circumstances would not be possible.

It has been a revelation to many Back Benchers to receive letters from civil servants, because it lets us see how much civil servants take on themselves. If the Minister decided that such a method of payment was possible, I suspect that Mr. Bichard would find it perfectly possible. However, many of the replies show the supreme power of the civil service.

I watched a programme called "Target" on Sky television in which there was an extraordinary interview about new secrecy, the inability of hon. Members to see letters from the Benefits Agency and other agencies that are sent to other hon. Members. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that they could be seen in a publication produced by an admirable Member of Parliament. He said, "We have helped him." I presume that he means the Government. However, they have not raised a finger to help in the publication of the report to which I have referred. The publication in which the letters appear is an admirable document, and I hope that before long the Government will publish the letters in *Hansard*.

The Government's claim that they are devoted to sweeping away the cobwebs of secrecy is gossamer thin. For over a year those letters have remained secret, but I am sure that they will soon be published in *Hansard*. That delay shows the increasing importance and power of civil servants, who seem to act outside the control of Ministers. After receiving odd information from Mr. Bichard and Mr. Fogden and other civil servants on several other issues, I appealed to Ministers, but my letters were not answered by Ministers: they were diverted to Mr. Bichard and Mr. Fogden.

The authors of the York survey attempt to establish by sophisticated statistical techniques the type of application to the social fund that was most likely to succeed. However, the attempt failed because

"the inability to predict probabilities of awards and refusals from general needs-related variables suggest that people who receive social fund awards are not in greater general need than those who are refused . . . we cannot show that those who got awards were in greater general need than those who did not; nor can we conclude that the social fund is meeting its objective 'to concentrate attention and help on those applicants facing greatest difficulties in managing on their income.'"

That is a remarkable conclusion.

It is hard to imagine a more sweeping condemnation of the whole basis of the social fund. People with health problems at risk of needing institutional care, with damp accommodation, heating problems, and lacking cooking facilities and floor coverings, were no more likely than others to get help from the fund. Those lacking washing or drying facilities or sufficient beds were less likely to get help.

The impression that the social fund is a cruel lottery was confirmed by the exercise of having 15 social fund officers brought together and asked to make decisions on some hypothetical applications. They were not working in the pressure of an office with demands on their time. They were in a laboratory situation and had time to consider before deciding. The results are unbelievable. A single parent was in need of a washing machine and the application, made two years after the introduction of the fund, was placed before those 15 professional officers who are used to taking such decisions every day. Two of the officers said that the person should have nothing, 11 decided that he was entitled to a loan, and two said that he was entitled to a grant.

There was an application from a pensioner in need of clothing, and the decision could not have been more mathematically confusing. Five of the officers said that he was entitled to nothing, four said that he was entitled to loans, and six said that he was entitled to grants. The effects of the social fund cash limits were shown when 15 social fund officers were asked to decide in cases that were, first, subjected to their local office budget priorities, and then considered without budgetary constraints. When the

constraints were removed, those experienced people decided that grant expenditure should go up by 49 per cent. and loan expenditure by 41 per cent. That is a telling finding. There were not just more payments, but bigger payments—up 28 per cent. on average for grants and up 24 per cent. for loans. Eight of the 38 loans were converted to grants.

The Minister will no doubt argue, as he always does, that the cash limits are generous, but that exercise suggests otherwise. When he announced the limits for 1992-93, he claimed with his usual sleight of hand that they were 30 per cent. above the April 1991 figures, which they were. What the Minister forgot to mention was that the April 1991 limits were so low that they had to be increased no fewer than five times during the year to keep the fund afloat. To maintain the level of spending, the 1992-93 budget would have to be £339 million instead of £302 million. There has been not an increase of 30 per cent. but a cut of 11 per cent.

It is not only claimants who would benefit from the removal of the cash limits. The job of social fund officers would be infinitely more satisfying if they could exercise real discretion. The report said:

"During the exercise in which they had made social fund decisions in the absence of budgetary constraints, some officers reported feeling that a burden had been lifted from them. They felt a previously unknown freedom to interpret the Directions rather than to work with a tightly prescribed priority list. In a telling phrase, they would be 'able to fit things into the Directions as opposed to making things up to fit'."

The "tightly prescribed priority lists" referred to here are drawn up by each district office, and tell social fund officers what kind of thing they can make payments for without exceeding their cash limits.

In many parts of the country, the priority lists have become so restrictive that even the most basic needs can no longer be met. A typical example, recently reported to the Child Poverty Action Group, was provided by the East Lowlands district in Scotland, where last month the budget was 11 per cent. overspent. As a result, that district is no longer making budgetary loans for space heaters, pots, pans and crockery, essential home repairs and maintenance, removal expenses, push-chairs or prams, floor coverings, tables, chairs, and many other things.

To make matters worse, the guidance on priorities issued by district managers is often unlawful, either because it takes the form of directions rather than of guidance, or because it conflicts with the Secretary of State's directions and guidance, excluding payments to whole categories of people who ought not to be excluded. Surveys of local guidance and priority lists carried out by my office in 1990 and 1991 showed that this was happening in most areas.

Similar complaints are made each year by the Social Fund Commissioner in her annual reports. Her latest report, published last week on the same day as the York survey, says that many local office priority lists

"give cause for concern. This may be because they are mandatory, and prescribe the decision for the SFO to make, or because they seek to exclude cases from consideration under Direction 4(a)(iii)"—

which allows payments to ease exceptional pressures on the applicant and his family—

"or because they use client groups to determine priority without consideration of individual circumstances."

The commissioner makes it clear that such guidance must be ignored by social fund officers. But how can they be expected to distinguish between lawful and unlawful guidance issued by their district manager—and what would happen to a social fund officer who had the temerity to set himself or herself up as a judge of the legality of the manager's guidance?

There is a simple solution to these problems: do away with the cash limits and allow social fund officers to decide applications on their merits within a clear set of rules. Local priority lists, which are often artificial, would then disappear, removing the illogicality.

However, that suggestion implies that there is, in fact, a clear set of rules governing the social fund. There may be a place for discretion in the social fund, but there is also a need for clearly defined entitlement to payments for needs which are predictable and definable. That is the course advocated by the Social Security Advisory Committee in its report "The Social Fund—a new structure" published in March.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): It is hard not to contrast the six Labour Members who have turned up today with the massed ranks of them who turned up earlier in the week to vote for a whopping rise in their expenses.

Did not the social policy research unit say that 50 per cent. of people agreed with the idea that loans were a fair system, that three quarters were satisfied with the level of the loans made, and that two thirds were satisfied with the level of repayments?

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Come to any of our surgeries.

Mr. Flynn: The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) will be relieved to know that the extra money that comes to my office will greatly assist in paying a proper London wage to those who worked on publishing the document that I have used, and on providing an alternative to the masses of civil servants on the Government side who provide fictitious press releases for them. The Opposition are woefully underfinanced for challenging the Government, with their virtually infinite resources. We make no apologies about the extra money.

I am about to finish my speech and I look forward to what the Minister will say. However, the information that the hon. Member for High Peak cited earlier was highly selective, and amounted to a distortion of the report. I encourage him not to dwell on a brief which has undoubtedly been provided by the Whips, but to read through page after page of the report, and then to read all the other reports on the state of the social fund.

The social fund is friendless now. Before it was introduced, the Fowler review, on which it was based, was universally condemned. Sadly, all the worst fears of those who attacked it have now been realised. It is a lottery. What matters is not what people's problems are or how serious their needs, but where they live, the disposition of the local social fund officer, or the current state of the budget in the office. Apart, possibly, from the poll tax, the social fund is the greatest failure that the Government have ever produced. It stands condemned by all.

I do not expect a radical response from the Minister this morning, or a commitment to a thorough reform of the social fund, but I ask him to spend some part of the next three months, while Parliament is in recess, studying the great mountain of unanimous evidence that the social fund does not work. My last word to him this morning is that perhaps he might think about the views of the people who use the system. They are the most vulnerable and the least

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articulate people in society—those least likely to complain. Yet, as recorded in the document, they found the experience of applying for a social fund grant or loan unfair, depressing, ridiculous, humiliating, terrible, and degrading.

11.28 am

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on his success in obtaining the debate, and on his sustained interest in the social fund. That interest does not always make my life comfortable; nevertheless he pursues it with great assiduity. Although the social fund represents only a small part of overall social security provision, it is right that the system which seeks to provide exceptional help for people in exceptional circumstances should be subject to sustained interest and scrutiny.

I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said about the social fund. I disagreed with almost all of it, and shall try to respond to some of his arguments during the next quarter of an hour.

As I have made clear on several other occasions, we have before us the Social Security Advisory Committee's report on the fund, and the social policy research unit report, which has provided the opportunity for our discussion, has been published.

I shall first tackle the "conspiracy theory" about the publication and handling of the report. There has been no undue delay—I totally reject that suggestion. The Government commissioned the report and paid for it. The terms under which it has been handled are exactly in accordance with long-standing provisions for research contracts which, to the best of my knowledge, have been followed by Governments of both parties in recent years.

The process followed on this occasion is the same as that followed on other occasions. The precise day on which the report was published was a matter of the Government deciding on which days various announcements were made. We had to find a slot in the process, as anyone who has been in government clearly will recognise. There is nothing underhand or improper, and nothing that has not followed all other occasions on which such reports have been commissioned and produced. There is no mystery and no undue delay, and certainly no conspiracy is involved.

Since the research was carried out, a number of things have happened. First, substantial extra resources have been put into the Social Fund in recent years. Secondly, we have tackled some of the administrative shortcomings of the operation of the Social Fund to make it more responsive to the needs of our customers. If I have time, I shall come back to that in detail. The report must be seen in the context that time has moved on and policy has moved on since the research on which it is based was carried out.

Mr. Flynn: We are familiar with the argument. Research has to be carried out over a long period and the Government then say, "Things have changed since then." That is why the conspiracy theory has many fans among Opposition Members. For how many months has the Minister had the report? Would it not have been better to publish it immediately? We could then have had a far more appropriate discussion because it would have been nearer the time at which the study was carried out.

Mr. Scott: We commissioned the report, and the normal process on such occasions is that a final draft of the report is sent to the Department. Officials consider that draft to see whether the researchers have fulfilled their commission. Various discussions then take place between our officials and the researchers. Any gaps that need to be filled are filled so that the report is a proper piece of work when it is finally published. I congratulate the social policy research unit at York on the competent and professional way in which it carried out the report. I make no secret of the fact that I shall study the findings carefully. I simply point out the valid fact that, since the research on which the report was based was carried out, a number of changes have taken place in the system.

I will talk for a moment about the principles behind the social fund. Schemes for making payments for unusual and exceptional needs are at the margins of the overall provision for social security. The social fund represents less than 0·5 per cent. of the social security budget which, as hon. Members will realise, is running at more than £70 billion for this financial year. Meeting individual, exceptional and irregular needs, which is what the social fund is about, is even more difficult and a great deal more sensitive than addressing the general problem of providing for regular needs.

Over the past 50 years, many attempts have been made to find a fair solution to the problem. Until the social fund came into existence, previous attempts under Governments of both political persuasions had ended in failure. I return to a point made by the hon. Member for Newport, West in which he fell into a trap. He failed to distinguish between the task of the social security system as a whole to meet regular needs, which can be met by a regulated pattern of provision through regular—normally weekly—social security benefits being paid to meet those needs, and the exceptional and unusual needs which occur infrequently and unexpectedly in relation to specific individual circumstances. Manifestly it is a more difficult and sensitive task to respond to those needs than to respond to the generality of need. When the hon. Member for Newport, West reflects on the contents of his speech, it is important for him to draw the distinction between the two distinct types of need in society.

We set off down this route in 1934 with the Unemployment Assistance Board establishing a principle of exceptional assistance. The problems of defining what can be legitimately classed as exceptional need and how payment should be made have been subjected to continuous scrutiny and debate ever since.

The hon. Member for Newport, West no doubt recalls that Beveridge in the 1948 reforms made provision for the payment of discretionary exceptional needs payments administered by the National Assistance Board. Like the single payment system that followed, payments under the scheme spiralled from one payment for every 10 people on benefit in 1949 to one payment for every three on benefit in 1979. That process showed clearly that the scheme was no longer addressing exceptional needs but was becoming part of a more general provision.

Opposition Members will be as familiar with this feeling as are Conservative Members. Many people who were in low-paid employment saw people who happened to be on

benefit getting large grants for needs which may have been there but for which people in low-paid employment had to provide out of their earnings. Many people perceived that to be an unfairness in the scheme.

In 1977, the Supplementary Benefits Commission thoroughly reviewed the scheme. Its report makes good reading and I commend it to the hon. Member for Newport, West if he has not yet turned his attention to it. It covered the problems, the abuses, the anomalies and the basic inequalities which were being produced by the exceptional needs payments system of the time. Many proposals were made and many solutions were offered.

The regulated single payment system came into effect in 1980 and started with high hopes of remedying some of the problems of the exceptional needs scheme. By 1986, it was clear that the single payment scheme was wholly out of control and revised regulations were introduced. It became clear shortly afterwards that a more radical approach would be necessary.

I do not know the extent to which the hon. Member for Newport, West speaks for his party on the future of the social fund. If he intends to go back to a system analogous to the old single payments system, he should remind himself why that system fell into disrepute and had to be abolished. After 1980, the cost was doubling every two years in real terms, out of all proportion to the increase in the number of people on benefit, to the level of unemployment or to any other measure. The payments were unfairly distributed. Four fifths of the money went to fewer than one in five claimants in 1987. In 1985, the scheme cost only one twentieth of supplementary benefit decisions and for half of all appeal hearings. The system continued to be unfair to people on low pay who had to budget for many of the things that people on benefit were able to obtain with large sums paid for out of the taxes that employed people were paying.

The system was open to manifest abuse. Before the changes to the regulations in 1986, one local office, for example, serving 21,000 customers received 4,000 claims for bedding within a few weeks and 2,500 claims for furniture within four days. There was also frequent abuse of the help available for deposits to secure accommodation.

Mr. Flynn: I did not mention the old system and my party's policy does not suggest that we go back to it. The right hon. Gentleman's attack on the old system is well known and well rehearsed and I have heard him deliver it at least 20 times. We are discussing a serious attack on the social fund. Will he now deal with it?

Mr. Scott: I intend to deal with it, but it is impossible to consider its future or any changes that we might make to it without first examining alternative schemes that have been tried before and the origin of their failure, which has been manifest. The Labour party manifesto seemed to have something along the lines of the single payment scheme in mind—a return to a total grant scheme in which all loans would be converted to grants. The distinction between that and the single payment scheme is only marginal.

I note that opponents of the social fund no longer speak of replacing it; they talk of restructuring it or of altering its balance—not of undermining the fundamental principles of the fund.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does the Minister believe that those with equal need should have equal entitlement? If he does, can he refute the fact that equal entitlement is not available under this scheme?

Mr. Scott: I do not agree. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman disagrees with the principle behind a controlled, cash-limited budget——

Mr. Williams: I do.

Mr. Scott: Costs under previous schemes spiralled out of all control, so before the right hon. Gentleman commits himself to a return to them I advise him to have a word with whoever is shadow Chief Secretary to discover whether he or she is prepared to commit the party to uncontrolled provision in this area. All experience shows that such schemes are open to manifest abuse and to spiralling and uncontrolled costs.

I could go on talking about the failings of the single payment and exceptional needs payment schemes, failings which the social fund was designed to deal with and which it has dealt with largely successfully. One of the failings of the old single payment system was that those who fell one side or the other of the terms of a particular regulation received payment, or not, as the case might be. Introducing an element of human judgment and discretion overcomes that problem to a considerable extent. Of course, a limited budget means that some people will not get grants, perhaps because they live in one place and not another, but local budgets administered and profiled by local managers, and operated by social fund officers, add an element of discretion and of the ability to meet local needs in local circumstances.

The social fund is not so flawed as to need immediate replacement. Any careful reading of the SPRU report supports that analysis. The SPRU provided a complex, detailed, competent, professional and comprehensive report on the workings of the fund. It took more than two and a half years to conduct the work leading to the report. It interviewed more than 2,000 people, many of them in depth. It is impossible to summarise the findings of the report in a brief Adjournment debate. No doubt there will be opportunities when the House returns in the autumn to take a more careful look at it. I shall certainly spend a large chunk of my summer recess absorbing the report and learning what lessons I can from its authors. The hon. Gentleman analysed it in a rather superficial way—digesting the report requires days and weeks, not a single morning.

The report says that many people are being "substantially helped" by the fund; that there are high levels of satisfaction among many groups who receive awards—naturally there is rather less satisfaction among those who do not; and that, interestingly enough, there is a general acceptance of the idea of loans. When we launched the fund, not many of us expected such a high level of acceptance.

Not only have we improved the administration of the fund but we have put a great many more resources into it to reflect the pressures on it. In the next few weeks and months, I shall be examining with great care the conclusions of the authors of the SPRU report to determine whether we need to make any changes. On the fundamental principles of the social fund, I am unshakeable: it is far better than any of its predecessors, and it does a good job for millions of people.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This morning's *Financial Times* contains what appears to be a report of the Bingham inquiry which seems to have found its way not to Members of Parliament but to members of the press. Have you received any notice from the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he is to make a statement about the report to be published by Lord Justice Bingham; or have you received any assurance from the Leader of the House that once the report is published, and if it contains the sort of information that appears in the *Financial Times*, Parliament will be recalled to discuss it?

When this matter was raised last week with Madam Speaker, she deprecated the way in which the Bank of England chose to send copies of its report to members of the press instead of to Members of Parliament in the first instance. Will you ensure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a copy of the Bank of England's letter is placed in the Library of the House? I understand that the Governor has apologised to the Speaker for the behaviour of the Bank of England.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point of order, but it is now too late for statements. I shall draw his latter remarks to the attention of Madam Speaker.

Schools (Religious Education)

11.46 am

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Religious education in our schools is in a crisis, despite the Government's efforts with the Education Reform Act 1988, when they battled to provide a framework ensuring that children receive a mainly Christian education in their religious studies. Frankly, that is just not working. Many children today are being cheated of their fundamental right to a Christian education, and the result is an appalling lack of basic knowledge of Christianity.

A MORI poll in 1991 found that 57 per cent. of the 18 to 24 age group could not say what happened on Good Friday, and 62 per cent. could not identify Pontius Pilate —yet between 80 and 90 per cent. of the population, or of those polled, regard themselves as Christians. All the polls found that barely 3 per cent. belonged to Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Buddhist faiths, and I stress that it is not they who are asking for special treatment.

We find ourselves being apologetic for acknowledging the obvious—our Christian faith. The daily act of Christian worship is often a mish-mash of multi-faith worship, which in turn has become a secular religion of its own. Its themes centre on contentious issues such as racism, sexism and western exploitation of the third world —issues which have nothing to do with the heart and soul of Christianity.

Many RE lessons have shifted from traditional Bible study to a disproportionate emphasis on other faiths, with Islam, Buddhism and so on rendering Christianity a minority faith. The push for this has come from influential teacher trainers, RE advisers and local education authorities. As a result, children, together with their parents and teachers, are frustrated because they crave a balance.

A parent in my constituency, Mrs. Kay Reid, has a little girl who attends the Avenue primary school. She said to me yesterday:

"There is so much emphasis on other religions, like children performing a Hindu wedding, that I ask 'What is wrong with putting Our Lord first in Britain which is a christian country?' This liberal view that we should have a little bit of this and a little bit of that means that children end up with no clear picture of christianity. Because my daughter goes to Sunday School, she is able to tell her friends about Jesus."

Is that an incredible scenario? I am afraid that it is not. That is happening in schools all over the country.

The emphasis on multi-culturalism has left children bewildered. For example, I received a letter from a 14-year-old girl in Liverpool. She wrote:

"Please can you help me? I have been forced to learn the Hindu religion for three whole years now. Since I started first year seniors, I have learnt nothing about Christianity. My dad went in and complained and the headmaster told him that he taught a multi-faced religion at his school. My dad asked why Christianity was not included and the headmaster said that he did not want to offend the Muslims. All we learn about is Hindus, Muslims and the Vishnu religion. I don't mind knowing about other religions, but why can't I be taught about my own? Last week my class had to go to a Hindu temple to see how the religion works."

She included a circular from her school, the Childhall community comprehensive, which detailed arrangements for the visit to the temple. The circular included a note:

"The Hindus do not allow the wearing of shoes in their temples. Therefore, could you be sure that your child's socks cause no embarrassment? As this is a place of worship, I expect their behaviour to be extremely respectful."

That trendy liberalism has swamped us everywhere, but rarely have I found it so deliberate and disturbing as in religious education. It is hardly surprising that we are producing a rootless and restless society with no moral and spiritual benchmarks. Concern has reached such a pitch that parents, teachers and children are crying for help. They have become aware that children will be unable to answer my questionnaire that I am issuing through Christian Call. It contains basic questions on Christian knowledge, such as:

"Can you recite the Lord's prayer? Can you name any six of the 10 commandments? Have you studied the apostles' creed? Name the parts of the Trinity. Who betrayed Jesus? Why do Christians celebrate Christmas, Easter and Whitsun?"

That last question often stumps people. It is:

"Have you read or studied the Bible?"

I regret to say that I have heard reports of teachers treating Bible stories as fairy tales. My questionnaire continues:

"Have you read the gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John? Have you studied or read the 23rd psalm?"

I received a letter from an angry teacher who taught at the New Milton junior school in Hampshire. He complained bitterly that no RE appeared in the curriculum. Children were not taken to church. There were no harvest festivals and Christmas was not celebrated. When he asked the children what they knew about Jesus, he was told that Jesus was God. When he asked who his Father was, the answers included Julius Caesar, Henry VIII and George VI. When he asked where Jesus died, the answer was "Don't know." The answer to the question, "Where was Jesus born?" was "Don't know." When asked how Jesus died, one child said, "Tied to a cross."

That was a depressing litany and that teacher resigned from the school because he felt that he was unable to carry out his spiritual duties. It is hardly surprising that early-day motion 446 on Christian religious education has been signed by 52 hon. Members from both sides of the House.

It is also very worrying that some standing advisory councils on religious education—or SACREs—are being manipulated and others appear to ignore good advice. Resource material for teachers is highly questionable. One of the latest fads in RE is a teacher's handbook entitled:

"New methods in religious education teaching, an experimental approach by the RE advisor for Islington, three teacher trainers and two RE teachers."

One would laugh if it were not so downright dangerous. It contains barely a mention of a Christian God. There is more emphasis on dangerous mind-bending exercises designed to teach meditation, which I believe has no place in the classroom.

The handbook claims that its version of RE is

"Much more interesting than old-fashioned scripture."

It states that RE cannot be taught unless it also teaches about politics, society, exploitation, expression, sexism and racism.

The final result of such teaching is that it often causes anxiety in children who are confused by the views of partisan indoctrination. Meditation, guided fantasy and other mind-bending techniques are suggested for children from primary age upwards. For example, nine-year-olds at Woodborough school carried out an exercise entitled, "Who am I?" That was based on an "Alice in Wonderland" illustration of the caterpillar. The children had to imagine that they were something else. Answers like, "I am a brown rabbit," or a heavy, hairy very juicy peach have absolutely nothing to do with the teaching of the gospels of the Christian faith.

Exercises on meditation and breathing exercises for children, which are more widespread than we can possibly imagine, can be regarded only as highly suspect. How can local education authorities and the SACREs allow such abuses of RE to happen? This is a Christian country and we live by a Christian ethos. The Education Reform Act 1988 has provision for a daily act of collective worship which is meant to be wholly or mainly Christian in character. However, the evidence is that schools are failing in that regard.

The RE adviser in the London borough of Redbridge suggested a thematic approach for the spring term school assemblies last year. Apart from Christianity, themes included Elvis Presley, Rod Stewart, Raquel Welch and Brigitte Bardot and every conceivable faith from the martyrdom of the Sikh guru Arjan onwards. Other themes included when the first top hat appeared in London; when the first supermarket opened; the American militant black Muslim leader Malcolm X and Alex "Hurricane" Higgins; the snooker champion; and national days in Gambia and Nepal. A poem on Mahatma Gandhi's death was considered a useful topic for seven-year-olds, as was one about violent black South Africa.

Is that not a waste of public money on such resource materials? The local education authority in Dudley in the west midlands offered an alternative syllabus in RE—folk religion. That included astrology, hippie commune cults and the occult. I am glad to say that, as a result of the Education Reform Act 1988, Dudley is now scrapping "non-religious stances such as Marxism and communism."

A parent in north London called Georgette Behar, a school governor at Robbinsfield infants school, told me that there was no religious education in her school because the headmaster had told her that he did not believe in anything and so did not believe that he could talk about Christianity or any other religion. Barely a year after the 1988 Act was passed, the chair of the education committee in Ealing, Hilary Benn, issued a press release stating:

"Multi-faith worship consists of a general religious, moral and ethical content which is not distinctive of any one faith or religion. Under this system schools will be able to use materials for worship from all faiths and take a thematic approach reflecting the values and experiences common to all faiths."

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Does my hon. Friend recall that the Archbishop of Canterbury, in his excellent sermon at the start of this Parliament, made the case clearly that Muslims and those other faiths find it much easier to relate to a strongly expressed and firmly held Christian faith and worship than to some kind of mish-mash which poses as accommodating them?

Lady Olga Maitland: I could not agree more wholeheartedly. In the 1987 general election, I was the parliamentary candidate for Bethnal Green and Stepney, where 35 per cent. of the community were Islamic and the parents were very positive about Anglican church schools. Their views were taken into account.

I refer to Ealing to demonstrate the projects that were suggested to be used in class. I have a teacher's outline which states:

"Use the South African situation."

[Lady Olga Maitland]

Children are asked to sit on the floor, and teachers say to them:

"You are a black young person living in a country with a population of nearly 33 million, 24 million of those 33 million are black like you, nearly 5 million are white, but the 5 million have most of the power. Because of the Groups Areas Act, your family have to move into an African township. You are not free to live where you like."

The children must then give examples. They are then told to listen to a soundtrack of "Cry Freedom". That strikes me as far removed from Christian education.

Another difficulty is that parents find it extremely difficult to complain and to obtain a satisfactory response. That has certainly been the case in Ealing. A popular model for SACRE is based on the syllabus that has been adopted by the Rotherham local education authority. I am sorry to say that it has been adopted by my own LEA in Sutton. Significantly, the Diwali festival is featured on the front page, but not our faith, Christianity. Taken as a whole, Christ's teaching is barely mentioned.

A page devoted to the syllabus reads more like a social science course with key words such as "self-understanding, exploration, investigation, analysis, lifestyles, concepts, moral values, open-mindedness, critical mind" and so on. Christianity is included—in a shopping list of religions after Judaism and before Islam. There is no sign that Christianity has more significance than any of the other five religions. Clearly, it is not a mainly Christian syllabus. It is very much a matter of a child taking it or leaving it on the shelf in favour of another religion, perhaps with more amusing festivals.

Manchester LEA is no better. Its syllabus, "Multi-Faith Manchester", has an introduction which begins:

"We understand the term to include the normal meanings given to the related words 'spiritual' and 'ethical', including non-theistic standpoints."

It spells that out further by saying:

"No policy for multi-cultural education can avoid consideration of racial prejudice and racism."

The rest is a loose Cook's tour of world religions which is more obsessed with inter-faith dialogue than with any study of our own Christian faith.

Bradford's agreed syllabus for religious education is entitled "Living in Today's World", and, like the others, has little time for Christianity. Among its general objectives for four to nine-year-olds is a section on self-awareness and enjoyment. A detailed diagram of the inter-relationship between religions, using light as a theme, links a complete mishmash of ideas and religions, from Christmas lights to Florence Nightingale, birthdays, volcanoes, Diwali and Hannukah.

Our great and glorious 19th century hymns are under pressure. Teachers are advised to change words that might offend Muslim children, especially references to Jesus as the Son of God, and are warned that representations of the crucifixion are obviously sensitive issues for Jews and Muslims and need to be presented carefully.

What is to be done? I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to include my suggestions in the Government's forthcoming White Paper and revised circular. Will he make the complaints procedure easier for parents who are unhappy about how RE is being taught in schools? Grant-maintained schools should be allowed to opt out of a local authority's influence and develop their own RE under the mainly Christian requirement of the Education Reform Act. That is not a licence to ditch RE, for that would come under the new inspectorate. The Government should consider giving a clearer guideline regarding what is put into RE and what should be left out. Is there not a case for the Department of Education warning against dangerous meditation techniques? Christianity must be given a clearly defined and fully recognised status. It is, after all, the established historical faith of Great Britain.

Religious education nowadays tends to put Mecca and Lourdes on the same level, but are they equivalents? That just reduces Christianity to a take-it-or-leave-it faith. Schools need to be reassured by the Department of Education that it is quite acceptable to spend 80 per cent. of their teaching time on Christianity. It is extraordinary that good schools now worry about that. The Department for Education must ensure that religious education is about genuine religious study and not political debates about western imperialism, feminism, gay rights and the allegation that Christ's teaching is little more than Eurocentric education. We must tackle the fact that two thirds of LEAs are clinging to their old RE syllabuses. Many of them deliberately undervalue Christianity. The time has come to bring them all into line with the provisions of the 1988 Act.

I should like to take heart from Sutton's education department. It was so stung by parents' complaints and criticisms that it has drawn up guidelines based on the Act for collective worship in schools. The document is not yet published, but it is a welcome start. I am encouraged that in that document there are more mentions of Christianity in its 20 pages than I have seen in years of Sutton's education materials. The crunch will really come when the Government's new schools inspectorate comes into operation next year. My concern is that the inspectors may not be wholeheartedly behind the spirit of a mainly Christian education.

Surely there must be room for the Churches to take some responsibility, especially in RE. I was encouraged to hear that the Archbishop of Birmingham's office feels keenly that the moral and spiritual elements of the curriculum should not be judged by a secular body, especially in Church schools. Would this not be an excellent opportunity for ecumenism to show its real strength? All Christian religions must co-operate in defining what is acceptable in schools today and perhaps supply inspectors who are committed Christians.

This is a cry for help from the bottom of the hearts of the people of Great Britain. The debate would never have come about if I had not had such a swell of information from all quarters. I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take my words to heart and respond to the anxious parents of this country.

12.7 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I apologise to the House for speaking on this matter.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With respect to the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), I do not want to stop him speaking, but I do not think that he has come to an arrangement with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who has made an arrangement with other hon. Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

Mr. Enright: That is right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I put down my name at the beginning of the day. If the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) does not wish me to speak, I shall not do so except by intervention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for the hon. Lady.

Mr. Enright: I am at a disadvantage. I taught religious education for 20 years. The hon. Lady's remarks are offensive to people who teach religious education. My four children were taught absolutely splendidly. We did a not unreasonable job in our teaching.

I take particular issue with the hon. Lady's topics. There are two laws—love God and love your neighbour. Last week, "love your neighbour" was the Gospel at mass. It is an important part of Christianity and should be taught. Equally, other faiths have to be taught. I speak as a Catholic under the direction of the hierarchy and splendid guidance of Bishop David Constant. In Catholic schools, Hinduism, Sikhism and the Jewish faith are all rightly and properly instructed. I have taught those subjects. To suggest for one moment that they are a mish-mash is appalling.

The hon. Lady does not understand what education is truly about. It starts with the family. No one will know who Jesus is or know the gospel and epistles unless he or she is brought up with such teaching in the family. That is a crucial part of education. The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) will bear out the fact that teachers of not only religious education but all subjects need the backing and willingness of the family if they are to succeed.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam mocked some of the subjects taught. I refer her to the beatitudes and the corporal works of mercy, which are an essential part of the Christian faith. The beatitudes say, "Blessed are the peacemakers". Does that mean making nuclear bombs and throwing them all over the place? Or do we teach a passive attitude? The teaching of the beatitudes is crucial, but when one does so, it is difficult to explain the selfishness, greed and determination to succeed at any cost and no matter whose cost which is rampant in our society and has been taught to us.

It is right that we should reach out to the third world. It is right that we should talk to our brothers and sisters there. The religious content of what we say is the heart and core of being a Christian. That is how we show that we love Christ and that we are trying hard to be Christians. We do not pretend to be perfect; we merely try. Christianity should be taught in the context of the home, openness, looking out and tolerance and understanding of others. In that way we shall succeed truly in being Christians.

12.11 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) for initiating this most important debate and for her interesting speech. I meant no offence to the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) when I said that I had arranged with my hon. Friend to speak in the debate. I did not want to miss the chance to do so.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth addressed the subject in a particular way. I went to a funeral the other day of an 18-year-old constituent whom I had know all his life. He was an immensely brave person who died of multiple sclerosis. He talked to me on his deathbed about death. The funeral was one of the most moving spiritual and religious experiences that I have ever had. The music of Elvis Presley was played at that funeral not to offend those of us who were keen on the Christian religion but because Elvis Presley was a love of that young man. The music fitted completely in the context of the Christian funeral. We must understand that such experiences can be translated into the classroom and real spiritual and Christian understanding can arise from them. That is an important point. It is important to get that point across as a basis for understanding how religion can be taught.

For many years, I took assemblies of more than 2,000 children two or three times a week, with 160 or 170 teachers on the stage with me. One must start with all those people where they are. One cannot take them out of the world in which they live and teach them religion in a vacuum. So it was with young Daniel. His funeral included the music of Elvis Presley because it had been part of his life. The lives of modern children in my constituency and many others are subject to pagan influences and pressures, which, unfortunately, are difficult to deal with. But if one starts where children are, one takes the right Christian approach.

After all, the great quality of Christianity and the difference about it is that Jesus came to people where they were. He did not bring down tablets of stone and say, "This is how it has to be." That is what we have to do with children today to put the subject across. I make no apology for saying that.

I agree wholly with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam about the Ealing syllabus. Is she aware that the syllabus, which has been withdrawn by the Tory administration, made no reference to Jesus, God or the bible? That was its basic problem. My hon. Friend put her finger on it. Unfortunately, acts of worship in schools have deteriorated for many years. In many schools they have ceased to be acts of worship. Assemblies are often simply programmes of announcements from the headmaster or headmistress, with perhaps a prayer if one is lucky. That is not good enough. That sort of thing can be tightened up. There is nothing to stop a sound act of worship taking place in all schools, whether large schools, such as those with which I have been associated, or small schools.

One must start with children where life is for them today and take them from there to some special teaching point. One might start with a football match or the fact that everyone has a birthday. But there must be a point with which every child and adult present can identify if one is to take people forward into a teaching experience. One cannot teach anyone in a vacuum from a position at which they are not. It is vital to start where they are.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) wants to speak, so I shall curtail my remarks. Assemblies need to be rethought, and become acts of worship again, as they should be. The curriculum must be nationally organised and not left to local whim. The matter has not been resolved satisfactorily at local level, even though the syllabuses were well intended and aimed to take account of local social and religious differences.

Mr. Enright: Diocesan syllabuses are not drawn up at national level. Does the hon. Gentleman suggest that the Catholic church should change its practice and draw up its syllabus nationally?

Mr. Greenway: I am talking about maintained schools. Denominational schools have their own arrangements for religious education, and rightly so.

It would help if there were national guidelines. My hon. Friend the Minister might address that. Such guidelines would overcome the excesses that we faced in Ealing and other local authorities where the subject was allowed to go too far from the experience of the people of Britain. After all, our culture and that of our children is based on Christianity and nothing else.

12.17 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): The facts are absolutely plain. We are a Christian society and we should teach the Christian faith. We should teach an awareness and understanding of other major religions but only in an academic manner. We should be basically Christian. We should re-establish in all schools regular acts of communal worship with real hymns such as those which the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) and I remember singing when we went to school.

I do not know whether hon. Members are aware—perhaps not, because the attendance is not good—that even in the Palace of Westminster on a Wednesday morning at 12.45 pm there is an act of worship in the Crypt Chapel. I should be delighted to see more of my hon. Friends there with me.

Even in my constituency of Castle Point some schools are reluctant to engage in simple things such as acts of communal worship, singing real hymns and teaching the Christian faith. Such schools deny our children a sound moral basis and the opportunity to understand and love Jesus Christ. I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) introduced this important debate.

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Eric Forth): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) for bringing this undoubtedly important matter before the House and for giving hon. Members an opportunity to express their strongly held convictions on the subject, which they hold dear to their hearts.

Four years after the Education Reform Act 1988 and following much work on the national curriculum, it is appropriate that we should turn our attention to religious education, not least because widespread concern is developing about it at local and national level. I emphasise that the Government share that concern and I hope that my hon. Friends and hon. Members are aware of the personal interest and commitment of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—who made a point of ensuring that among the first people he met when he took on his new responsibilities were the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Hume and the Chief Rabbi. The Minister of State, Baroness Blatch, takes a close interest in such matters and gives them her personal attention.

In the context of what has been said, it is worth emphasising that, as many have pointed out, the Education Reform Act 1988 left responsibility for religious education at local level. The Act required the new agreed syllabuses adopted by local education authorities after 1988 to

"reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain".

The Act also introduced a requirement that daily acts of collective worship in county schools should be

"wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character".

In addition to these changes, local authorities were required to establish standing advisory councils on religious education known as SACREs and referred to by my hon. Friend to advise on religious education and collective worship. In addition to the curriculum and including religious education, the Act requires local authorities to set up local complaints procedures so that parents and others may complain if they feel that the curriculum is not being dealt with adequately in a school.

Notwithstanding what my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam has said and the many graphic accounts that she gave of the system's shortcomings, some progress has been achieved since 1988. One third of local education authorities have reviewed, or are reviewing, their agreed syllabuses. The National Curriculum Council's recent analysis of SACRE reports noted that that represents, believe it or not, a level of curriculum development in RE unparalleled since 1944. Even that relatively modest progress is something that we have not necessarily seen before.

Local SACREs have been active in encouraging schools and local authorities to give more attention to religious education. That is a positive sign. We should also acknowledge the part played by representatives of the Churches and of other faiths in contributing to that work. However, that does not mean that we should be satisfied, because the corollary of what I have pointed out—the burden of what my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam said—was that two thirds of agreed syllabuses have not been reviewed since 1988. I must admit that in some schools religious education is notable only by its absence from the curriculum.

I assure my hon. Friend and other hon. Members that in the Department for Education we are actively considering what more we can do by encouraging local bodies to develop religious education or to bring their syllabuses more in line with what is required.

Under the present framework, decisions on the content of RE are a local responsibility. I agree with David Pascall, the chairman of the NCC, who said only last Friday that local responsibility is proper since RE must take into account the views and beliefs of the local community in order to meet the needs of pupils effectively. He correctly identified the root of the problem when he said that, if religious educaiton is being marginalised, this reflects a failure by individual schools and local bodies to meet their responsibilities. We must address those issues at that level.

In that context, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam referred to the fact that only a small proportion of the population are represented in ethnic or religious minorities. That is the case. Census results which will be published soon will verify the latest figures. My hon. Friend must take into account the fact that that proportion is much higher in many communities. It would be wrong for us not to acknowledge that the proportion of ethnic and religious minorities—those with religions other than Christianity—is very high in some schools,

communities and local education authorities. That factor must be taken into account in our considerations during this debate and beyond.

I have emphasised that local authorities have the main responsibility for RE, but we must ensure that local education authorities and schools are discharging those responsibilities and statutory duties under the Act properly. The first and most important step, as my hon. Friend said, is inspection. In the Department for Education we ensure that we follow up cases where Her Majesty's inspectorate reports that the provision of RE at a school is inadequate, but one must accept that the number of schools inspected under the present regime is pitifully few. The new inspection regime that we shall introduce from next year will make a dramatic difference to the extent to which schools are inspected and to which the inspectorate will be charged to consider religious education and spiritual and moral values along with everything else in the curriculum, which will give us important new information to work on.

Together with inspection, there is a system of complaints. While I note what my hon. Friend said about the difficulties faced by parents in making complaints, nevertheless the procedure is there and I encourage as many people as possible to use it. The complaints system can be demonstrated to have been effective when it has been used by parents, and that is the key factor. Complaints are relatively few and far between. One might conclude from that that my hon. Friend's concern might not be shared as widely as she would expect, but I suspect that, as in so many other things, people who feel aggrieved are not aware of the complaints procedure or are not taking full advantage of it. I hope that the debate will help to bring the attention of parents to the fact that the complaints procedure exists. Parents who feel aggrieved and unhappy should take the opportunities available to them.

In addition to my hon. Friend, influential bodies are beginning to take up the debate on religious education. The Archbishop of York recently suggested that the Church of England and other faith groups should come together to develop model syllabuses that local authorities could consider adopting. Mr. David Pascall has offered the NCC's help in such a venture. That could be part of a wider range of work planned by the NCC, including a review of how the curriculum contributes to pupils' spiritual and moral development, an examination of agreed syllabuses produced since the 1988 Act to share best practice, work on the planning and delivery of religious education in schools, and work in consultation with the new office of Her Majesty's chief inspector in monitoring the curriculum. In those important respects, the NCC commitment to religious education is clear.

I note the concerns expressed so eloquently by my hon. Friend about the proportion of time devoted to Christianity. The Department has legal advice that in most cases the mainly Christian requirement referred to in the statute will be reflected by "most attention being devoted to Christianity." That advice was sent to all local education authorities in March 1991. That might go some way towards meeting my hon. Friend's reasonable request.

The view has been expressed that there may be some limit on the number of religions studied in schools. Although I am aware of the need to ensure that pupils are not confused by teaching that does not give them an understanding of the distinct nature of individual religions, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) pointed out, it would be difficult to set limits on the number of religions to be studied. That is an area that should be considered carefully.

The Government and the Department are aware of the widespread concerns about this important matter.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend has just mentioned the Government. May I draw the attention of the House to the empty Opposition Front Bench for this important debate?

Mr. Forth: Indeed, but I want to emphasise——

Mr. Enright: May I point out that a spokesman in our education team asked me to speak on behalf of the Opposition?

Mr. Forth: The important conclusion to be drawn from the debate is the concern that is widely and deeply felt about this matter. It has been reflected by my hon. Friends who have attended and contributed to the debate. I want to leave them in no doubt that my colleagues in the Department and I are seized of the level of anxiety. The matter has been actively studied by the Department and will continue to be so. I can assure my hon. Friends that the Secretary of State and the Minister of State will continue to pursue these matters until they are satisfied, as I hope my hon. Friends will be, that this vital matter of religious education in schools in being dealt with properly and responsibly, and reflects the nature of society as we understand it.

Mr. Rowe: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that you are jealous, as is Madam Speaker, of the privileges of this place. I should like to seek your advice on what seems to be prima facie a case of contempt of the House. The facts are briefly stated.

A senior executive of a nationalised industry, British Rail, came to see me in my office three weeks ago. I sought assurances from him about a part of my constituency. I got no satisfaction from him, but I made it clear that this was a major political interest of mine. I now discover that yesterday he had a meeting in my constituency with the leaders of the three political groups locally and has forbidden them to tell me about it, although it was about this very subject. I should be glad of your ruling Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Private meetings between individuals and chairmen of nationalised industries are not a matter for the Chair. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman's comments will be noted.

Wheel Clamping

12.31 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Although this is not my maiden speech, I should like to begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Peter Archer, now Lord Archer of Sandwell—an honour richly deserved and widely appreciated, and worthy of a man who is held in the highest regard in this House, his constituency and throughout the country. I have often heard that he will be a hard act to follow, and I can only reiterate those sentiments.

I sought this debate because it is now self-evident that the problems created by wheel clamping on private land have, in the classic phrase, increased, are increasing and ought to be diminished. The cowboy clampers must be stopped. We cannot allow these outrages to continue throughout the summer, which is why we need to debate the subject here today before the summer recess.

I am pleased to see the Home Office Minister in his place. We missed our hour-and-a-half debate at an ungodly hour last seek. It is important that this subject is in the remit of the Home Office, because that is where the major decisions will have to be made.

I have already received a helpful letter from the Minister for Roads and Traffic, who highlighted two main reasons why we need a decision on this. The first is the increasing number of reports on the disturbing incidence of private clamping and the occurrence of outrages. There have been reports in the press, a campaign is being run by *Today*, and the matter has been raised elsewhere in the media, including "That's Life" and notably the Ed Doolan programme on Radio West Midlands. I should also like to pay tribute to the work being undertaken by the motoring organisations, the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club. They have been campaigning on behalf of their members—not only on individual cases, but on the wider general issue.

Another reason that has made the subject pertinent for debate today is a recent decision by the Scottish courts. They have held that wheel clamping vehicles on private land and demanding a release fee is, under Scottish law, illegal extortion and theft. No one could have put it better. That is why I and more than 80 Members of the House have signed an early-day motion on wheel clamping. That is why I have a 10-minute Bill scheduled for when the House reassembles. Before then, I hope that the Minister can tell us of some progress in his discussions with other Departments and announce some action.

I accept that the Minister's task is not an easy one and that, undoubtedly, there are careless, thoughtless and dangerous parkers. The question is, what is the appropriate remedy? The car clampers are not normally the landowners—the work is sub-contracted to them—but they are the judge, jury and court bailiff rolled into one. They perform all those tasks at the same time.

It has been difficult to get this matter resolved in the courts. The AA and the RAC have taken up a number of cases on behalf of their members, but in every instance, either the money has been paid back before the case has come to court, or the clampers have gone out of business. The motoring organisations believe that some of them re-emerge somewhere else in a different guise to carry on the same business—M. Mouse wheel clampers become D. Duck wheel clampers. The motorists have never been recompensed for their frustration and inconvenience.

It is especially unfortunate that no case has come before the courts, because the legal opinion sought by motoring organisations suggests that even under current legislation wheel clamping is potentially unlawful in England and Wales, especially as it is rare for a parked vehicle to cause damage to the land. Some of the so-called legal backing for private clamping draws its authority from the old laws that enabled landowners to retain animals that had strayed on to their land and eaten their grass and crops. I know that some cars may be described as gas guzzlers, but that is taking things too far.

The nub of the issue is, what is the problem that private clamping—according to legal opinion, that is trespass on a vehicle—is supposed to solve? It cannot solve the problem of obstruction, because immobilising a vehicle must be the most inappropriate way of doing so. It comes down to the use of the land for parking. There may be problems with parking near offices and hospitals, but what about waste land? If owners want to restrict access to that land and charge for its use, they should erect a barrier or fencing. I am sure that the Minister would agree that we cannot tolerate land being leased or sub-contracted to clamping firms for the sole purpose of holding up a motorist and profiting from him by extracting a fee. The more they clamp, the more they make.

The Conservative party has always set great store by motivation and incentive. It should consider how those qualities work in this instance, because the basic incentive of the wheel clamper is to make the parking problem worse and to extract more money. That money is not spent on trying to solve the problem. His sole purpose is to get fees from those who park on certain land. It has got so bad that, in many places, cars are left deliberately on waste land so that other drivers are enticed on to it. They are then trapped and have to pay a release fee. I understand that some clampers are even offering profit-sharing schemes to landowners. They are constantly on the lookout for new sites. I am sure that the Minister would agree that that is a scandal.

It is worth considering some of the cases which have excited public interest in recent weeks and which have led to increasing demands from all sides of the House for some redress. Just this week a driver who found himself in a dead end went on to rough land to turn his car. He was immediately blocked in by a wheel clamping firm and his car was clamped while the engine was still running. In another case, someone picked up a friend from a station and dropped him off at a hotel. He parked on an empty bit of land in front of a disused shop opposite the hotel just long enough to put the friend's bags into the hotel and to emerge to go to a meeting. That car was clamped. In another case someone parked in front of a hotel on part of a private roadway, just as he had done many times in the past five years. When he left the hotel, he found that his car had been clamped. The hotel apologised and said that the firm was causing great inconvenience to its guests. It eventually managed to track down that clamping firm. Someone else parked on vacant land next to a coach station and left his car for a couple of minutes to see if a coach had arrived. In that time his car was clamped.

Those cases highlight one of the main problems—the rapid response of the wheel clampers. In many cases it appears that they watch land, ready to clamp anyone who

parks on it. Some clamping firms advise their employees to get the money and to get the clamp off as quickly as possible because they do not want to discourage other people from parking.

I have been told about an hon. Member who, at 3 o'clock one afternoon, parked on land behind a trade union office and had his car clamped. He telephoned the clamping firm and was told that it would cost £50 to have it released. He said that he had to attend an urgent advice surgery session and needed his car immediately. The firm replied that for one of its staff to attend and release the car within two hours would cost another £50. Fortunately, the hon. Member knew enough to get the local police to deal with the matter, but he had to call the police twice to get the clamp removed. There are some disgraceful cases.

It is interesting to note the way in which the attitude of the police, and even of the Government, has changed in the matter. A year or so ago the police regarded it as essentially a matter between private citizens. Now, many police authorities and chief constables are becoming increasingly worried about the abuse that is occurring and the difficulties that they are having to face in the matter. That change of attitude should be noted generally.

A particularly worrying case involved a woman who parked her car on some waste land near a theatre in a town with which she was not familiar. At about 11 o'clock at night she came out of the theatre to find her vehicle clamped. I was informed by telephone today of a similar case in London. The lady who parked on some waste land was told that it would probably be a couple of hours before her vehicle could be released. Would we want any member of our family to be on waste land in an unfamiliar town waiting for a vehicle clamper to turn up? We should not subject people, particularly women, to such treatment.

I was told of the amusing incident of an AA emergency vehicle which went on a breakdown call-out. The engineer could not find the vehicle, stopped to investigate on foot, and found on returning to his vehicle that it had been clamped. At least the AA was able to get one of its recovery vehicles to lift the clamped van on board, take it to the depot and have the clamp removed. That story highlights the absurdity of what is happening.

The charges are also outrageous, £50 a day being the going rate. If one does not have the money and must go and get it and return the following day, the charge is £100. That seems to be the bottom rate, and in many areas it can cost much more. The record that I have is £240 at Hebden Bridge. Lord Ingham may wish to go to Hebden Bridge, but that is a high price to pay for a visit.

I have information about a health visitor whose vehicle was clamped while she was visiting a convalescent patient. The stories are legion. Similar cases have been drawn to the attention of hon. Members in all parts of the House, and I am pleased to see in his place the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller), who hopes to take part in the debate to lend support to my case. This is a widespread issue and it is getting worse.

The Scottish courts have ruled that wheel clamping is extortion. I am not a legal expert, but I am advised that under English law the offence of blackmail is close to extortion, as is the law of trespass, operating not just against the vehicle owner but against the clamper. The Home Office has sufficient legal experts to study the problem and reach the right answers.

I hope that before we rise for the recess the Minister will announce firm action against these modern-day highwaymen and will take action against cowboy clampers who are causing misery to motorists, our electors.

12.43 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I strongly support the case made by the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), and I am grateful to him for allowing me to take part in his debate. We are united in our view that the practice of wheel clamping on private land should be regulated by law.

The media have given wide coverage to some abuses that have occurred. There are widespread examples of wheel clamping firms which, frankly, have been trying to get away with murder by charging motorists extortionate sums to have their cars unclamped or to retrieve them when they have been removed. In the few cases where victims have challenged the charge in court, the firm has generally accepted defeat, ungraciously or otherwise, so that there are no judicial decisions which could provide guidance to motorists. Cases in which victims have fought back are undoubtedly just the tip of the iceberg. No one can know how many people have paid large sums without seeking to assert their rights.

I support the view that motorists are at least entitled to full information about the consequences of parking on private land without permission. Maximum fees should be laid down in regulations, and arrangements must be made for clamps to be removed within a reasonable period. Those whose vehicles are clamped should be informed what action they need to take to have their cars released.

In the past, the Government have been complacent about the issue. That is demonstrated by the response, in November 1990, to the RAC by the then Minister for Roads and Traffic, when he said:

"there is no obvious role for central government involvement".

There is a need for central Government involvement and for the law to be changed. As the hon. Member for Warley, West said, there is a case for wheel clamps to be used on vehicles parked on private land, but the need for the practice to be controlled is at least as great on private land as it is on the public highway.

Reputable firms exist—indeed, a firm in Keighley can make a claim to that status. It is in their interest that the cowboys should not be allowed to tarnish the reputation of that type of business. Above all, motorists should know where they stand and should not go on being mugged by some extremely unsavoury organisations.

12.46 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Jack): I congratulate the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) on raising this subject. I am glad to be able to participate in the debate. I am sorry that we did not meet at an earlier hour but the clock beat us on that occasion. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) on his contribution. He has a long and honourable tradition of interest in transport matters in this House, and I am delighted that we have had a chance to look at those issues this morning.

I, too, am aware of the considerable concerns on the subject expressed by correspondents in the press. I congratulate both hon. Members on the fact that they have

[Mr. Michael Jack]

drawn the House's attention to specific examples of bad practice. They have done the House and the country a service in so doing.

It struck me that many of the attitudes displayed to the problem are akin to acts of piracy. Perhaps I could add another description: we may be dealing with parking pirates. Clearly, some important issues underlie what the hon. Member for Warley, West said and I shall try to deal with them.

The hon. Member for Warley, West and my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley mentioned motoring organisations. I was much taken by the clear advice in the RAC's briefing to Members for this debate. I am sure that those legitimate organisations which my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley mentioned will take notice of the four-point advice steps that the RAC gave. They seem to be clear, good common sense about the right way to go about the problem.

The hon. Member for Warley, West rightly drew the House's attention to those practising in the wrong way, which is at the centre of our debate. I shall do my best to respond to the many interesting points that were raised.

It is important to clarify the scope of what we are debating. The issue relates to the practice of wheel clamping properly carried out on private property. The question is whether the owner of the private property should be allowed to immobilise a vehicle parked on his land without his permission and charge a fee for the vehicle's release. Our principal concern should be to satisfy ourselves that the right balance is struck between the legitimate interests of a private landowner to protect his or her property and the rights and reasonable expectations of the motorist. The hon. Member for Warley, West said that other motives may lie behind that exercise. I have taken careful note of what he said, and I assure him that I shall look carefully into the specific points he raised.

I cannot offer a firm conclusion on some of the issues this afternoon because they raise untested areas of the law. However, I underline my assurance that the concerns that the hon. Gentleman expressed are being urgently considered. I shall come to further developments on that.

Hon. Members may be aware that some wheel clamping is legitimate on public roads. That activity is regulated by section 104 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the release fee of £38 for that legitimate exercise is properly prescribed. Such clamping has made a significant contribution to solving the problem of parking in and around central London.

The hon. Member for Warley, West spoke about the Scottish judgment, which has raised the profile of the issue. The question of the legality of this activity was answered by the Scottish Court of justiciary in the negative. It found that private wheel clamping amounts to extortion and theft under Scottish law, and we are currently considering the implications of that judgment for England and Wales. The position is not straightforward. As in so many other areas, the laws of Scotland and those of England and Wales are not the same. That begs the question whether private wheel clamping in England would amount to theft.

Under Scottish law, it is not necessary for a charge of theft to prove an intention permanently to deprive an owner of his property. The essence of the offence appears to be appropriation, by which control and possession are taken from the owner. English law, on the other hand, provides in section 1 of the Theft Act 1968 that a person is guilty of theft if he dishonestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it.

It is clear, therefore, that the finding of the Court of Justiciary has no direct relevance to the position in England and Wales. It would be a matter for a court to determine in any particular case whether the fixing of a wheel clamp to an improperly parked vehicle amounted to dishonest appropriation, or whether it involved any intention permanently to deprive the owner of the vehicle. It would not be proper for me to offer a view on the likelihood of such a charge being sustained, although hon. Members may feel that it would be straining the meaning of the Act a little if it were.

Mr. Speller: Will the Minister ask the Department to consider whether the offence of blackmail under English law might have an impact on these cases?

Mr. Jack: I carefully noted what the hon. Gentleman said about that when he spoke about another aspect of this complex area of yet untested law. I shall evaluate what he has said, but I should now like to turn to other aspects of the law.

Theft is not the only offence that may be relevant. Other elements of the Theft Act 1968 offer a further perspective on this matter. Section 21 makes it an offence for a person, with a view to gain for himself or another, or with intent to cause loss to another, to make any unwarranted demand with menaces. Again, of course, it would be for a court to determine, but a court could find that an offence had been committed if, for example, a demand for payment was made against the threat that the vehicle would otherwise continue to be immobilised and, particularly, if the fee was deemed to be excessive. That applies even more so if no notice had been displayed warning drivers of the risk of clamping.

That brings me to the RAC advice on that matter. I am sure that the House will not need reminding that any assault against the person of the motorist or, indeed, the clamper would be an offence. The civil law may also be relevant. The act of fixing a clamp to a vehicle could amount to the civil tort of trespass to goods, which involves direct physical interference with goods without lawful justification. I understand that such a tort can be committed even without damage to the goods, although any damages recoverable would not normally be substantial unless there was physical damage.

Refusing to return a vehicle unless a fee is paid may also be actionable as an act of conversion under civil law. I am aware of at least one recent case involving that branch of the law in which a motorist was able to secure the immediate release of his vehicle. Clearly, some of the nuisance which hon. Members have described can arise if people employed by a wheel-clamping firm operate in an unpredictable or irresponsible manner. The hon. Member for Warley, West graphically described a number of such cases. If a court were to decide that a civil wrong or criminal offence had been committed, it would have to reach a decision on the facts of the case about where liability should rest.

It is clear that there is widespread and justifiable concern about the practice, but we should not overlook the real nuisance which can be caused by drivers who park

their vehicles on private property without regard to any inconvenience they may cause to others. I appreciate that there is a legitimate need to prevent problems with access to land which may be needed, for example, to move vehicles on or off it. The examples cited by the hon. Member for Warley, West went further than that, and I shall consider what he said.

Owners of private property can, not unnaturally, become frustrated by people who regularly park on their land, sometimes blocking access for themselves, their families or their clients. Most of the concern expressed in the debate has been for the drivers whose vehicles have been immobilised, and the consequences that follow when they try to get their cars released. I share those concerns, but it is important to bear in mind that we are talking about someone who has parked on private property to which he has no right of access, sometimes in direct defiance of notices specifically identifying a plot of land as a private car park. As the hon. Gentleman said, there are examples involving the trade in clamping in which such strictures have not been followed—but I am glad that he raised that point.

Such actions do not necessarily give the owner of the property the right to take whatever action he wishes, however unreasonable, to deal with the nuisance, but I think that it is necessary to acknowledge that there are two sides to the issue. As the hon. Gentleman said, the owner of property may, of course, take other steps to prevent parking on his land—a barrier or a gate can be effective —but if those steps fail, should he necessarily be prevented from taking other remedial action?

If further remedial action is justified and within the law, what steps can the motorist reasonably expect the landowner and the clamper to have taken? I sense from the debate that many of the complaints which hon. Members and others have brought to my attention concern the manner of clamping as much as the clamping itself. The posting of clear warning notices, and a sensible approach to the level of fee and the manner of its collection—including, as the hon. Gentleman rightly drew to the attention of the House, a regard for the particular circumstances of the motorist after his car has been clamped—are the kind of issues which must be high on the agenda for future discussions.

As I have outlined, it seems that in certain circumstances a court may find that wheel clamping on private land amounts to a criminal offence or civil wrong. It is unfortunate that, so far as we are aware, neither the civil nor the criminal law has been authoritatively tested in the courts on the broad issue. There are—as the House will appreciate—difficult legal questions here which the Government are urgently considering. I appreciate hon. Members' frustration that the situation is not clearer. Indeed, I share that frustration—I have seen some such situations for myself—but I assure them that we are considering the matter urgently, including the question whether any action is needed to prohibit or to regulate the use of wheel clamps on private property.

I shall take fully into account the examples which both hon. Members who spoke in the debate raised. If the hon. Member for Warley, West cares to provide more detailed information in correspondence with me, I invite him to do so, and it will all be considered. Once again, I congratulate him on raising the matter——

Mr. Spellar *rose*——

Mr. Jack: —and before I finish my speech, I shall give way to him.

Mr. Spellar: Will the Minister tell us when the deliberations are likely to come to a conclusion, and when he will be able to make an announcement?

Mr. Jack: One of the factors which has become clear during the debate is the complexity of the untested law involved. Something which has become clear to me in my short time at the Home Office is that sometimes to act in haste means to repent at leisure. We must carefully consider the implications of what has been said. In my speech I have tried to balance the needs of the legitimate private landowner who may say, "This is causing a nuisance; I have no option but to resort to clamping," with the considerations put before me by the hon. Member. He said that people were almost turning clamping into a business so that the legitimacy argument was lost. He also said that bad practice had come as people sought to make gains.

Our task must be to consider the full implications of both sides. Private people in residential areas may have a legitimate case for saying that clamping is the best way in which to deter people from blocking the entrances to garages, for example.

The hon. Member for Warley, West highlighted another matter which is a new aspect of debate in the House. I am personally delighted that he has gone so far in highlighting it. I give him the assurance that we will look at the matter with all urgency. I am aware that we must make quality decisions in the area if they are found to be appropriate. I should like a little time to study the matter to ensure that we can examine fully the evidence put before us. Clearly the Royal Automobile Club——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

MOD Jobs (North Yorkshire)

1 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I am grateful for the opportunity to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just two hours or so before the House rises for a very long recess, and to raise a matter of considerable importance to my constituents and to the constituents of my hon. Friends who represent North Yorkshire seats. I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) is in the Chamber to support me in this brief debate. I also thank my hon. Friend the Minister for finding time to respond to the debate. It is a great pleasure to see him in his post and he is clearly enjoying life in the ministerial ranks.

I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that I am wearing the tie of the Armed Forces and Parliament Trust. More of those ties are being seen around the Corridors of the Palace. I was one of the first three guinea-pigs who entered the Armed Forces and Parliament Trust scheme which was introduced by the then Speaker and by Mr. Neil Thorne, who then represented Ilford, South.

I have found membership of the trust to be an extremely enjoyable and illuminating experience. One thing it has taught me is the importance of Ministry of Defence establishments, in North Yorkshire, not least the importance of the Royal Air Force base at Linton-on-Ouse where I was placed for my year on the scheme.

North Yorkshire has a fine tradition of Ministry of Defence work. It is home to a number of distinguished regiments and armed forces. Apart from RAF Linton-on-Ouse, my constituency has the newly commissioned early warning station at RAF Fylingdales up on the moors. I visited the station some months ago to see the huge work load there with civilian jobs of some quality involved in the preparation of the station and now, thankfully, in its manning.

There are two Ministry of Defence establishments at Strensall—Strensall barracks and the Strensall Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers depot. I shall devote most of my remarks to that depot. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, our right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced on Tuesday the intention to close the REME depot at Strensall. Other matters have affected North Yorkshire Ministry of Defence establishments in recent months and have given rise to some concern.

The future of the support command for the RAF establishment at Harrogate, where more than 1,000 civilians are employed, is still not settled. I must tell the Minister, on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks), that many of us are still unconvinced by the Government's arguments for the removal of those jobs from North Yorkshire to Brampton and to RAF Wyton in Cambridgeshire. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear it in mind that we are still not convinced of the Government's case on that and that he will respond to our request for more information about the costings which do not seem to us to have been properly worked through.

There are, however, some bright spots, and it would be wrong to concentrate exclusively on the potential problems stemming from proposed closures. At Leeming and at Catterick there has been a substantial enhancement of armed forces and civilian personnel requirements—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks will refer, in the hope of some reassurance from the Minister on the future of Catterick following the announcement this week of the proposed transfer of the Royal Air Force Regiment from Catterick to Suffolk.

We are also grateful that at York, at the Imphal barracks in Fulford, the former north-east district headquarters is to have an enhanced role, following "Options for Change". The new eastern district headquarters will take on an even more important role than before, which is good news for many of my constituents in greater York who work at the Imphal headquarters.

Equally, it would be churlish not to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) who, as Secretary of State, piloted through the "Options for Change" programme, listened to our entreaties and retained all the Yorkshire regiments—a much-deserved retention because of their fine traditions and recruitment records. That action did not go unnoticed.

The latest string of announcements have nevertheless created the impression that much of the Ministry of Defence activity in North Yorkshire is being shut down. People want to know whether there are to be any more announcements, any more skeletons in the cupboard, or whether we now know the full extent of the changes, which will affect people's jobs, about which they are understandably anxious.

The announcement this week that the REME depot at Strensall is to be shut down has caused considerable dismay. Two hundred and fifteen civilians work there. The consultation document, of which I have a copy, makes but fleeting and almost dismissive reference to the reasons behind the decision. It offers no properly worked out argument for the closure, referring merely to only 25 per cent. of the work load coming from York and to the fact that the volume of its dependency is not expected to increase in the future.

There follows the sweeping statement that having reviewed the position there is a decision that 41 district workshop at Strensall should close on financial, engineering and operational grounds. That is the sum total of the Government's argument.

That argument does not bear much scrutiny, because 41 Command is the only workshop facility for telecommunications test and calibration in the Ministry of Defence. The closure of the workshop would have far-reaching effects on support for the British Army and all our armed forces establishments. What is more, if the depot is closed, no facility between Leicester and Stirling will provide the support that Strensall provides. About 141 Ministry of Defence establishments depend on Strensall; all would incur higher transport costs, although we are not told how much higher or what the collection arrangements would be.

There has been a suggestion that collection sites might be established. Who would man them? I suggest that there is a real danger of only small savings accruing from the closure going ahead. I do not dismiss the need to find savings in defence expenditure, but in this case those savings could be more than outweighed by the extra costs, because of the logistical difficulties that would ensue from the closure of this fine facility and the consequent dispersal of its professional skills.

Perhaps the Minister can tell us why he and the MoD believe that we can close Strensall and transfer the work to

Catterick or contract it out when no case has been made to support that. I accept that it is about 50 miles away, but the Catterick depot supports the mainline infantry. It will also have extra work when it supports the 6th Armoured Brigade when it returns from Germany in due course. The Strensall depot supports the Rapid Reaction Corps, that jewel in the crown of the "Options for Change" programme.

The Strensall depot provides vehicle and communications equipment maintenance support. The facility at Strensall also provides the Army with flexibility. That was illustrated in May when I drove along the A6 autoroute in France during the last recess. Driving in the opposite direction was a convoy of white United Nations ambulances. They made an impressive sight. Being aware of the troubles and difficulties in Yugoslavia, my wife and I were much relieved by that sight. At long last, we were doing something about the problem. Little did I know then that those ambulances and vehicles were prepared, maintained and serviced for their journey at the Strensall depot in my constituency. In fact, I live round the corner from the depot and perhaps it was rather remiss of me not to notice that all that work was going on.

The Strensall depot was able to prepare those vehicles very quickly and at short notice. That shows the value of the depot to the British Army. We do not know when we will have to call upon our armed forces to respond in times of war, a subject which we had to discuss in this place not so long ago in respect of the middle east, or for relief operations. It would be a retrograde step to shut the Strensall depot when the argument in favour of closure seems so threadbare.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond to my points and perhaps say whether we can come to some better arrangements about the proposal. As I understand it, the normal consultation period with the unions for a closure announcement of this kind is about 20 working days. That is not long enough at the best of times. However, given that the House is to go into recess and many people will be on holiday, it is incumbent on the Minister to respond to the not unreasonable request that the consultation period should be extended and that no formal decision to close Strensall depot should be taken at least until after the House returns after the recess.

I should like to go a stage further than that. In any event, it would be premature to close the depot until the market-testing initiative on contractorisation, referred to in the consultation document, has been carried out. It seems crazy to say that we think that we can settle some of the current work load through contractorisation and that there will be a market-testing initiative to discover whether that is feasible, but we will close the depot before we have the results of the market test initiative. I cannot see the logic in that argument and, understandably, neither can the work force.

We all want to save expenditure and cut waste, particularly in administration. The Strensall and Catterick depots are close to each other and closely interrelated, as has always been the case with the various barracks around North Yorkshire between Catterick, Strensall and Imphal. Given that they are so closely related, why cannot one depot remain as a satellite of the other? At this juncture, I should not like to suggest which way round that should be, because I understand that they are of a similar size, but my suggestion would prevent waste administration and it might lead to the satellite depot shedding some staff, particularly if the contractorisation experiment worked. Expenditure that is likely to be incurred on various military establishments having to send their work loads all around the country, with extra transport and collection costs, would be better spent on maintaining a depot, albeit slimmed down, at one or other site. I suspect that it might be in Strensall, given that Catterick is to expand its operations under the "Options for Change" programme.

I hope that I have demonstrated to my hon. Friend the Minister that the proposal raises many questions and that we need more time to prove that Strensall depot, which has a fine history and fine traditions—I pay tribute to all the staff who have worked there—should be given an opportunity to show that it still has an important role in the support of our armed forces. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that we should have more time to put our case.

1.16 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) for raising this subject and for allowing me a few moments to make a contribution. Like my hon. Friend, I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister is present.

I am prompted to participate in the debate by the announcement on Tuesday that the RAF Regiment is to move from Catterick, after a long association with the town, and be concentrated entirely in Suffolk. We in the Richmond and Catterick area are very sad to see the RAF Regiment go. It has had a long association with the area and it is well liked. Many generations have enjoyed working there. The regiment's relationship with, and contribution to, the local community have been extremely positive. However, we accept that the decision was taken after a long review. The decision is not a surprise. Difficult decisions must be made during the "Options for Change" process. Some battles will be won for North Yorkshire and some will be lost, but we accept that my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues have a difficult decision to make.

I was pleased to receive a letter from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces earlier this week, stating:

> "Everything possible would be done to avoid redundancies amongst the 75 civilian . . . employees at RAF Catterick. The Army is likely to have an alternative use for the base. This could provide job opportunities for the existing civilian employees, and there may also be opportunities for alternative employment in Catterick garrison."

I ask my hon. Friend to ensure that high priority is given to ensuring that those 75 civilian employees will be found alternative employment. I ask him also to make a decision as soon as possible about the future of the base, even though the RAF Regiment is not to leave until the end of 1993 or early 1994. The sooner my hon. Friend decides the future of the base and whether the Army will use it, the better it will be for all concerned and the sooner the local community will know how the matter will develop. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to find an alternative use for the base by the Army.

In many ways, this matter is exceptional. Over the past few years, the extent of Ministry of Defence employment, the number of armed forces and the number of service men based in my constituency have continued to expand, particularly because of RAF Leeming being established as a major air base and the expansion of Catterick garrison. I emphasise to my hon. Friend the Minister that that is

[Mr. William Hague]

extremely welcome in the area. Notwithstanding a few problems of noise compensation that we still have to sort out at RAF Leeming, the local community and the armed forces work extremely well together and have a good relationship. That demonstrates my other point.

The north is an excellent region in which to locate a larger share of the armed forces. It has lower property prices. Money has greater purchasing power because the salaries of those who work in the armed forces are lower. Many people can work close to their homes. The north is an excellent place to locate an ever-increasing proportion of our armed forces.

1.20 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): I begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) for introducing this important debate. I have been much impressed by the concern that he has rightly shown for his constituents and by his expertise on military matters, which he kindly said was due in no small measure to his experience as a guinea pig, as he put it, in the Armed Forces and Parliament Trust.

I listened to both my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) with particular sympathy. I know their constituencies reasonably well. I once aspired to represent the Thirsk and Malton constituency which, following subdivisions, both their constituencies now include. Although my period as a prospective parliamentary candidate was not the most successful episode of my career, I formed a great affection for the people of Yorkshire and a love for the countryside of Yorkshire. Therefore, I have some feeling for the places that my hon. Friends described, such as Strensall and Catterick. So I reply to the debate with some local knowledge as well as on behalf of the Ministry of Defence.

My hon. Friends were right to say that Yorkshire is a county of great military excellence and tradition. This is rather an all-Yorkshire occasion. Although the impartiality of your office precludes you from doing anything but listening to our debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that as the Member for Parliament for Pontefract and Castleford you concur with the kind tributes that were paid to the excellence of the various regiments and depots in Yorkshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), who is present on the Front Bench in his silent capacity as a Government Whip, has also expressed great concern on behalf of his constituents who are affected by some of the decisions about Harrogate. He will also echo the good and justified tributes that were paid to the various installations and regiments in Yorkshire.

Some 17,500 Ministry of Defence personnel are based in Yorkshire. The county has the fifth highest number of MOD posts in the United Kingdom. Pro rata to population, that rises to third highest. In addition, the Ministry spends some £200 million annually on equipment in the Yorkshire and Humberside area, providing direct employment for about 4,000 more people.

Among the main defence establishments in North Yorkshire is the large garrison at Catterick. Of course, the city of York has been chosen for the headquarters of the new enlarged eastern district. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale has already mentioned the various RAF bases and fine regiments, so we can safely say that Yorkshire is well represented in the order of battle of both the RAF and the Army. There are three county regiments—the Green Howards, the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment and the Duke of Wellington's Regiment—in addition to contributions from other regiments.

The problem that my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale has rightly raised of some 189 jobs at the 41 district workshop in York must be seen from the perspective from the great pride that everyone feels about the wider defence presence in Yorkshire. The Ministry faces some difficult decisions as a result of "Options For Change". I fully understand and sympathise with the shock that my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Ryedale and his constituents must have felt when we announced that we proposed to close 41 district workshop in the constituency. I certainly appreciate his anxiety about the effect that the closure will have on employment in the area.

I welcome the opportunity to explain why we have to make reductions in the Army's static workshop organisation and why we propose that the workshop in York should be among those to be closed.

The Army's static workshop organisation now consists of a workshop in Northern Ireland, three base workshops in England, nine district workshops in England, Scotland and Wales, a small workshop at Long Marston and one base workshop in Germany. The organisation as a whole is working at well below capacity: overheads are high and greater efficiency could be achieved.

"Options for Change" requires a significant restructuring of the Army, and although the variety and diversity of equipment—will remain largely unchanged, there will be a considerable reduction in the volume of the repair load. It has been calculated, for instance, that the base repair load —that is, the in-depth overhaul of equipment, will reduce in the post-options era to less than 60 per cent. of the former requirement. We have therefore had to conduct a review to assess the number of workshops required to support the Army in future.

The district workshops, of which York and Catterick are examples, are located in areas of Army concentration throughout the United Kingdom. They provide first and second line support for Regular Army and Territorial Army units and undertake a limited amount of base repair work. The current in-house work load is of the order of 1·4 million man hours a year. In addition, some 800,000 man hours of work are carried out under contract. It has been calculated that the redeployment of units to the United Kingdom from the British Army of the Rhine will raise the annual in-house load to some 1·5 million man hours. However, even this will leave a significant amount of spare capacity in the workshops and we reluctantly, but inevitably, came to the conclusion that some should be closed, including, I regret to say, 41 workshop in York.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale asked questions about a specific problem, to which I should like to reply, and he made certain requests. First, he asked, justifiably, whether 20 days was too short a period for meaningful consultations and whether we could do a little better than that, particularly when the House is in recess and some people are away on holiday. I can grant that request easily, because the Ministry's consultation period provides for a minimum of 20 days, which can be extended if the closure raises difficult issues, as we acknowledge it

does, and if the unions or the local Member of Parliament asks for an extension. I hope that my hon. Friend feels that we have met him on that request.

My hon. Friend asked whether we could arrange for the necessary clearances for him to visit the workshop. We shall be pleased to make those arrangements for him.

I find it harder to grant my hon. Friend's second request to postpone the closure pending the outcome of the market-testing initiative. I cannot agree to that, because of the huge over-capacity in the workshop organisation, which will increase. There is simply insufficient work load to maintain the workshop organisation at its present level, and closures must be made. The market-testing initiative will be carried out only in the workshops that remain.

Next my hon. Friend asked whether the two workshops in Yorkshire could be retained, one as a satellite of the other. Again, I cannot see my way to agreeing to that. It simply would not resolve the problem of the great over-capacity that exists in the Army static workshop organisation.

My hon. Friend also asked whether we were worried that there would be no workshop capable of performing highly technical telecommunications work in the calibration field, particularly between Stirling and Leicester. I can confirm that there is no facility at Catterick. We expect to place specialised work out to local contract repair. There will be a good opportunity for many local telecommunications companies. In addition, where really specialised work is necessary, local collecting points will be provided to move the work, where necessary, to other Army workshops. We can give further details of that in the consultation period. I hope that I have dealt with the main points of my hon. Friend's plea on behalf of Strensall.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks asked about the RAF Regiment and the changes affecting Catterick. I was delighted by his warm tribute to that regiment. Last Tuesday my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced changes to the future size and shape of the regiment. The reorganisation follows an exhaustive study which has been an important part of our programme to create a more efficient structure for the RAF for the future.

I assure my hon. Friend that it is the required size and shape of the RAF Regiment, which was carefully examined, which will result in the announced move from Catterick. I believe that the majority of the affected RAF staff will be relocated to other RAF Regiment duties. Unfortunately, there will be some officer redundancies, but we hope that the alternative use of RAF Catterick by the Army will provide job opportunities for the existing civilian work force. It may also create job opportunities at the Catterick garrison. I understand my hon. Friend's concern, but I think that I am right to say that, in this case, the effect on his constituents and the local economy will not be great.

Difficult decisions have had to be made. I am afraid that I cannot please all my hon. Friends in their requests. Yorkshire has 17,500 service men. Therefore, I hope that my hon. Friends will agree that the changes are fairly small and will not unduly affect the military situation and its installations in Yorkshire.

Southern Africa (Drought)

1.30 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity on this last day before the summer recess to debate, albeit briefly, the current drought in southern Africa. It is no coincidence that this debate follows a substantial and significant one in the other place yesterday, because many Members on both sides in both places, as well as the Government, are aware of the enormity of the potential disaster facing Africa today. It is because that disaster could be so unprecedented in its scale that it is vital that the House should speak on behalf of the country and say what we should and could do to prevent it.

Two of today's earlier debates have centred on regeneration and job retention in docklands and in north Yorkshire respectively. Nothing that we debate about social security, employment security or the domestic security of our residents is in the same league as the debate on southern Africa. Many members of the public understand that; therefore, we must adopt a wholly different type of stance in addressing this issue.

My interest in southern Africa goes back a long time, but only a month ago today, at the invitation of the director of Oxfam, I had the privilege to touch down with him and four others in Zambia for a five-day visit, followed by a similar length visit to Zimbabwe. To be completely honest, I think that Oxfam originally hoped that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) would undertake the visit. He was unable to go, so I was asked to go in his place.

The new director of Oxfam, Dr. Bryer, accompanied me, together with Justin Forsyth of Oxfam, who is expert in southern African affairs, and its press officer, Liam Curran. We were also accompanied by an experienced BBC television crew, Bill Hamilton and Baz Solanki, who have visited Albania and elsewhere and reported vividly from other countries as they go through major crisis.

The purpose of our visit was clear. Reports had reached us that the sub-region of southern Africa was facing the worst drought in living memory. Oxfam is 50 years old this year, and throughout its existence it has taken up the challenge of trying to respond to disaster and famine throughout the world. It believed that the best way to respond to this drought was to send a delegation so that people could see with their own eyes and report back.

Within two days of returning from Zimbabwe and Zambia, we went to see the Minister for Overseas Development and her officials, who received us courteously. I believe that that meeting was effective. I had talks with the Labour spokesman, the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), and her colleague the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). On the following Monday, I visited the Vice President of the European Commission, with the Oxfam team responsible for such matters. Oxfam officials have also had several discussions with officials in the Overseas Development Administration and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office elsewhere in the United Kingdom and in Brussels.

We came back to present the message of what could and should be done. A great thing about the visit was the way in which it was planned. I take no responsibility for that, but applaud the way in which Oxfam thought it through. By taking an experienced and competent television crew,

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we could report back direct to the widest public in this country. People also saw the films in other countries across the channel. In the week that we came back there was BBC television coverage on four days—morning, lunchtime, afternoon and evening—as well as on children's "Newsround" later that week.

The result is that we have been able to contribute to what the debates yesterday and today seek to do—to raise the profile of the issue and to ensure that in this country we are not unaware of the severity of the crisis.

I do not want to go over what was said yesterday in another place, as those who follow our proceedings can read the report and it would be repetitious simply to go over facts. However, I urge people to refer to that debate and to view it alongside this one.

I want to describe the present picture, and to share some reflections on my visit. I am grateful that I had the benefit of an earlier conversation with the Minister on the subject, and I hope that we can identify new ways in which we can do something. The purpose of the debate is not merely to make people aware of what is going on, but to make them realise that we can do something as a country and we can use our influence at home and abroad.

Briefly, I shall describe the scale of the problem. It is not a cliché to say that it is the worst drought in living memory, and that is confirmed by the facts. The region is normally a net exporter of food to the rest of the world, especially grain and cereals, and it is the grain basket of Africa. It is a part of Africa that is normally self-sufficient and is not regarded as subject to this sort of crisis. Because there was no rain last year, and because in some parts of southern Africa there has been no rain, or below average rainfall, for the past 11 or 12 years—we were told that by some of the people that we visited—the crisis has not suddenly arrived but has built up over many years.

The figures have been identified by the United Nations, according to the best advice given to it. Potentially, 18 million people could die of famine. That is more than one quarter of the population of this country. People have already died because of the drought in southern Africa. Because of weakness through lack of food, they have not been able to survive. We visited villages in the eastern provinces of Zambia and the southern part of Zimbabwe where, within the preceding day or two, people had received their first food for weeks. They had been living on roots and berries, which have no nutritional value but give a little moisture and a semblance of food. In some cases they had rubbed the leaves of plants to make salt, which was the only other food for them to eat.

Water is the life source, and some people either have none or they find a little stagnant water left in the bottom of a pool perhaps a mile away. They might find a drop of water in an almost empty well or in a borehole in the back of beyond away from the villages. Rivers and streams are dry, and reservoirs that normally contain 100 ft of water are all but empty.

We visited places where the villagers, often women, had to walk 10 miles to borrow a bucket—because they had none—and walk another 10 miles to collect a bucketful of stagnant, polluted water from a source shared by wild animals, and then carry it back to their families. It will not surprise the House to hear that they face not just hunger and malnutrition but the diseases that follow, such as cholera, TB, malaria and dysentery. Already, there have been significant numbers of deaths among the elderly and children, and even the healthy middle-aged.

We were told by one family that it had 20 cattle last year. Fifteen had died through lack of water and food and the remaining five were too weak to be of any use. In many parts, people have no cattle to produce food for them, and their income and wealth have been destroyed through no fault of their own. Instead of acres, mile upon mile, of fields growing green, providing crops for the people of rural southern Africa and others, there is a brown horizon yielding nothing.

Relief agencies and Governments have been asked to respond and provide the grain needed immediately. But including the other crisis area of Africa, the horn, we are still about $550 million short of the money needed to buy the food and provide the aid needed to meet the immediate crisis.

The countries concerned are democracies which are grappling to cope with imposed, though agreed, terms for their economic development. Those terms were laid down by the International Monetary Fund. They are doing their best to turn old demand economies into capitalist economies. They are removing subsidies and thereby increasing food prices to their people. They are trying to balance their books and pay off their debts, and so far they have not defaulted.

In addition to trying to cope with incredibly difficult economic problems—far more difficult than we face in the present recession—they are facing additional hardships such as the prevalence of HIV and Aids and thousands of refugees coming over the border from countries such as Mozambique, where there is war as well as famine. So this is an accumulated crisis.

There has been a good response from Britain and the European Community, but we need a general awareness that more must be done. A part of the world that can normally look after itself—and look after us in large measure—is saying not that it needs handouts but that it cannot now do everything to help itself. Given the tools, it will do the job, but it desperately requires help to overcome the immediate crisis. It needs food and cash, and we must ship it quickly through the coastal into the landlocked countries in the centre of the region. We must ensure that it is distributed effectively. That will enable us to prevent drought from creating famine and disaster from becoming an unparalleled crisis in the history of the continent. We can also create the possibility of survival and restructuring thereafter. For that, many obvious things are needed: seed, fertiliser, tools, tractors, technical equipment, and so on.

To show how desperate the position is, may I complete the picture by illustrating the consequences? If there is no water, the hydroelectric scheme cannot produce as much electricity. Therefore, it cannot supply as much industrial production and industry will lay off people. Those people become unemployed and produce less, sell less and earn less. The country's balance of payments problems are therefore far more difficult to resolve. So the whole of the economy and everyone in the region are directly affected as a result of what may appear on the surface to be a crisis of the rural economy.

The agenda for our response should be as follows. First, as President of the European Community for the remainder of this year, it will be within our term of office to decide about this issue, and we must ensure that the

shortfall in pledges is soon made up. Secondly, we must ensure that the pledges are converted into effective delivery, a point which my hon. Friends and I made strongly to the Vice President of the Commission, when we said that it was all very well making a pledge, but we must deliver the goods. Thirdly, to judge by Baroness Chalker's reply in another place yesterday, there will be an opportunity next week to see whether we can alter the terms of debt repayment—the Trinidad terms—so that Zambia, which is in a different International Monetary Fund category, does not have to repay its debt either at all or under such rigorous terms.

In much of the correspondence which the television programmes have generated for me, people have said that we must write off the debt once and for all to give those countries a chance of survival. Lastly, there are opportunities to alter what everyone in those countries talks about—structural adjustment. That means altering the structure of those countries' economies so that they are not required to be so economically and financially self-righteous that they cannot carry out their principal duty: to feed the people whom they are elected to represent.

I wish to finish with a personal comment. I make it only because I hope that it will give the debate the immediacy that it deserves. When I arrived back at Heathrow, I was greeted with the devastating news that an elder brother of mine had died, having caught malaria on his honeymoon. This has been reported in the press and I repeat it only for that reason. If the death of one person in one's own family can have such a personal devastating effect on so many, as other colleagues in the House have experienced in their lives, I hope that that will persuade us of the reason and urgency to do something about these 18 million people who are already suffering while we still have the time to do something about it. I hope that we will realise that, for many millions of people, what we decide this summer is nothing less than a matter of life and death.

1.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on initiating this Adjournment debate. It is timely and he has spoken well and with great feeling as he described, in his closing words, the crisis facing southern Africa. I know of his visit to southern Africa with Dr. Bryer and Mr. Forsyth and of his discussions with my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker. If I do not manage to answer all his points in the few minutes left, I am comforted by the fact that he has had a full discussion with my right hon. and noble Friend.

The hon. Gentleman's concern is shared by everyone in the House. It is important to appreciate the scale of the problem and to give the threat of famine in the region its due place on the international agenda. The drought, both in terms of its geographical spread and its severity, may be —as described by the hon. Gentleman—the worst to affect the southern part of that continent this century. With regional production of basic food grains down to about 40 per cent. of the normal level, and with shortage of water leading to the widespread slaughter of livestock and to an increase in diseases among the most vulnerable groups, especially the elderly, up to 18 million people are at serious risk. A region which can normally expect to be largely self-sufficient in cereal crops is having to import more than 11 million tonnes of food.

These basic facts provide some measure of the problem. Lives are at real risk and, as the hon. Gentleman said, there is grave threat also to the processes of economic and political reform which have been making significant headway in the region over the past year or so. These are threats which the international community must recognise and act quickly and decisively to avert.

The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to say that Britain has taken a leading role in responding to the crisis. He had discussions with President Mugabe, who confirmed that. We provided an initial package of assistance for the worst-hit countries at the beginning of March and, since then, the Minister for Overseas Development has made bilateral commitments of aid which, so far, amount to more than £48 million. This aid has been balance of payments support to help cope with the burden of extra food imports, food aid, technical assistance and support for both local and British-based voluntary agencies.

The Government have also pressed for a generous response from the European Community. I shall say more about that later. On 4 May the Development Council approved additional food aid totalling 800,000 tonnes. Some 370,000 tonnes of that additional aid will go to southern Africa and we shall contribute more than £11 million towards the cost.

The drought appeal conference in Geneva in June—at which, sadly, my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development was the only Minister from a donor county —produced a positive response from the international community as a whole. In terms of the specific categories of assistance covered by the appeal, pledges made at the conference, which came to about US$600 million, fell short of the appeal target of $850 million, but these included substantial commitments from some major donors, including notably the Americans and the Japanese. Other donors, including the Dutch, the Canadians and ourselves, have made substantial extra commitments since the conference. We shall continue to take every available opportunity, both in the European Community under our presidency and in other international forums, to urge others to join in responding generously to the needs of southern Africa.

It would be wrong to imply that the solution to the crisis is solely help from outside. The countries of the region have acted with commendable speed to put the machinery of co-operation in place. A regional task force of representatives from the member states of the southern African development co-ordination conference was set up in April. Six transport corridor groups have been established to supervise the importation of food, and they are liaising closely with national emergency co-ordinators and with the logistics advisory centre now operating in Harare with the support of the world food programme. It is encouraging to note that this co-operation transcends political differences, with the port and railway authorities of southern Africa playing a vital role in the massive logistical effort that is now under way. If there is a positive aspect to the drought, it is this readiness on the part of all the countries of the region to act together at a time of crisis. That gives some comfort for the future.

I am glad to be able to tell the House that, after discussions that lasted well into last night, agreement has

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been reached in Rome on secure corridors for the safe passage of relief supplies in and through Mozambique. That is excellent news not only for the people of Mozambique but for those in neighbouring landlocked countries, and it is a further step towards the peace that Mozambique so badly needs.

I said that I would say a few more words about the European Community response, which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey mentioned. Given the nature of the procedure involved, I consider that the approval given on 4 May to a substantial programme of additional food aid was something of an achievement. Of course, as the hon. Gentleman also said, delivery is equally important. I assure him that the Commission is fully alive to the need for a proper delivery process.

Nearly half the Community's total food aid programme for 1992 had been shipped or was on the point of shipment by the end of June. Another enormously important factor, of which I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware, is the vital necessity for food aid shipments from the Community and from other bilateral and multilateral donors to be managed and co-ordinated properly over the next few months so as to ensure an even flow of supplies between now and the next harvest, in March.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As the Minister knows, the House will be in recess for the next three months. We are told that the crisis will intensify in September. Can the hon. Gentleman assure us now that, if things get worse, every effort will be made by the Government and by the EC, and that all the machinery is in place, to ensure that emergency action is taken to send food to the people as soon as possible? As the Minister has said, pledges have been made and have not yet been delivered. That is a matter for great concern to the House.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the four minutes remaining to me, I had intended to deal with some of those points.

My right hon. and noble Friend referred specifically to the drought at the meeting of the Development Council of the European Parliament yesterday. I have no doubt that the subject will be on the agenda at the next Development Council, and that both my right hon. and noble Friend and our colleagues in the EC will take it extremely seriously during the coming months.

The Paris Club is meeting next week and will consider Zambia's request for debt relief. That is the appropriate forum for the consideration of debt relief issues, and we shall continue to work there for the application of more generous terms on the lines of the original Trinidad proposals suggested by the Prime Minister.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey asked about Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is different from Zambia, in that it has been able to service its debts in full, and thus to maintain its creditworthy status. We understand that it has no plan to seek debt relief. Indeed, because it is anxious to maintain its creditworthy status in commercial and financial markets, it does not intend to change that approach.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the deaths of livestock, and recovery and rehabilitation problems. Of course, there is a severe impact on livestock. In Zimbabwe, for example, 40 per cent. of commonly owned and smallholder cattle may die. In the commercial sector, numbers are likely to fall by as much as 25 per cent. The threat to wildlife is mainly confined to the south-east of the country, where a major cull is being carried out to help to ensure that at least some of the animals survive.

We know that emergency humanitarian aid is not enough, and that we must consider recovery and rehabilitation. That must be the next step, and it will include helping to rebuild livestock holdings and ensuring that supplies of seed are available for the next planting season.

There can be no doubt that the people of southern Africa face great hardship over the coming months. The task of the international community will be to ensure that hardship does not turn into grave loss of life and widespread dislocation of the region's political and economic structures. That is the threat which must be faced and overcome.

I assure hon. Members that the Government will keep a careful eye on developments in the region in the coming months and will remain in close touch with their European partners and with other bilateral and multilateral donors. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will visit some of the worst-hit countries in September and will have the opportunity then to assess what more may need to be done.

I will conclude on a slightly more hopeful note on significant developments which are under way in southern Africa. We have seen progress towards the ending of long-standing conflicts in Angola and Mozambique, towards economic renewal and more open and accountable government, and towards a transition to multiracial democracies——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was announced a few minutes ago that the German central bank has rejected the appeal from the Chancellor of the Exchequer and has increased its discount rates by 0·75 per cent., which will clearly have a fundamental effect on British economic policy. May I ask you whether it would be in order for the Government, if they so wished, to make a statement during the next hour on the implications of this alarming decision for British economic policy?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have received no notice of any Minister intending to make such a statement. I think it rather unlikely that there will be such a request.

Occupational Pension Schemes

2.1 pm

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate occupational pension schemes. The schemes have a membership of about 11 million people and are important in this country. Some 300,000 schemes are in operation. The debate on pensions over recent years is welcome. As our population ages and people can look forward to periods of retirment of 20 to 30 years, the need for properly funded retirement via occupational pensions and state pensions is increasingly important.

There has been a great deal of success in occupational pension schemes, and we should start on that basis. We should mention that, in 1979, 54 per cent. of pensioners had a second income from an occupational pension scheme. That figure has now risen to 69 per cent., which is very welcome. We should also recognise that, in addition to occupational pension schemes, the number of people who can supplement their income has doubled from savings during that period. That is most welcome. The number of people who own property as another asset has increased during the period. As the wealth of the nation grows, pensioners can participate in that wealth, which is to be approved of greatly.

I want to bring a number of points before the House. One of the first problems that the industry and Government may face in coming months is surpluses. The fact that surpluses have built up in pension funds over the past 12 to 14 years is a credit to the economic conditions that have existed for the principal part of that time. The key point is what to do with those surpluses.

Who owns the surpluses in pension funds? I suggest that ownership of pension funds must lie with the employees and with the members of the pension fund. That key point must be accepted. The argument is helped by recent judgments in the European Court. The case of Barber *v.* Guardian Royal Exchange established that pensions are deferred pay. Deferred pay, by its nature, must belong to the person who has earned the salary. Ownership is very much in the hands of the employees.

I do not welcome the way in which, in recent years, the surpluses that have been built up in pension funds have been attacked by predators and over-enthusiastic companies. I approved of the Conservative social security legislation which was introduced with the principal objective of placing limitations on what such surpluses can be used for. That was an excellent initiative, but it has still to be applied. The sooner the new rules are applied the better.

Other tactics, perhaps not as overt as taking over company pension schemes and creaming off their assets or taking loans from them, also give rise to anxiety. I refer to certain subliminal activities which have come to my attention—for instance, the practice of placing directors in the membership of an employee pension fund and allowing them to take up and backdate their benefit entitlements in the fund, following which, six or nine months later, they are given a transfer out of the fund and into their own executive scheme, taking with them a high transfer value. This causes concern among members of pension schemes and it must be dealt with.

Some employers are over-enthusiastic about taking contribution holidays. Some of them take employer contribution holidays of between five and 10 years. Given the ever-lengthening period of retirement these days, there will be ever-increasing demands on pension funds, so they will require increased resources. That in turn will require increased contributions, so employers must not set a bad example by taking these contribution holidays.

The security of pension funds has been much on our minds, given the tragic circumstances surrounding the Maxwell pensioners, but we must be careful not to over-legislate and place too heavy a burden on the 300,000 pension schemes in this country which operate successfully and effectively on behalf of employees.

Much of the great debate, inside and outside this Chamber, surrounds schemes with large memberships—multinational pension fund schemes, for instance. However, as we know, the vast majority of occcupational pension schemes are run by small manufacturing companies and small chains of shops with 20 or 30 staff. It may be right to impose on larger schemes professional actuaries who have to attend board meetings and be subject to increased compliance with legal requirements —that may tighten up on the investment and management of the large funds. We do not want, however, to place an excessive burden on smaller schemes. After all, where would the money to comply with more legislation come from? It would have to come from the pension funds themselves, to the detriment of their members.

Much of the protection required is already in place. Trustees must be better educated to know their rights and what to look for as they attend trust meetings. They need to know more as they take on responsible positions in companies and in occupational pension schemes.

We also welcome the review by Professor Goode initiated by the Department of Social Security. Most of us were extremely impressed with the quality and expertise of that distinguished committee. We have a great deal of confidence in the quality, knowledge and expertise of those people to produce sensible solutions which will be for the benefit of pensioners.

We must also consider portability. The nature of employment has changed. In the 1930s and 1940s, it was normal to think that people would spend 30 or 40 years with one company in one job. That was particularly so in the north-east of England. People would work in a mine from the time that they left school until they retired, or they would stay with a shipyard for their entire working lives. However, the nature of employment has changed. People change the nature of their duties and their professions and jobs. They also change employment on many occasions.

Under current legislation and the operation of occupational pension schemes, people who are mobile and move between different pension schemes can be disadvantaged because benefits have to be left or frozen within a particular scheme or transfers must be taken from a scheme, but the transfers are not a full and accurate reflection of the true value of the contribution in that fund.

We must recognise that there is a greater need for portability and mobility in the work force. We must encourage that, because it is good for the economy and for business. We must make it as easy as possible for people to move between jobs and to secure and build up pension benefits. Some people might argue that that is the responsibility of the individual, that people should take that decision and on their heads be it. However, if people fail to make adequate pension provisions during their working lives, they will become the responsibility of the

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state, which the taxpayer has to fund. We can legitimately take an interest in ensuring that people make adequate contributions into pension schemes to secure adequate benefits in retirement.

One cannot mention portability without referring briefly to the position in the European Community. I should welcome comments from my hon. Friend the Minister about pension benefits in the European arena because it would be helpful to draw comparisons. As we head towards a single market, the picture that I drew earlier of increased mobility in this country will be increased many times over. People will take advantage of the tremendous opportunities available through a single market to move between different employers and to change their professions, not just within the United Kingdom, but within the European Community.

Such movement raises questions about the funding of those pensions. The original European communication issued in 1991 by the Commission contained a provision for portability of pension benefits and for securing pension benefits as people move between member states. That was very welcome, but that provision was not adopted in the final document and that was very disappointing.

One appreciates that there are problems with different tax structures and that it is difficult to allow tax benefits in different member states. It is difficut to achieve harmonisation in that area. However, if we want a true, single European market and true mobility of labour, we must address that problem. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would comment on that.

Many other things can be done for pensioners which relate not directly to pension schemes, but to the economic conditions that surround pensioners. We often hear from the Opposition the accusation that inflation is not the most important economic indicator. It is all right for hon. Members who will secure index-linked pension benefits, but, for the vast majority of people—11 million—who do not have index-linked pension benefits, inflation and the control of inflation are of dire importance and are vital to their security and to maintaining the value of their pension benefits. We must bear that point in mind. We must imagine what it would have done to an occupational pension scheme in 1977, when the rate of inflation was 23 per cent. and a pension fund was limited to an increase of 5 per cent. Clearly, the Government have a duty, and the control of inflation for the benefit of pensioners is paramount.

The maintenance of low rates of taxation is another way of assisting occupational pensioners. The introduction of the 20p band for pensioners was a great assistance, particularly for pensioners receiving state and occupational benefits. The welcome increase in income support for pensioners is also a great assistance. There are things that the Government can do and I am pleased to say that they are doing them successfully.

If we want increased pension benefits, an adequate standard of living for an aging population and a decade of retirement, which is an excellent idea, we must strive towards flexibility of retirement ages. It is nonsense to suggest that everybody reaches an appropriate retirement age at exactly the same time. Individuals have different approaches to when they would like to exercise their retirement benefits. The ability to fund them is the key.

The individual must accept that it is his responsibility to fund pension benefits and pension schemes. Perhaps in the past we were used to getting our pension benefits on the cheap, certainly compared with other European Community states. Contributions by our employees are at the low end of the scale. The individual must say, "If I want to secure those benefits and to choose my date of retirement, those benefits need to be funded." That is the responsibility of the individual and the individual alone.

2.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates), first, on obtaining the debate and, secondly, on the extremely lucid way in which he has made a wide range of points. His speech follows well on his excellent and well-acclaimed maiden speech on housing. My hon. Friend will be able to bring a great measure of judgment and expertise in serving his constituents. It is a tremendous pleasure for me to answer such interesting and thought-provoking thoughts. Given the time constraints, it is unlikely that I shall be able to address each of my hon. Friend's points, but I hope to be able to to respond to the most important.

My hon. Friend is right to welcome the review of trust law which the Government have implemented under Professor Goode. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend for making it clear that a balance is to be struck between, on the one hand, protecting the members of pension funds and making sure that the law is sufficiently tight to protect their assets and future pensions and, as far as possible, to avoid the excesses that we have seen as a result of the Maxwell affair, and, on the other hand, not drawing the rules so tight that they make it impossible for small funds to function or that they provide a major disincentive for employers to set up occupational pension schemes. That is an important balance to be struck. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing it out.

The Government have always been aware that the security of pensions is a major issue. It was addressed in the Social Security Act 1990. Several measures in that Act have been implemented and we are still considering others. That is a tribute to the Government and a refutation of the frequent claim that somehow we know that problems were brewing in occupational pensions two years ago, well before any knowledge of Mr. Maxwell's activities, but did nothing about it. We were already implementing measures or consulting on measures to strengthen the law.

We took cognisance of the balance that my hon. Friend discussed when we introduced the self-investment regulations, because we wanted to limit self-investment because we recognised that it was in the interests of members of pension funds to do so. However, we did not want to limit it in such a way that we would cause funds and employers to wind up prematurely or make it impossible for them to function sensibly within whatever limits we introduced. Therefore, there was a period of consultation before we introduced the 5 per cent. limit. I suggest to my hon. Friend that that is evidence of our great desire to maintain the balance to which he referred.

My hon. Friend was right to put occupational pensions in the overall context of pensioner incomes and to assess how far occupational pensions have contributed to the welfare of Britain's pensioners. He asked me to make clear what pension benefits exist in the rest of Europe. In many

of our European competitor countries highly developed occupational pension schemes such as we have here do not exist. Even in countries that have large occupational pensions schemes such as Germany or Holland, the schemes are not all run on exactly the same principles.

There is a healthy mix between private and public provision in Britain. Perhaps a good demonstration of that is the fact that the average income from occupational pensions is almost exactly the same as the state pension. The state pension makes a significant contribution to a pensioner's income. It is precisely that healthy mix which enables us to sustain an increasing pensioner population and maintain services for our pensioners which are not readily available in the rest of Europe.

I shall take the request of my hon. Friend to draw some comparisons with Europe. In much of the rest of Europe people already have to work much longer for their pension. For example, in Denmark the retirement age is 67. In the Netherlands people must have 50 years of insurance before they even qualify for a pension. The pension received by people who live in France or Germany depends on how much they have earned. Low earners end up with extremely low pensions.

In Britain a basic state pension is available to all with a contributions record. In both France and Germany people pay health insurance out of their pension. In Britain national insurance contributions stop when people retire. They simply draw their pension. Only Britain provides a separate pension for a spouse who has not worked. As that represents some 60 per cent. of the basic pension, it makes an enormous difference in any European comparisons.

In other countries, assessments for income support or its equivalent take account of children's income as well as that of the pensioner. In this country, we consider solely the income of pensioners. As my hon. Friend pointed out, half our pensioners own their homes and those at the poorer end of the scale can receive help with rent of up to 100 per cent., whereas housing costs are a major drain on pensioners' incomes abroad.

In France, pensioners pay £4·50 a day for the first week in hospital. In this country pensioners have no deductions for the first six weeks. In Belgium, they pay up to 10 per cent. of the cost of their treatment and in some other countries there are no automatic free prescriptions for pensioners or there is a system, for example as in France, where pensioners are entitled to free medicine but have to pay and claim back the cost. In most other countries, the cost of living is higher. That puts into context the good deal that pensioners have, if we look outside the narrow provisions of the state pension.

In the past 13 years, there have been significant improvements in pensioners' average incomes. Our policy to encourage such improvements has been in two strands. First, we have pledged—and have succeeded in ensuring—that basic state pensions provide a secure foundation for retirement, by increasing them in line with the movement in prices. Secondly, we have encouraged private provision for retirement, both through personal and occupational pension schemes, and by aiming to create a stable economic environment in which savings and investments can grow and maintain their value.

It was important that my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh drew attention to the role of the control of inflation in promoting pensioners' incomes. He was right not merely to rely on the automatic uprating of occupational pension schemes but instead to point to central economic policy.

As there is no Opposition Front-Bench spokesman in the Chamber it might be rather ungenerous to draw the obvious comparison with the 1970s, when many pensioners' savings were effectively wiped out and when few of them—or far fewer than today—enjoyed the comfort of an occupational pension in addition to their state pension. Since 1979, pensioners' incomes from savings have more than doubled, whereas under the last Labour Government they fell by 16 per cent., and average income from occupational pensions has nearly doubled over the same period. The number of recently retired pensioners receiving income from occupational pensions has increased from 54 per cent. in 1979 to 69 per cent. today.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Hear, hear.

Miss Widdecombe: That is a tribute to the success of our occupational pension strategy, and I am glad to have that sign of support from my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), whom I welcome to the Chamber.

While it is true that many pensioners rely on benefits for much of their income, during the past decade private incomes have become much more important. Social security now accounts for only about half of pensioners' average incomes, compared to three fifths at the end of the 1970s. That important shift in emphasis from state to private provision has given us much-needed flexibility in the way that we manage the wide range of pension provisions that my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh referred to.

Real benefit expenditure on the elderly has risen by one third since 1979, but we have been able to target that towards poorer pensioners. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, the previous Secretary of State for Social Security, who is also in the Chamber in another guise, was firmly of the opinion and managed to carry through with great success the focusing of extra help on those pensioners who are generally regarded as being less well off. As a result of those measures, we have been able to reduce the proportion of pensioners among the poorest fifth of the population from 40 to 28 per cent. during the Government's term in office. Even among that group, the extra help that we have been able to give through increased income support pensioner premiums has contributed to a 15 per cent. real increase in their average incomes.

In the remaining minute of my time I shall turn from the general state of pensioners' incomes and European comparisons, on which my hon. Friend invited me to comment, and assure him on an issue on which he touched at the end of his speech when he called for a flexible decade of retirement. Contrary to speculation in the press and from the Opposition, the Government have not yet reached a view on how to equalise state pension ages. We are wholly committed to equalisation, but we have not decided on any one method. I can assure my hon. Friend that a flexible decade or flexible period of retirement in any one of a number of forms is under consideration. It is one of four principal options being considered by the Government. When we finally reach our conclusions we

[Miss Widdecombe]

shall have taken into account the expert advice that we have received from him. I conclude by again thanking my hon. Friend for raising this important subject.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is fortuitous that the Leader of the House is by your right hand, which is where he should be. Have you had any indication from the Government that there will be, even at this eleventh hour, a statement about the plan to confiscate Scottish water? I note from yesterday's proceedings that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry did the decent thing and made an important statement to Parliament about the proposals to privatise Parcelforce. We learn from the newspapers that the Government plan to steal Scotland's water. It would be an outrage if Parliament were to break up for the longest recess in living memory without our knowing what the Government plan for that most precious of natural resources, Scottish water.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have received no information that any Minister intends to make a statement, and I think it highly unlikely.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): Further to that point of order——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it on the same point of order?

Mr. Watson: It is, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but I have ruled on that.

Bolton General Hospital (Ward Closure)

2.31 pm

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): The subject of this debate is the closure of a long-stay, continuing care ward for elderly patients in my constituency. The closure was carried out without any statutory consultation procedure. The issues involved far transcend the closure of one ward; they go to the root of the whole policy of the district health authority on long-stay, continuing care in the three constituencies of Bolton.

The Minister may not be aware that, following a debate in 1981 that I initiated to get the Bolton hospital centralised on one site, money is only now coming forward to build the remainder of what is to be the new Bolton general hospital, updated into a facility ready to deal with the care of the people of Bolton.

Bolton district health authority does not seem to have thought through a policy for beds for the long-stay elderly in need of continuing care. The proposal was that one block in Bolton general hospital, H block, was to be used for continuing elderly care until the elderly patients can be transferred off the main site which was to be used for acute patients.

There was a broad-brush approach to consultation in Bolton concerned with the Mereworth exercise. It was intended that patients should then be transferred to another hospital off site. It was to be Hulton hospital. It is an old hospital and lacks modern facilities. It lacks privacy, space in bathrooms and space in dayrooms to give the dignity that elderly people require and quality of life they should have. The district health authority had promised that H block on the Bolton general hospital site —I should tell the House that the different sites are some miles apart—should be maintained until the older hospital some miles away was updated.

We need a clear policy statement from the health authority about how it intends to care for elderly patients. Although it has talked generally about improving the facility at Hulton Lane hospital, to date, that facility has not been upgraded. Now we find that some of H block will be closed despite the promise to maintain it until the other facility was upgraded and ready.

I am not arguing against the proposed new use of the vacant wards, but one should not rob Peter to pay Paul. If the district health authority has a sincere policy for long-term, continuing care for the elderly, it is vital that the facilities for them are updated in line with those in the newer hospital.

One problem is that the district health authority has never appeared to determine how many long-term continuing care beds are required at the hospital. A notional figure of 120 has been bandied about, which appeared in a discussion paper by an eminent consultant. It has never been incorporated into the district health authority's policy. An additional concern is that the health authority has taken no note of the fact that by 2001 the number of people over 85 in Bolton will have increased by 47 per cent.

From April 1993 the local government authority will be responsible for community care. Long-stay continuing care beds in hospitals will be affected by the provisions made by the local authority. People will be aware that those authorities are concerned about whether they can provide the facilities in the first place. Working parties

have only just been set up between the district health authority and the local council to consider the number of beds required. It is high-handed to close wards before those discussions have taken place.

What adds to the local community health council's concern is that on 6 February 1992 health officials in Bolton assured open meetings of the community health council that H block would remain in operation until new developments were completed at the general hospital. They also said that money would be spent on the development of the Hulton Lane hospital. On 5 March, just one month later, it was confirmed, by telephone, to the community health council that H1 ward would close by the end of March. That was done without consultation and the staff were redeployed into other disciplines. A belated consultation exercise is now taking place, but that will do nothing to restore the morale of the staff who have seen a specialist team broken up overnight and dispersed into other specialties.

We used to allege that such arrogant bureaucracy occurred only in eastern European states. Offering consultation once a ward has been closed, the staff redeployed and the patients reallocated is like offering a man who has been hanged a fair trial by those who hanged him.

Consultation must take place when proposals are made about the elderly because they are among the most vulnerable in the community. For physical or mental reasons, many of them cannot put up a fight on their own behalf, and many of their relatives cannot do so because they are elderly.

Guidance is given in the Community Health Council (Amendment) Regulations 1990 about the need for a consumer-orientated strategy among authorities, and it says:

"The principle of making the NHS more responsive to the needs of the consumer is central to the reforms announced in 'Working for Patients'."

It goes on:

"True consumer involvement is more than just a consultation exercise to 'rubber stamp' a decision that a DHA has, in effect, already taken. It involves DHAs in taking the initiative in forging links with their local communities in advance, before there are controversial plans in the offing; this will be best achieved by developing a shared understanding"—

among other things, there being consultation on substantial developments or variations in services. I suppost that Bolton district health authority argues that the change was not substantial, and, no doubt because it is a grey area, it will try to avoid the responsibility of acting in the way suggested. But if we are to build up confidence in the NHS, we must go further than simply following what might be described as the legal regulations. A body —such as the district health authority in this case—that has acted with such arrogance does much to destroy the faith in the NHS of the people of Bolton.

I would not have pressed for today's debate but for the fact that we are due to recess for the summer, and some important questions must be answered. As there is no allocation in this year's estimates for the upgrading of Hulton Lane hospital, we must be told what the upgrading will involve and how much will be spent. Blair hospital in Bolton, another continuing care facility for the elderly has been closed and about £500,000 is expected from its sale. Will any of that money be used for upgrading Hulton Lane hospital? As a result of the premature closure of H1 ward, £280,000 was saved by the authority. Will any of that be used for the upgrading?

Precisely what proposals does the district health authority have? All the goodwill and sympathy in the world will not provide one bathroom in Hulton Lane hospital. Answers to such questions are vital because it has only recently been announced that Bolton hospitals will be going for trust status, and trusts vary from one part of the country to another. The key point is that they are commercial enterprises. Their aim is to be profitable, and once an enterprise changes to a commercial basis, its facilities move along those lines. Even if that does not happen immediately, as the years pass pressure for that activity grows.

Beds for the elderly in need of continual care are a financial liability. It becomes increasingly necessary to ask, now that applications are being made for trust status, what will be the position of long-stay elderly people in Bolton? Those key questions transcend the closure of just one ward. We must ask whether the closure of Blair hospital and H1 are the beginning of a movement, which began without statutory consultation, to remove continuing elderly care from the people of Bolton. If not, what are the district health authority's detailed proposals for the facilities that they will provide? What will they be and how will they be financed? What assurances do we have that, if the NHS trust is approved, it will carry over commitments and obligations made by the district health authority to the people of Bolton? What machinery exists to ensure that those commitments, if made, will be honoured?

It is important to know how the directors of the trust will be appointed and paid and where they will come from. Will their remuneration and position depend on making the hospital profitable or looking after the health of everyone in Bolton, whether young children or long-stay elderly patients?

Those questions must be asked because they go to the fundamental conception of the health service provided in Bolton. Will the remuneration of directors depend on the profitability of the hospital or the hospital's service to the people of Bolton? It is important that, in a free and democratic society, we have adequate consultation so that people's views can be taken into account. The citizens of Bolton should have as much say in the future of their hospitals as any official or board of directors.

Ultimately, the most vulnerable people are the elderly, many of whom had no chance to contribute to private insurance schemes. Most of them contributed during all their working lives to the national health service. They expected—not unjustly—that at the hour of their greatest need the state would provide the facilities to look after them when they could not look after themselves and have no relations who could look after them. Those ideas are, unfortunately, changing, but that is all the more reason for requiring discussion and consultation and explanations before arbitrarily deciding to close a ward or hospital facility. Above all, we depend on the dedication of our nursing staff and doctors.

It is worrying that many consultants and nurses say that they should not talk to Members of Parliament because their jobs could be in jeopardy. My district health authority never refuses to give me information—provided I phrase the question correctly and, in effect, know the answer before I ask it. There must be much more consultation. I am arguing not along political lines but for

[Mr. David Young]

the best future of the people of Bolton. To that extent, my speech may be highly political, but all hon. Members owe their constituents the best and most caring health service possible, and that requires open consultation with the community and its elected representatives.

2.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tim Yeo): I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young) and to congratulate him on bringing before the House the proposal to change the use of ward H1 from continuing care for the elderly to gynaecology services at Bolton general hospital. I know that the hon. Gentleman is interested in securing the welfare of all his constituents and is concerned about the frail elderly. I agree that they are among the most vulnerable members of society. I am also aware that the hon. Gentleman has had a personal involvement with Bolton general hospital in recent months.

I have listened to him with interest and recognise that he has much local knowledge. He shares with the chairman of Bolton health authority, Tom Taylor, a concern that Bolton gets the best available care from the national health service. The health authority is striving to improve the health care of all Bolton residents.

The proposal at issue is part of a process completely to reshape hospital services in Bolton. At the heart of the process is a massive investment by the Government in the local acute hospital that will take it into the next century in the best possible shape.

The broad strategy in Bolton is based on spending £45 million on a regeneration of Bolton general hospital and on concentrating long-stay continuing care for the elderly at Hulton hospital, which is also in Bolton. The genesis of the proposals goes back to November 1988 when the North Western regional health authority asked every district health authority in the region to carry out a strategic planning exercise covering the following 10 years. That exercise was known as Mereworth and Bolton's document was accepted by the regional health authority. As a consequence, the major development at Bolton general hospital costing some £45 million was approved.

For elderly services, the strategy had two aims: first, to provide some 120 beds for continuing care; and, secondly, to locate these in a single hospital. That would benefit elderly patients because they would not be competing for acute services on the same site, and the services could be managed more effectively. There seems to be a broad consensus in support of that overall strategy, which includes the local community health council. Hulton hospital has been chosen to accommodate these elderly patients. It is against that background of broad agreement that we are debating the important step of implementing the strategy.

As I have explained, the health authority aims for 120 continuing care beds. There are presently 146 such beds—72 at Bolton general hospital and 74 at Hulton hospital. Figures from the health authority's consultation document suggest that, for some time, many of these beds have been empty, suggesting, of course, that there are more beds than patients who need them. The proposal to change the use of H1 ward would reduce the number of continuing care beds at Bolton general hospital by 24, leaving a total of 48 beds on that site.

With the 74 beds available at Hulton hospital, the overall total of continuing care beds within Bolton health authority would be 122, which is broadly in line with the long-term target. I understand that continuing care patients already at Bolton general would not be moved but that new admissions would be made to Hulton hospital. I understand that plans are now in hand to upgrade the facilities for continuing care patients at Hulton.

I hope that that makes the background clear. I assure the hon. Gentleman that money has been allocated both this year and next year for upgrading at Hulton. As he said, there is to be a meeting tomorrow at which the longer term allocations are likely to be discussed.

The hon. Member made some remarks about the consultation on the changes. The process of consultation is fundamental to the Government's health strategy, and extensive consultation has taken place elsewhere on the establishment of national health service trusts and also when larger district health authorities are created to improve the ways in which the health needs of patients are assessed and met. Similarly, the guidance issued by the Department of Health makes it clear that the consultation must be a real process. Adequate time must be provided and there must be a wide opportunity for local interests and users to express their views.

Consultation is therefore an integral part of the management process. Many people could speak with knowledge about the situation in Bolton. As the hon. Member has demonstrated today, the House is also one of the arenas in which local issues can be aired. The process of making the health service more responsive to the needs of its consumers is central to the Government's reforms.

Setting up national health service trusts to run hospital services allows health authorities to concentrate on obtaining the best possible services for the residents of their area. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman encourages local people to support the health authority's expression of interest in becoming a fourth wave NHS trust. The trusts remain within the NHS; they are not commercial operations, although they must be efficient and businesslike, in the interests of the patients whom they serve.

There is a well-established process for scrutinising applications for trust status, and the health authority retains a statutory duty to provide for all the health needs of the population. The departmental guidance is clear. Consumers and community health councils, which act as consumers' representatives, must be consulted about any controversial plans. I share the hon. Member's concern that consultation on the change of use of ward H1 took place after the patients were transferred. That is outside the spirit of the consultation process. I shall write to the chairman of the health authority stressing how imperative it is that every effort is made to secure local agreement for the changes.

There has been an element of misinterpretation. A good deal of discussion took place following the publication of the broad strategy document in 1989, and following that discussion there was a consensus among interested parties that the proposed strategy was right for Bolton residents. The health authority took that to mean that component changes within the overall strategy would not be subject to

formal consultation procedures. That, I believe, was a mistake—but it has been corrected and a consultation document was issued in April.

Since then the community health council seems to have acknowledged that the proposal to close the beds is consistent with the strategy. The consultation paper was issued to 49 individuals and representative bodies, and I understand that nine responses have been received.

I sympathise with the sense of unfairness when a change of use takes place before the outcome of consultations is known. That is unsatisfactory. However, the process has now been completed. On the whole, decisions on levels of service should be made locally. Occupancy levels for long-stay beds for the elderly are apparently low, and it is not in the best interests of patients that such a situation should continue. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that the health authority has a record of careful planning.

As I have said, the community health council is not pressing for the ward to be reopened, but its acquiescence to the proposal is contingent on the introduction of a clear plan for upgrading Hulton hospital. I understand that the health authority has such a plan, which will be considered tomorrow.

If, after tomorrow, the CHC presents an objection to the change of use, that must be referred to the regional health authority. If the regional health authority supports the district, the matter will come to the Secretary of State for consideration.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are now almost in the final minute of the Session, and the Government continue to treat Scotland and Scottish Members of Parliament with contempt, refusing to make a statement to the House on the privatisation of Scottish water.

As representatives of Scottish constituencies, we appeal to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to use the office of the Chair to protect the interests of our electors by insisting that a Minister comes to the Chamber and makes an announcement to Scottish Members about what the Government intend to do about Scottish water. Otherwise we, as ordinary Members of the House, will be forced to do whatever we can to ensure that the House does not adjourn until the Government have made a clear statement of their intentions on the privatisation of Scottish water.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The occupant of the Chair is in no position to insist that a Minister comes to the House. As I have already explained to the House——

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already explained the position to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway). I have received no information to the effect that any Minister intends to make any such statement, and I think that it is unlikely to happen now. Mr. Yeo.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not possible, even at this eleventh hour, for you to send for a Minister to come and make a statement, bearing in mind the contempt which the Government obviously have for Parliament and for the people of Scotland? The Government did not even receive a mandate from the people of Scotland, especially not for the proposal to privatise Scotland's water——

It being Three o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House, without Question put, pursuant to the Resolutions [3 July and 9 July], till Monday 19 October.*

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 6 July 1992

TRANSPORT

Expenditure

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the expenditure from his Department by standard regions, showing Greater London as a separate region, for each year from 1987-88 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1987-88 prices.

Mr. Freeman: Estimates of general Government expenditure on transport by standard region for the years 1988-89 and 1989-90, the last two years for which information is available, are given in appendix E of "Public Expenditure Analyses to 1994-95: Statistical Supplement to the Autumn Statement", Cm. 1920. The figures for 1987-88 appear in appendix F of the prior year's publication, Cm. 1520.

The figures are produced only on a cash basis and Greater London expenditure is not separately identified from that of the south-east region.

Ocean Hound

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to detonate or otherwise destroy the wreck of the Brixham Trawler Ocean Hound which currently lies on the ocean bed off the Dover straits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Trinity House has the responsibility for ensuring that wrecks do not constitute a danger to navigation. It is aware of the sensitivity of this case and has no plans to detonate or otherwise destroy the wreck of the Ocean Hound. I understand that work will be limited to the removal of about 3 m of the vessel's mast and will be undertaken with the least possible disturbance to the wreck.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Chakufwa Chihana

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Malawi concerning Mr. Chakufwa Chihana, an international trade union official, detained in Malawi.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In April we initiated a joint EC demarche calling on the Malawian Government for Chakufwa Chihana's immediate release. We continue to take every opportunity to press the Malawian Government for Mr. Chihana either to be released or charged and brought to trial.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which areas he assesses powers will be diverted from the European institutions back to the nation states under the principle of subsidiarity.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The principle of subsidiarity states that the Community should take action

"only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the member states".

The Lisbon European Council set in hand urgent work on the procedural and practical steps to implement this principle. The Commission and the Council will report to the European Council in Edinburgh.

Tibet

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will seek to persuade the Chinese authorities to admit the delegations from Austria, the United States Senate and Australia, to investigate alleged human rights violations in Tibet; and whether he will also seek agreement for a delegation from the United Kingdom to visit Tibet for this purpose.

Mr. Goodlad: It is for the Governments concerned to approach the Chinese authorities. They have agreed to receive a human rights delegation led by Lord Howe later this year. Timing, itinerary, and other details have yet to be decided.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about violations of the freedom of religion in Tibet; and how many monks and nuns have been killed, detained and sentenced to terms of imprisonment for political offences in each of the years 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992 to date.

Mr. Goodlad: Information of this kind comes mainly from the findings of organisations such as Amnesty International and Asia Watch. We have no independent corroboration of these disturbing reports. We take every opportunity to express to the Chinese our deep concern about human rights abuses in China, including Tibet.

Nigeria

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement about recent violations of human rights in Nigeria, including the riots in Kaduna, during the week beginning 17 May.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Nigerian Government are aware of the importance we attach to human rights. We raise with them any serious violations such as the recent arrest and detention of human rights activists. We regret the loss of life in the riots in Kaduna state in May which were the result of a dispute between two ethnic groups. We understand that order has now been restored.

Mr. Salman Rushdie

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Iranian authorities over the declaration regarding Mr. Salman Rushdie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The fatwa against Salman Rushdie is an infringement of his fundamental rights as a British citizen. We have made this clear to the Iranian authorities on many occasions. We have also made clear to him that we deplore the recent statement by the Iranian parliament.

Indonesia

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will cancel the invitations to three officers of the Indonesian army to attend courses at the Royal Military College of Science, in view of Indonesia's record on human rights.

Mr. Goodlad: No. We do not believe that the cancellation of this form of educational assistance would help the human rights situation in Indonesia.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the criteria used by the Lord Chancellor in recommending to Her Majesty the appointment of Queen's Counsel.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor recommends the grant of practising silk only to those practitioners who hold full rights of audience in the High Court or the Crown court, who are considered to be sufficiently senior—normally of at least 10 years' standing—and who have reached an appropriate level of professional eminence and distinction as advocates. The Lord Chancellor also takes account of the numbers of new silks appropriate in the different fields of practice. In addition, the Lord Chancellor recommends a small number of particularly distinguished lawyers for the award of Queen's Counsel honoris causa.

Legal Aid

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the amount of legal aid owed to solicitors for completed work at the latest date for which figures are available; if he will estimate the average length of time between the date on which payment is claimed by solicitors and the date on which payment is made to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information is not available in the form requested. However, the Legal Aid Board publishes in its annual report targets and performance for the time taken to process legal aid bills from receipt in the area offices to payment being made. Targets are also published in the Court Service annual report for payment of criminal legal aid bills in the higher courts. As at March 1992 the targets—set out in the table—were all being met or exceeded apart from in the south eastern circuit central taxing team where special measures are being taken to reduce the backlog.

Civil bills: 65 per cent. paid within six weeks of receipt.
Magistrates' court bills: 80 per cent. paid within six weeks of receipt.
Other legal aid fund bills: 90 per cent. paid within six weeks of receipt.
Crown Court taxations: 70 per cent. paid within four weeks of being lodged.
Central taxing teams: 75 per cent. paid within three months of being ready to tax.

It should be borne in mind that, except where standard fees are in force, time has to be allowed for the claim submitted to be given full and detailed examination by way of taxation by the court or assessment by the Legal Aid Board before final payment can be made.

WALES

Youth Training

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of those leaving *(a)* YTS and *(b)* employment training schemes in each training division in Wales (i) entered employment, (ii) entered further education and (iii) were subsequently unemployed; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since the scheme's inception.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is contained in the tables.

Destination of leavers (Youth Training and Employment Training)
Youth Training (YT)
April 1991 to August 1991

Percentage

	Gwent	*West Wales*	*Cardiff*	*Wrexham*	*Wales*
In a job	38	44	41	57	46
Unemployed	29	24	32	21	26
In education	20	19	13	11	15

April 1990 to March 1991

Percentage

	Gwent	*West Wales*	*Cardiff*	*Wrexham*	*Wales*
In a job	56	51	49	60	53
Unemployed	24	22	28	18	23
In education	20	19	13	15	16

April 1989 to March 1990

Percentage

	Gwent	West Wales	Cardiff	Wrexham	Wales
In a job	65	63	59	67	63
Unemployed	14	15	20	14	16
In education	15	16	14	14	15

April 1988 to March 1989

Percentage

	Gwent	West Wales	Cardiff	Wrexham	Wales
In a job	62	61	60	66	62
Unemployed	16	16	20	15	17
In education	17	18	15	15	16

Definitions:
"In a job" includes full-time, part-time and self employment.
"In education" includes full-time education and a further YT course.

Employment Training (ET)
April 1991-August 1991

Percentage

	Gwent	West Wales	Cardiff	Wrexham	Wales
In a Job	32	35	27	29	30
Unemployed	59	56	62	54	60
In Training/Education	4	5	5	8	4

April 1990-March 1991

Percentage

	Gwent	West Wales	Cardiff	Wrexham	Wales
In a Job	34	34	27	42	33
Unemployed	58	56	63	46	58
In Training/Education	2	3	2	3	3

July 1989-March 1990

Percentage

	Gwent	West Wales	Cardiff	Wrexham	Wales
In a Job	41	41	36	49	37
Unemployed	51	51	56	42	54
In Training/Education	2	1	2	1	2

Definitions
In a Job includes full-time, part-time and self employment
Unemployed includes those claiming and those not claiming benefits.
Training/Education includes full-time education and a subsequent Employment Training course.

Regional Policy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on his policies concerning assisted area status in Wales;

(2) if he will make a statement on regional policy in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: A review of the assisted areas map in Great Britain was launched on 9 June. My Department has issued a consultation document, jointly with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Scottish Office, to interested organisations in Wales. The objectives of the Government's regional policy will continue to be to reduce regional imbalance in employment opportunities and to encourage the development of indigenous potential within the assisted areas on a stable, long-term basis. The needs of all areas will be carefully taken into account.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each of the assisted areas in Wales; and what was the number of unemployed in each area for each year since 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: The assisted areas in Wales, along with the numbers unemployed in each area since May 1989, are shown in the table:

Wales Assisted Area Unemployment, at May

	1989	1990	1991	1992
Aberdare (D)	2,679	2,182	2,917	2,981
Bangor and Caernarfon (I)	3,020	2,845	3,229	3,817
Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny (D)	4,242	3,376	4,003	4,086
Bridgend (I)	4,896	4,225	6,160	6,618
Cardiff (I)	15,486	13,851	19,087	21,745
Cardigan (D)	912	568	859	1,080
Fishguard (I)	390	270	349	471
Haverfordwest (I)	2,083	1,685	2,267	2,447
Holyhead (D)	2,479	2,104	2,604	3.085
Lampeter and Aberaeron (D)	586	393	584	644
Llanelli (I)	3,427	2,899	3,727	4,139
Merthyr and Rhymney (D)	6,345	5,581	7,134	7,393
Neath and Port Talbot (D)	3,617	2,713	4,020	4,342
Newport (I)	6,736	5,627	8,056	9,266
Pontypool and Cwmbran (I)	3,435	2,770	4,076	4,737
Pontypridd and Rhondda (D)	6,473	5,614	7,798	8,009
Portmadoc and Ffestiniog (I)	494	441	615	714
Pwellheli (I)	687	530	613	686
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl (D)	5,924	4,467	5,964	7,366

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
South Pembrokeshire (D)	1,626	1,339	1,928	1,962
Swansea (I)	10,126	8,091	10,669	11,358
Wrexham (D)	4,135	3,272	4,600	5,425

Source: Employment Department
(D) Development Area
(I) Intermediate Area

Council Responsibilities

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further plans he has to assist Welsh district and borough councils to meet their responsibilities concerning *(a)* economic development, *(b)* environmental health and *(c)* refuse disposal.

Mr. David Hunt: It is for the local authorities concerned to decide how to discharge these, and indeed their other, responsibilities, taking account of such guidance as my Department may issue from time to time.

Inward Investment

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will give figures for inward investment into Wales from *(a)* north America, *(b)* Japan and the far east and *(c)* Europe classified by greenfield investment, joint ventures, non-United Kingdom company purchase of United Kingdom company, and re-investment for each year since 1987 measured by job numbers and project numbers; and if he will express such figures as percentages of the United Kingdom total for that year;

(2) if he will give figures for inward investment into Wales separately from *(a)* north America, *(b)* Japan and the far east and *(c)* Europe for each year since 1987; and if he will express each figure as a percentage share of all inward investment into the United Kingdom measured by (i) numbers of individual projects and (ii) jobs secured and created.

Mr. David Hunt: I will write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Council Housing

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses have been built by local authorities in Wales since 1981.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Between January 1981 and April 1992, a total of 13,669 local authority dwellings—6,904 houses and 6,765 flats—have been built.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of council house waiting lists in Wales; and what was the comparable list in 1981.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not centrally available.

Unitary Authority, Cardiff

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what boundaries he is intending to set for the new unitary authority based on Cardiff.

Mr. David Hunt: I am at present consulting on the boundaries appropriate for all the unitary authorities to be established in Wales, including an authority based on Cardiff. I will be announcing decisions in a White Paper later this year.

Sports Council

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the 15 recommendations of the Sports Council for Wales have been *(a)* accepted in full by the Commonwealth Games Council for Wales, *(b)* accepted in part and *(c)* rejected in respect of the organisation and funding of participation of Welsh teams at Canada and beyond.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand that the Sports Council for Wales considers that only three of the recommendations contained in its report on the management and administration of the Welsh team in Auckland in 1990 have been implemented in full. The council believes that some movement has been made on other recommendations, but not to the extent that it believes to be necessary.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Agencies

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), *Official Report*, 23 June, columns *117-20*, he will indicate for each of the executive agencies listed, the numbers of civil servants employed in all predecessor organisations.

Mr. Waldegrave: This information is not held centrally. Figures showing the allocation of staff and work within Departments prior to an agency's launch are normally only held by individual Departments.

Citizens Charter

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the citizens charter in relation to the wearing of name badges by civil servants; what percentage of civil servants now wear name badges; and if he has any plans to change this percentage.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have made good progress in implementing the citizens charter White Paper commitment on name badges. Most civil servants are happy to wear name badges, and the majority of civil servants who deal directly with the public now wear them, except where there is a real threat to their safety. The Employment Service, where the 38,000 staff who deal directly with the public now wear name badges, is a good example. We will continue to encourage all civil servants who deal with the public to wear name badges.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to make HMSO publications available on computer files; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: HMSO actively pursues viable opportunities for publishing official material in computer form, including working in concert with private sector firms in the information industry, in the spirit of the tradeable information policy. Currently available products include:

On CD-ROM (Compact Disc—Read Only Memory):

Statutory Instruments from 1987—published six-monthly.

DTI United Kingdom Register of Quality Assessed Companies—published quarterly.

Civil Service YearBook—published annually.

Catalogue of United Kingdom Official Publications—published quarterly.

As Data-Only Files on Magnetic Tape or Disc:

Customs & Excise Tariff (magnetic tape)—published monthly.

Standard Methods for Measurement (floppy disc)—available for purchase on request.

Specified Acts and Statutory Instruments (tape or disc)—available for purchase on request.

The Budget (tape or disc)—available for purchase on request.

The Birthday and New Year's Honours List (tape or disc)—available for purchase on request.

Sections of the House of Commons Vote Bundle (tape or disc)—bespoke daily service, on request.

Other Non-Parliamentary Publications which have been typeset by computer—available for purchase on request.

As floppy disc supplements to printed publications:

Neighbourhood Renewal Program.

SLOPE (Stability Calculation facility for Surveyors).

Annual Review of Government funded Research and Development.

Forthcoming Products include:

On CD-ROM

Full text of Commons Official Report—to be published three times per year.

Full text of current HSE publications and related legislation—to be published six monthly.

Current taxation legislation and related material—to be published three or four times per year.

On floppy disc:

United Kingdom VAT Legislation and regulations and related European Commission Directives Technical procurement information standard for computer communication systems (GOSIP).

As floppy disc supplements to printed publications:

Companies Assisted Standard Occupational Classification.

Structural Systems Analysis and Designs Methods (SSADM).

Market Testing

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to announce the detailed programme for market testing for each Department following the reviews which have recently been undertaken as a result of "Competing for Quality".

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) on 22 June 1992, at column *102*.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Disabled Employees

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of officers in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively and overall in his Department are registered disabled people.

Mr. Nelson: There are no officers registered as disabled people in grades 1 to 7 in the Treasury. There are 30 Treasury staff who are registered disabled, this proportion representing 1 per cent. at 1 June 1991, the latest date for which figures are available. The Department employs a number of people with disabilities who have chosen not to register as disabled.

Venture Capital

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a table of expenditure of venture capital availability by standard region by *(a)* number of companies and *(b)* level of expenditure for each year from 1985.

Mr. Nelson: The British Venture Capital Association collects information on venture capital activity by its members. The latest available figures, by standard region, are as follows:

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
(a) Number of companies							
South East	269	277	486	509	512	512	450
South West	42	51	74	78	74	68	60
East Anglia	32	39	68	60	48	57	50
West Midlands	36	37	86	119	116	87	102
East Midlands	17	26	75	72	90	81	80
Yorkshire and Humberside	17	18	70	36	71	75	104
North West	14	26	78	94	107	64	66
North	10	18	38	98	79	50	45
Scotland	62	52	116	145	147	174	150
Wales	12	53	71	94	43	39	57
Northern Ireland	2	3	12	21	15	14	32
Total	513	600	1,174	1,326	1,302	1,221	1,196
(b) Amount invested (£ million)							
South East	171·4	245·8	529	640	689	674	513
South West	18·4	17·6	67	53	93	34	72
East Anglia	15·9	20·1	24	38	39	51	27
West Midlands	19·2	11·3	40	119	82	64	93
East Midlands	5·8	10·5	71	86	103	70	47
Yorkshire and Humberside	7·4	12·5	68	80	58	57	74
North West	4·7	16·6	36	57	76	38	46
North	2·0	11·9	6	103	37	23	21
Scotland	18·4	26·1	50	81	217	81	73
Wales	6·8	11·2	42	27	19	12	17
Northern Ireland	0·2	0·4	1	14	7	2	6
Total	270·2	384·0	934	1,298	1,420	1,106	989

Financial Services

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for reviewing the working, structure and adequacy of the system of self-regulation set up by the Financial Services Act 1986, the Lloyd's Act 1981 and the Companies Act 1989; and what proposals he has for an independent statutorily based public regulatory commission.

Mr. Nelson: I keep the working of the Financial Services Act and the provisions of the Companies Act 1989 which are my responsibility under review. The Lloyd's Act 1981 and other parts of the Companies Act 1989 are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Excheuqer what information he has on the number of complaints to and disciplinary actions taken by, each self-regulatory organisation for the two most recent available annual periods.

Mr. Nelson: This is a matter for the Securities and Investments Board.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer on 9 June to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), *Official Report*, column *83*, if he will list those industries which he estimates will increase employment as a result of a carbon tax; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: The impact of a carbon tax on employment in specific industries would depend on the coverage and rate of the tax, the use made of the revenues raised and the extent to which similar measures were implemented in other countries.

Saztec Philippines Inc.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Treasury contracts have been let to Saztec Philippines Inc. in each of the last five years; what was the nature of the contracts; what was their combined value; and what was the total estimated saving to the Treasury as a result of letting those contracts.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury has not let any contracts to Saztec Philippines during the last five years.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the proportion of the public sector borrowing requirement which is represented by additional expenditure due to the recession.

Mr. Portillo: While it is very difficult to make accurate assessments of the impact of the cycle on Government expenditure, my predecessor told the Treasury and Civil Service Committee that of the increases in expenditure for 1992-93 announced in the 1991 autumn statement "around £5 billion could be directly attributed to the cycle".

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps were taken to ascertain the profitability of businesses in the area before valuation for uniform business rates on commercial property in west Worthing were made by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Lamont: Rating valuations are based on rental values at 1 April 1988 and the valuation officer at Worthing sent out forms of return requesting rental information. In the case of specialised properties which were valued by reference to accounts, information about trading receipts was also requested, and this was followed up with requests for actual accounts in appropriate cases.

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many appeals against uniform business rates valuations remain to be decided; and when he expects initial appeals against valuations to be completed.

Mr. Lamont: The total number of 1990 rating list appeals outstanding at 31 March 1992 was 624,091 of which 409,000 were initial appeals. The target date for clearance of the initial appeals is 31 March 1994.

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria are used by the Inland Revenue when valuing commercial properties for uniform business rates purposes.

Mr. Lamont: Valuation officers are required to determine the rateable values of commercial properties having regard to the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. An estimate has to be made of the rent at which the property might reasonably be expected to be let from year to year based on levels of value at 1 April 1988, and all the factors which might affect this figure need to be considered.

Car Taxation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to alter the current tax regime to ensure lower taxes on fuel-efficient cars.

Sir John Cope: I note this suggestion for my right hon. Friend's next Budget. The excise duty on road fuels already encourage motorists to buy more fuel-efficient cars.

Inheritance Tax (Exemptions)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each county or region where there are *(a)* six cases, *(b)* seven cases, *(c)* eight cases, *(d)* nine cases and *(e)* 10 or more cases where conditional exemptions from inheritance tax and capital transfer tax has been granted, giving the number of cases in each of those counties or regions; and in how many counties or regions there are (i) five cases, (ii) four cases, (iii) three cases, (iv) two cases, (v) one case and (vi) no cases.

Mr. Dorrell: A detailed breakdown for all conditional exemptions from inheritance tax or capital transfer tax by county or region is not readily available.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the list, "Access Deals", for works of art where tax exemptions have been given.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* A copy of the list containing details of those works of art which have been conditionally exempted from inheritance tax and which are either not on display in houses or rooms open to the public or on long term loan to a public collection is held by the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert museum. Additional copies are held in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. The list is freely available for inspection by members of the general public during opening hours.

As the list consists of about 1,400 pages and requires regular updating and amending and as a copy of the list is already available for inspection in the National Art Library, I have not placed a copy in the library.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provisions govern the access of members of planning boards and elected members of local authorities to information about the proposed land management plan in cases where inheritance tax exemption is being considered.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* Where inheritance tax exemption is being considered, a land management plan is prepared by the landowner. The appropriate heritage advisory agency consults the local authority or national park authority on the proposed plan. The planning authority is, therefore, aware of the exemption.

In many cases the heritage advisory agency will, with the agreement of the landowner, ask the local authority or national park authority to act as its agent monitoring that the landowner complies with the tems of the agreed land management plan. In these cases the local authority or national park authority is required to ensure that the tax confidentiality of the owner is observed.

Landowners (Tax Exemption)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 30 June, *Official Report*, columns *469-70*, what is the minimum number of designations in a county which he is prepared to identify in answers to parliamentary questions.

Mr. Dorrell: To protect taxpayer confidentiality in respect of conditional exemption, information would not be provided about the number of designations in a county where this was under five. As I explained in my reply to the hon. Member on 30 June, at columns *469-70*, information on the number of conditional exemptions for land in each county is not readily available.

Correspondence

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he received the letter, dated 9 June from a constituent of the hon. Member for Stockton, North, Dr. R. C. Turnock; and why he has not sent an acknowledgement.

Sir John Cope: Dr. R. C. Turnock's letter was received on 15 June. An acknowledgement was sent to Dr. Turnock on 3 July and a full reply will be sent as soon as possible.

Bingham Inquiry

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to publish the evidence given to the Bingham inquiry with the report.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* Lord Justice Bingham's report will be published subject to such restrictions as may be needed to avoid prejudicing any criminal proceedings and subject to the provisions of the Banking Act 1987. There are no plans to publish the evidence that is not reflected in the report.

Financial Services Division

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statment on the aims of the financial services division recently transferred from the Department of Trade and Industry; how many officials of each grade were transferred from the Department of Trade and Industry into the Treasury; and what changes he proposes to the staffing level.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* The aim of the financial services division, which has been renamed securities and investment services group, is to maintain and develop a good regulatory system for financial services which provides an appropriate level of investor protection, fosters the integrity of the markets and encourages international competitiveness. It is also concerned to secure the removal of barriers to fair and free competition in the provision of financial services in all important markets. A total of 49 staff were transferred from the Department of Trade and Industry. A breakdown by grade is given in the table. I do not propose to make any changes to the staffing level at present, but I will keep this under review.

	Number
Grade 3	1
Grade 5	3
Grade 7	10
SEO	5·5
HEO	9
EO	3
Other	17·5
Total	49

Foreign Prison-Made Goods Act 1897

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance he has issued to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on the Foreign Prison-Made Goods Act 1897, amended in 1988; and when the last prosecution was made under this Act.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* No guidance has been issued to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on the Foreign Prison-Made Goods Act 1897. There is no record of any prosecution having been brought by Customs and Excise under this Act.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what written representations he has received on the reintroduction of stamp duty for house sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 1 July 1992]:* I have received a number of representations on this matter. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer decided in December to limit the increase in the stamp duty threshold to a period of eight months. The Government have no plans to change that decision.

EDUCATION

Mentally Handicapped Students

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what consideration has been given to the allocation of funds to private institutions for the mentally handicapped under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992;

(2) if decisions regarding the distribution of funds for private institutions for the mentally handicapped under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 will be made by local or central authorities;

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of mentally handicapped students who are likely to qualify under section 4 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

(4) what arrangements will be made to provide payment to private educational institutions under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

Mr. Forman: The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 provides for the further education funding councils to secure provision for students with learning difficulties in independent institutions where appropriate, and to meet any fees charged. Local education authorities continue to have discretion to arrange and fund such placements. In a circular dated 29 June, the further education funding council unit has set out an initial approach to placement arrangements. The circular seeks information on numbers of placements and the associated costs.

Relocation

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to relocate civil service posts in his Department to Darlington.

Mr. Forman: The Department has plans to relocate some 50 posts from London to Darlington, most of them by the end of 1992.

Special Needs Schools

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of the education budget is allocated to special needs schools at the present time; and if he will make a statement about future needs funding.

Mr. Forth: It is for each local education authority to decide how much of its budget to allocate to special needs. In 1989-90, the latest year for which information on actual spending is available, English local education authorities' net recurrent expenditure on maintained special education represented some 5·7 per cent. of their total net recurrent expenditure on education. That percentage does not include spending on special needs within mainstream schools nor on support services for special needs, for which information is not collected separately.

The Government's proposals for education spending by local authorities in 1993-94 will be announced in the autumn.

Schools (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make provision in the capital allocations to voluntary and special arrangement schools for second bids where the allocation is not entirely taken up.

Mr. Forth: The Department is monitoring this year's expenditure of capital grant to voluntary-aided and special agreement schools through returns which the local education authorities have been asked to supply in July and October. Where allocations are not being fully spent, we shall seek to redeploy the sums involved to other worthwhile capital projects at aided schools, so long as the work could be completed and grant claims made before the end of the financial year.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average time taken in the English local education authorities to produce statements on children with individual learning needs; what plans he has to improve the time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Information for each local education authority is not available centrally. However, there is recent evidence that some authorities are failing to meet the Government's guideline that the procedures for assessment and the issue of a statement should not exceed six months. The Government have now decided that there should be comprehensive provisions for regulating the time and way in which the assessment and statementing procedures are carried out.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will designate by local authority the number of parents who are appealing against the refusal to make a statement about their child.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend is currently considering 50 appeals from parents or their advocates under section 5(6) of the Education Act 1981 against the refusal of the local education authority to make a statement of special educational needs. The authorities concerned are as follows:

Avon (2)
London Borough of Barking
Bedfordshire
Berkshire (2)
Bradford
London Borough of Brent
Buckinghamshire (3)
Bury
Cheshire (3)
Cumbria (3)
Devon
Dorset
Gloucestershire
London Borough of Greenwich
London Borough of Havering
Hampshire
Hertfordshire
London Borough of Hounslow (3)
Humberside
Kent (2)
Lincolnshire
Nottinghamshire
Northamptonshire (5)
Oxfordshire
London Borough of Richmond (2)
Somerset
Shropshire (2)
Stockport (2)
Wakefield
London Borough of Waltham Forest
Wiltshire
Wirral

Education Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how he calculates the impact of opt-out schools on his total basic credit approval for each local education authority; and if he has any plans to change the basis of his calculation.

Mr. Forth: The determination of authorities' basic credit approvals is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Environment. In doing so, he takes account of the distribution of annual capital guidelines to local education authorities by my right hon. Friend.

Decisions on the distribution of the capital resources available between the LEA-maintained schools and grant-maintained schools sectors take account of a number of factors including the bids made and the size and needs of the two sectors. The distribution of annual capital guidelines to LEAs takes account of the number of pupils in GM schools in each authority, and will, continue to be based on the application of national priority criteria set out each year in the LEA capital bidding letter.

PRIME MINISTER

Forests

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his speech at the Earth summit, if he will use the United Kingdom presidency to press for binding international commitments on management of forests: and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: At my initiative the EC and its member states agreed an eight point plan to follow up the Earth summit at the Lisbon Council last month. It included a proposal for establishing an international review process for the forest principles agreed at the Earth summit. We intend to take this forward during our presidency.

European Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what initiatives he intends to take as President of the European Council to establish greater openness and transparency in the work of the Council and of the Committee of Permanent Representatives' support role for Council meetings.

The Prime Minister: Under the rules of procedure of the Council, meetings of the Council are not public unless the Council unanimously decides otherwise. The same rules apply to COREPER. We do not intend to seek a change in the rules. However, we shall also continue to ensure that this House is fully consulted throughout the established scrutiny procedures.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met representatives of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association to discuss compensation; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have not met representatives of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association. I have, however, had meetings with a number of hon. Members on related matters.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 5 June, *Official Report*, column *655*, if he will sympathetically consider any request to meet representatives of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association to discuss compensation; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The position on compensation remains as set out in my answer of 5 June. I have no current plans to meet representatives of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association.

Additionality

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the application of the additionality principle in the United Kingdom; and what information he has on how the principle is applied by other member nations of the European Community.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom accepts the principle of additionality as set out in Article 9 of Council regulation (EEC) 4253/88. The application of the principle by other member states is a matter for the European Commission.

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to raise the security and physical protection measures for the transport of plutonium from the United Kingdom to Japan during his meeting with his Japanese counterpart in London on 3 July and in the subsequent Group of Seven meeting in Munich.

The Prime Minister: In my meetings with the Prime Minister of Japan I shall be discussing a wide range of issues. Responsibility for developing transport proposals rests with British Nuclear Fuels plc in association with its overseas customers. These arrangements will have to comply with international regulations.

Environmental Legislation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions were undertaken and decisions taken on the future scope of environmental legislation within the European Communities at the European Heads of State and Government summit in Portugal on 26 and 27 June.

The Prime Minister: None. But this is one of the areas of activity which will be considered as proposals are developed to ensure that the Community does not intervene where member states can act more effectively on their own.

Academic Research

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to ensure that the findings of academic research commissioned by Government Departments at public expense are published at the same time as, or as soon as possible after, they become available to Ministers.

The Prime Minister: Timing of publication must depend on the circumstances in each case.

Food Aid

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the commodities and the quantity of each commodity purchased by the European Commission for Food and

purposes as outlined in his answer of 25 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns 781-82 *(a)* in 1990, *(b)* in 1991 and in each half of 1991 and *(c)* in the first half of 1992.

The Prime Minister: The available information is set out in the tables. The European Commission does not produce half-year calculations; nor are any statistics yet available for the first half of 1992.

European Community Food Aid, 1990-91

	Amount £
1990	
Cereals	
Wheat	914,194
Wheat flour	143,171
Rice	132,663
White maize	55,167
Maize	30,210
Maize flour	5,254
Rolled oats	7,881
Sorghum	24,956
Total cereals	1,313,497
Non-cereals	
Skimmed milk powder	80,793
Butteroil	9,190
Vegetable oil	42,732
Sugar	14,837
1991	
Cereals	
Wheat	898,764
Wheat flour	181,182
Rice	167,519
Wheat maize	65,966
Maize	46,400
Maize flour	10,000
Oats	8,979
Sorghum	17,030
Pasta	173
Seeds	1,600
Total cereals	1,397,613
Non-cereals	
Skimmed milk powder	68,443
Butteroil	11,593
Vegetable oil	52,827
Sugar	16,527

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if it is his intention that the Luxembourg compromise concerning veto powers for the United Kingdom, France and Germany, will continue in force under the Maastricht treaty.

The Prime Minister: The Luxembourg compromise is a political agreement, rather than a legally binding text. Nothing in the Maastricht treaty conflicts with its continuing existence.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

European Arts Festival

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage why he decided to base none of the events in London in the European arts festival, July to December, in Waltham Forest.

Mr. Mellor: Even with more than 600 published events across the United Kingdom throughout the European arts festival, it was not possible to support projects in every locality. But I am delighted to tell the hon. Member that, as part of the schools and youth programme to be published later in the summer, Oily Cart will be presenting "Gobble and Gook" at Handsworth primary school on 5 November. Through the local education authority, all state schools in Waltham Forest have also been invited to take part in the schools and youth programme. A number of schools have expressed interest in doing so.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many of the arts events listed in the brochure on the European arts festival, to be held in the United Kingdom during the current presidency of the European Council, are events additional to those held on a regular basis; and what is the additional cost to the United Kingdom in sponsoring the special arts and musical events listed in the brochure.

Mr. Mellor: The events in the European arts festival fall into four categories: new initiatives, largely funded by the festival; long-held ambitions which could only be realised by the additional funding provided by the festival; partially funded projects which needed additional support to bring them to fruition; and a very small number of events which the festival has not supported, but which the organisers wished to associate with the programme because of the nature of the event. None of the major projects, for instance the touring festival tent, the visits of the great European drama companies and some of the major exhibitions, could have happened without the support of the festival.

The cost to the Exchequer of sponsoring the European arts festival is £6 million.

Specialist Libraries

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what the Government's policy is on support for specialist libraries providing services to academics and the wider community; and what plans he has to provide additional support to such libraries with specialisms in race relations.

Mr. Mellor: The Government have no specific policy for the support of specialist libraries. It is for individual Government Departments to consider the needs of applicants within their policy responsibilities and to decide whether, in the light of available resources and potential claims from similar bodies, a special grant is needed for their library or information services. The libraries in question are outside my responsibilities.

Works of Art (Exports)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the reviewing committee on the Export of Works of Art during the half year ended 30 June, specifying in each case the valuation and whether an item was exported or retained, with particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institution; whether he will list any items for which licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit; and whether a

press notice will be issued by his Department covering the information given in his reply, including that relating to the outcome in individual cases.

Mr. Mellor: The information is as follows:

Description of item	*Valuation* £	*Outcome*
A drawing, 'A wild boar at bay', Frans Snyders (1579-1647)	64,700	Export licence granted
A Berlin ormolu-mounted mahogany and parquetry commode, by Fiedler (c. 1875)	2,164,318	Export licence granted
A George III mahogany commode, by Thomas Chippendale (1766)	949,875	Export licence granted
A pair of George III black and gilt-japanned armchairs, by William and John Linnell (c. 1752-1755)	167,625	Export licence granted
A drawing, 'An allegorical female figure' by Veronese (1528-1588)	38,000	Export licence granted
A painting, 'Venus and Adonis', by Titian (c. 1490-1576)	7,599,000	Export licence granted
A George I ebony and silver mounted stick Barometer, by Delander (c. 1720)	275,000	Purchased for a private collection
An astronomical and musical mahogany pedestal clock, by Jenkins (1778)	122,925	Decision deferred until after 1 July 1992, extended to 1 August 1992
'Collage with Spanish Postcard', by Ben Nicholson (1933)	275,000	Decision deferred until after 1 July 1992
A painting, 'Christ at the Column', by Antonello da Messina (1425-1479)	4,250,000	Export licence granted
A drawing, 'Christ at the Cross', by Cortona (1596-1669)	254,500	Decision deferred until after 7 August 1992
A pastel drawing, 'Portrait of Mrs. Ayscoughe Boucherett', by Sir Thomas Lawrence (1794)	83,812·50	Decision deferred until after 7 September 1992
A drawing, 'The seven acts of mercy: ransoming prisoners', by Kunst (c. 1490-after 1542)	40,650	Decision deferred until after 7 August 1992
A drawing, 'Agony in the garden', by Castello (1625-1659)	52,300	Decision deferred until after 7 August 1992

Details of the items on which decisions were deferred were given in press notices issued at the time the reviewing committee's recommendations were accepted.

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he will list the objects and property accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax during the financial year ended 31 March; if, in listing them, he will specify *(a)* the amount of tax satisfied in each case, *(b)* whether any offers of objects carried conditions as to destination, *(c)* the dates in each case of the recommendations received by him from the Museums and Galleries Commission for the acceptance of objects, *(d)* the total for the financial year of the tax thus satisfied and *(e)* how much of this total was covered in the public accounts by means of resort to the reserve in accordance with Government policy as announced on 26 July 1985, *Official Report*, column *779;* and whether a press notice will be issued by his Department making available the complete list of acceptances during the financial year covered in his reply.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is as follows:

Item	*Tax satisfied* £	*Conditions or wishes*	*Date of MGC recommendation*
Augustus John portrait	105,000	Unconditional	21 May 1991
Vintage motor cycles and car	153,000	Unconditional	21 June 1991
Staham porcelain collection	77,000	Conditional	22 April 1991
8 contemporary paintings	108,920	Conditional	1 June 1991
Poele de l'Atelier by Cezanne	750,562	Conditional	28 May 1991
Upton House Chattels	484,820	Conditional	21 June 1991
Sporting paintings and silver collection	233,250	Wish for the paintings to go to the British Art Sporting Trust and silver to the Victoria and Albert museum	1 July 1991
Surface substitution by Jennifer Bartlett	64,400	Conditional	5 August 1991
Up and Out by Richard Hamilton	7,000	Conditional	6 December 1991
Hambledon Cricket Club accounts	39,120	Wish to go to the Hampshire Record Office	25 September 1991

The total expenditure for the 1991-92 financial year was £3,834,989·72. This includes a further payment for a Rubens cameo, which was accepted in 1989-90. It also includes payment for a Sevres dinner service and bas d'armoire which was accepted in 1990-91, and paid for by a call on the reserve this financial year. In total £1,144,172 was met by access to the reserve.

Press notices have already been issued on the acceptance of these items. A further notice will therefore not be issued.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he will specify the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half year ended 30 June of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historical or artistic interest which have been accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed by testators or executors in the matter of allocation; whether he will list the works of art and museum objects which are still awaiting allocation, with the respective dates of their acceptance in satisfaction of inheritance tax; and whether a press notice will be issued by his Department in the event of any information being given in his reply which has not previously been announced.

Mr. Mellor: The information the hon. Member requests is as follows:

Item	*To whom allocated*	*Condition/ wishes expressed*
Poele de l'Atelier by Paul Cezanne	National Gallery	Conditional
Surface Substitution by Jennifer Bartlett	Tate Gallery	Conditional
Chattels at Upton House	National Trust	Conditional
Up and Out by Richard Hamilton	Tate Gallery	Conditional
Two portraits by Reynolds and Van Dyck	National Trust	Conditional
Two busts by Rysbrack	National Trust	Conditional
Portrait by Peter Greenham	Tate Gallery	Conditional

Items awaiting allocation	*Date of acceptance*
Portrait by Beechey	20 April 1990
Collection of drawings by Runciman	26 April 1991
Hambledon Cricket Club Accounts	16 June 1992
8 Contemporary paintings	18 February 1992
Vintage motor vehicles	28 November 1991

Press notices have already been issued announcing the allocation of these items. A further notice will therefore not be issued.

National Lottery

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the organisations that have made submissions to his Department about the proposed national lottery; and how many individuals have made such submissions.

Mr. Mellor: The Home Office and the Department of National Heritage have received responses from the following 224 organisations and individuals.

Access Formdesign
ACRE—Rural Communities' Charity
Action for Blind People
Advertising Standards Authority
Alfred Marks Bureau Limited
AmTote
Ancient Monuments Society
Andersen Consulting
Arc Advertising
Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland
Art Libraries Society
Arts Council
Arundel Festival
Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts
Association of Charitable Foundations
Association of Chief Police Officers (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)
Association of Community Trusts and Foundations
Association of District Councils
Association of Medical Research Charities
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
BABN Technologies
Ballymoney Borough Council
Baptist Union of Great Britain
Baptist Union of Scotland
Barnet Borough Council
Bass Leisure
Bates, Wells and Braithwaite
Belfast City Council
Betting Office Licensees Association
Bingo Association of Great Britain
Birmingham City Council
Brewers' Society
Bridewell Newspower Association
British Amusement Catering Trades Association
British Casino Association
British Film Institute
British Greyhound Racing Board
British Institute of Sports Coaches
British Library Board
British Museum
British Olympic Association
British Retail Consortium
British Sports Forum
British Sports Trust
British Tourist Authority
Bromley Leisure Services
Buck & Sons Limited
Business in Sport and Leisure
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
Central Council of Physical Recreation
Charities Aid Foundation
Chatham Historic Dockyard Institute
Chief Leisure Officers Association
Church of England General Synod, Board for Social Responsibility
Church of England National Council for Social Aid
Mr T Christopher
Coldham Consultancy
Colorgraphic plc
Committee of Area Museum Councils
Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals
Commonwealth Lotteries—Summer Ducks Limited
Community Council of Devon
Compton Verney Opera Project
Control Data
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Corals
Cornish National Lottery Initiative
Cornwall County Council
County Landowners' Association
Countryside Commission
CPM Field Marketing Limited
D'arcy Masius Benton & Bowles
De La Rue plc
Democratic Unionist Party Councillors—Craigavon Borough Council
Dibb Lupton Broomhead
Dittler Brothers Limited

Down District Council
Dr. B. S. Freeman
Dundee District Council
East Lothian District Council
Eastern Council for Sport and Recreation
English Heritage
Free Church Federal Council
Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Gaming Board of Great Britain
Gingerbread Northern Ireland
Glasgow Development Agency
GTech
Hambros Bank
Heritage Consulting Consortium
HM Stationery Office
Reverend D. R. J. Halloway
Mr. W. Hombersley
Hull Kingston Rovers RFC
Institute of Charity Fundraising Managers
Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management
Institute of Professionals, Managers and Specialists
Interactive Telephone Services
J. Walter Thompson
Jet Heritage Limited
Jockey Club
Joe Marks Roger Marks
Kesslers International Limited
Kidney Foundation
Kunick
Lawn Tennis Association
Leo Burnett Limited
Lisburn Borough Council
London Advisory Group of Chief Leisure Officers
London Boroughs Association
London Community Cricket Association
London Community Trust
London Council for Sport and Recreation
Lord Prior of Brampton
Lotteries Action Group
Lotteries Council
Lottery Promotion Company
M. Milsom
M. Shefras
Macclesfield District Health Trust
MacIntyre
Magherafelt District Council
Methodist Church Division of Social Responsibility
MIND
Motorsports Facilities Unit
Museum of London
Museums and Galleries Commission
Museums Association
N. M. Rothschild
National Art Collections Fund
National Association of Bookmakers
National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service
National Association of Local Councils
National Bingo Game
National Campaign for the Arts
National Council for Conservation of Plants and Gardens
National Council for Schools' Sports
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
National Council on Gambling
National Dairymen's Association
National Federation of Community Organisations
National Federation of Retail Newsagents
National Greyhound Racing Club Racecourse Promoters
National Heritage Memorial Fund
National Portrait Gallery
National Sporting League
National Trust
National Trust for Scotland
Nationwide Lotteries Limited
Newtownabbey Borough Council
Norman Franklin Trust
North West Council for Sport and Recreation
Northern Council for Sport and Recreation
NI Amusement Caterers Trades Association
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Opax International
Opera North
Police Federation of England and Wales
Pool Promoters Association
Post Office Counters Limited
Prisoners Abroad
R. Rafferty
RADAR
Rank Organisation
Professor R. L. Reid
Religious Society of Friends
Richmond-upon-Thames Borough Council
Roxburgh District Council
Royal National Institute for Deaf People
Royal National Lifeboat Institution
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Saatchi & Saatchi
Salvation Army
SALVO—Scottish Arts Lobby
Save the Children
Scientific Games Incorporated
Scottish Arts Council
Scottish Churches Committee
Scottish Council for Spastics
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
Scottish FA/Football League
Scottish Film Council
Scottish Museums Council
Scottish Natural Heritage
Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped
Scottish Sports Association
Scottish Sports Council
Scottish Squash Rackets Association
Securicor
Select Mail
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
South East Council for Sport and Recreation
Sports Council for Wales
Sports Aid Foundation
Sports Council
T. D. Woods
T. Shaughnessy
Taff Ely Borough Council
Tenovus
The Transport Trust
Theatre Workshop Edinburgh Limited
Theatrical Management Association
Tote
UK Charity Lotteries Limited
UK Forum on Young People and Gambling
UK Institute for Conservation
UNICEF (UK)
UNICEF (UK) (NI)
Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
Unisys
United Reform Church
Vaux Inns
Volunteer Development Scotland
Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Welsh Arts Council
West Midlands Arts
West Midlands Council for Sport and Recreation
Women's Forum Northern Ireland
Woodland Trust
Working Men's Club and Institute Union
World Wildlife Fund (UK)
Worthing Borough Council

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Beer Orders

Mr. Stern: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what extent tenancies which previously provided for a renewal option after five years are automatically varied by the Beer Orders.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Beer Orders do not automatically vary existing tenancy agreements. Certain changes are required when pubs are leased by national brewers free of ties to ensure a proper arms-length relationship between tenants and their landlords.

Mr. Stern: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will re-refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the offer of only a 20-year full-repairs lease to all existing Courage tenants, irrespective of the circumstances or terms of the original lease.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No. The rights of tenants under existing agreements and the terms of new leases offered to them are matters for the tenants concerned and their landlords; any dispute must ultimately be resolved by the courts.

Mr. Stern: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will review the Beer Orders.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Beer Orders, made in 1989, come fully into force from 1 November 1992. The Director General of Fair Trading is due to review them next year when their effectiveness can be assessed.

Structural Funds

Ms. Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement concerning his Department's views on the future of EC structural funds as they relate to objective 2 areas.

Mr. Sainsbury: Article 130[illegible]EC, reaffirmed at Maastricht, makes objective 2 areas one of the tasks of the European regional development fund. The Government will seek to ensure that they continue to receive appropriate priority.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of inward investment on the level of imports and exports of motor vehicles.

Mr. Sainsbury: Inward investment in the motor vehicle industry in recent years has made a major positive contribution to the balance of payments and to improving the competitiveness of the industry in the United Kingdom.

The establishment of new car plants in the United Kingdom is expected to result in additional exports of 300,000 units per annum by 1995 compared with 1991.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will state the premium rates under the loan guarantee scheme for 1991-92, the income derived from premia in 1991-92 and the net cost of the scheme for 1991-92; and the number and total size of loans guaranteed in each region and nation for 1991-92.

Mr. Leigh: For most guarantees issued in 1991-92 the premium rate was 2·5 per cent. of the guaranteed portion of the loan. For guarantees of loans in the 16 inner city task force areas, the premium paid was 2 per cent.

A total of £3·211 million was derived from premiums in 1991-92.

The net cost of the scheme in 1991-92 was £27·351 million.

The number and total size of loans in each region and Nation in 1991-92 are as follows:

Region	*Loans guaranteed*	*Value £ million*
Northern	164	3·61
North West	271	5·43
Yorkshire and Humberside	171	3·36
West Midlands	193	4·76
East Midlands and Eastern	301	7·17
London	393	9·82
South East	681	17·83
South West	477	9·92
Total in England	2,651	61·90
Scotland	131	4·29
Wales	154	3·41
Northern Ireland	14	0·58
TOTAL	2,950	70·18

Computers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a copy of the reports into computer misuse and safety-related computer systems, commissioned from Coopers and Lybrand by his Department, referred to in his predecessor's answer to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) 23 January 1992, *Official Report*, column *290;* and what plans he has to publish these reports.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department has received both reports from Coopers and Lybrand. They will both be published shortly and a copy of each will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Export Licences

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what communications his Department has had with Mr. Tim Kelsey of *The Independent* newspaper in regard to articles published in the paper on 22 and 23 June on possible circumvention of his Department's export control licensing procedures.

Mr. Needham: Mr. Kelsey contacted my Department's press office on a number of occasions in regard to the articles. I wrote to the editor of *The Independent* on 24 June pointing out that I was concerned about the allegations, that it was a criminal offence to supply fraudulent documents in support of an export licence application, and that Mr. Kelsey should provide evidence to substantiate the allegations. This has not so far been provided.

Exports

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the amount of cover by the Export Credits Guarantee Department for *(a)* military and *(b)* civil exports, for each year from 1985 to 1991, inclusive.

Mr. Needham: The answer is set out in the table.

Year	Total Capital Cost Insured	Total Arms Capital Cost Insured	Total Civil Capital Cost Insured	Arms as a Percentage total business
	Values in Millions Sterling			
1985	1,478	300	1,178	20
1986	1,518	252	1,266	17
1987	1,274	186	1,088	14·5
1988	1,854	623	1,231	33·5
1989	1,248	357	891	28·5
1990	1,615	553	1,062	34
1991	1,855	213	1,642	11·5
Total	10,842	2,484	8,358	23

1. The information relates solely to Project business.

Passenger Ships

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the range and criteria of schemes to subsidise the building of passenger ships available to United Kingdom shipyards; and how many such yards he expects to be eligible in 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Sainsbury: The shipbuilding intervention fund provides assistance to United Kingdom merchant shipbuilders to enable them to secure orders against competition from outside the EC. The level of grant is intended to allow yards to secure orders at what would otherwise be loss making prices but to break even on the resulting contracts. The maximum grant available for 1992 is 9 per cent. for ships costing more than £7·1 million and 4·5 per cent. for smaller ships. Grants are available for merchant vessels, including dredgers, of not less than 100 gross registered tons, fishing vessels of not less than 100 gross registered tons intended for non-Community based owner and tugs of not less than 365KW. For 1992, grants are available to all merchant shipbuilders which have built a qualifying vessel within the last three years and which were not privatised as warship builders. No decision about availability of grants for future years has yet been taken.

Contact Lens Solutions

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the price of contact lens cleaning solutions and the public availability of such solutions; what inquiries are being made into these matters by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* On 30 April the Director General of Fair Trading made a monopoly reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission concerning the supply of contact lens solutions. The Commission will have 10 months in which to complete its investigations and report to the President.

Pyramid Selling

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to strengthen present pyramid selling regulations in the Fair Trading Act 1973 to ensure that *(a)* promoting companies are able to fulfil their legal obligation to refund money, where participants exercise their rights of resignation and refund and *(b)* participants may not be subjected to mandatory standing order or fixed payment schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 29 June 1992]:* My Department has received a number of representations from hon. Members on behalf of members of the multi level marketing industry which raise the same matters as the hon. Gentleman. As yet, I am unconvinced that there is need for revision of the legislation.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Eastham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ban the advertising of tobacco in video games where the speed at which they are played could cause the products to be subliminally advertised.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 29 June 1992]:* The advertising of tobacco in video cassettes for sale or hire to the public is not permitted under the terms of the voluntary agreement between the tobacco industry and the Government. If the hon. Member has examples of advertisements or promotions which he believes are in breach of this agreement, I suggest he makes them available to COMATAS, the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Husbands (Murder)

36. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions have been brought by the Crown prosecution service of women for alleged murder of husbands in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: The Crown prosecution service does not keep records in that form. The most relevant figures available relating to domestic homicides are contained in the Home Office criminal statistics for England and Wales 1990.

British National Party

37. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the consideration being given to prosecution of the British National party in respect of its publications.

The Attorney-General: I am not aware that the Director of Public Prosecutions is currently considering the prosecution of any member of the British National party in respect of its publications.

International Trading Agreements

38. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Attorney-General what is his policy towards the prosecution of those who breach international trading agreements.

The Attorney-General: Responsibility for enforcement of the law relating to international trading is shared between a number of public authorities who will apply the principles set out in the code for Crown prosecutors.

Crown Prosecution Service

39. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Attorney-General what progress is being made to adopt national standards in the Crown prosecution service.

The Attorney-General: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) earlier today.

Trade Union Bill

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General what consultations he has had with interested organisations about the points raised by the Joint Committee on Consolidation Bills about clauses 62 and 226 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Bill *[Lords]*; when these took place; and if he will list the organisations.

The Attorney-General: I have had no such consultations.

In its Report to Parliament on the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Bill, the Joint Committee of Consolidation Bills recommended that the attention of interested organisations should be drawn to the provisions of clauses 62 and 226 of the Bill and to the Committee's decision that the more concise wording and revised arrangement of the Bill was justifiable in order to improve the form of the legislation and did accurately reproduce the existing law.

In response to the Committee's recommendation, the secretary of the Law Commission wrote on 14 February 1992 to the CBI, the Engineering Employers Federation, the TUC and the Law Society drawing their attention to the provisions and to the Committee's decision. The TUC on 27 February and the Law Society on 4 March have written to confirm that they are satisfied that the revised wording does not alter the meaning of the legislation. No response has been received from the other two organisations.

In addition, the Law Commission draftsman wrote to leading practitioners in the field who agreed that the proposed text accurately reproduced the existing law.

The Joint Committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Browne-Wilkinson, reported to this House that it was of the opinion that the Bill as amended is pure consolidation and accurately reproduces the existing law.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Malawi

45. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the results of Her Majesty's Government's policy of linking aid and good government in relation to Malawi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since the United Kingdom and other donors agreed to restrict new non-humanitarian aid to Malawi, the Government of Malawi have released eight detainees and have agreed that the International Committee of the Red Cross may visit places of detention. We will maintain our pressure.

Child Health

46. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the Overseas Development Administration is making to the promotion of child health both directly and through the United Nations and other international agencies.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We make a significant contribution. The Overseas Development Administration is spending some £100 million a year on health and population activities, bilaterally and multilaterally. It is not possible to provide a detailed breakdown but a substantial proportion of this aid benefits children's health.

Know-how Fund

47. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Scottish organisations and educational institutions which are taking part in the know-how fund scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are numerous Scottish companies, voluntary organisations and educational institutions involved in the various strands of the know-how fund scheme. A list has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Overseas Aid

48. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the United Kingdom overseas aid programme for reaching the target of 0·7 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government have received a number of representations about progress towards the United Nations aid target. We have said that we shall reach it as soon as possible, but we are not prepared to set down a timetable.

Overseas Development Administration

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people served in the Overseas Development Administration *(a)* in May 1979 and *(b)* currently; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The numbers of permanent Overseas Development Administration staff in post were:

	1979	*1992*
Overseas Development Administration Headquarters	1,375·5	1,229·3
Scientific Units (now the Natural Resources Institute)	628·5	466·2

The 1992 headquarters figure takes account of the transfer of overseas pensions work to the Overseas Development Administration from the Crown Agents in 1987, when 112 staff transferred with the work. The 1979 figure for the scientific units excludes 346 staff of the directorate of overseas surveys which was merged with Ordnance Survey in 1984.

Comparing like with like, rationalisation and efficiency measures introduced during the period have led to a reduction overall of 21 per cent. in the total staff in the Overseas Development Administration.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons (Halal Meat)

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons currently offer the alternative of halal meat *(a)* with every meal, *(b)* with more than half the meals, *(c)* with less than half the meals or *(d)* not at all.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The prison dietary scale provides for halal meat for inmates who register as Muslims, and ask to have halal meat.

The number of meals at which halal meat is offered varies from prison to prison and from day to day to take account of the changing inmate population. Detailed statistics are not maintained.

Microfiche Data

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to consult the relative trade unions and professional associations before contracting out back-record conversion of National Identification Bureau microfiche data.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This matter has already been discussed with the Home Office trade union side. It will be kept informed of further developments in accordance with the standing arrangements which are established for such purposes.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of individual convictions and individual records which are involved in the back-record conversion of NIB microfiche data; and whether the contract will cover all convictions regardless of the seriousness of the offence.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The National Identification Bureau only holds records of those who have been convicted of offences for which a term of imprisonment may be imposed. It is estimated that there are some 3 million records in the collection and that these relate to some 9 million convictions. No decision has yet been taken as to how much of this material should be back record converted.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what terms of reference have been prepared by the computer services branch at his Department for the back-record conversion of NIB microfiche data; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No such terms of reference have been prepared.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many posts in his Department would be lost as a result of the contracting out of the back-record conversion of NIB microfiche.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the results of the consultancy on the back-record conversion of NIB microfiche data.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. Much of the information in the consultants' report is commercially sensitive.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to offering the contract for the back-record conversion of NIB microfiche data to staff of his Department.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is one of the options being considered.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and secrecy in the event of contracting out of the back-record conversion of NIB microfiche data.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is one of the matters being considered.

Brixton Prison (IRA Escapees)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is to be taken against members of special branch for their part in events leading up to the escape in 1991 of two Irish Republican Army suspects from Her Majesty's prison Brixton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that the chief constable of Staffordshire has received the report which he commissioned from the deputy chief constable of Nottinghamshire into allegations of special branch involvement in the escape. The report concludes that there is no evidence to warrant criminal or disciplinary action against any member of Staffordshire police. Any action to be taken on the report is for the chief constable of Staffordshire in the first instance.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of claims to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board are reduced on the grounds of previous convictions of the claimant; and by how much on average they are reduced;

(2) what proportion of claims to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board are rejected on the grounds of previous convictions of the claimant.

Mr. Jack: The latest figures available relate to 1990-91. They may be found in the board's 27th published annual report, a copy of which is held in the Library of the House. This shows that in that year the board received 50,820 applications and resolved 53,384 cases. In 1,783 cases nil awards were made because of the applicant's character as shown by his criminal convictions or unlawful conduct. In a further 696 cases reduced awards were made, but the available records do not show whether this was because of the applicants' conduct before, during or after the events giving rise to the claim or because of his character as shown by his criminal convictions or unlawful conduct. Information about the amount of any reduction made for such purposes is not recorded centrally.

Saztec Philippines Inc.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he has taken to ensure confidentiality of information passed to Saztec Philippines Inc. as a result of contracting out in the past five years;

(2) how many of his Department's contracts have been let to Saztec Philippines Inc. in each of the past five years; what was the nature of the contracts; what was their total value in that period; and what was the estimated saving to his Department as a result of letting those contracts;

(3) how many persons have been laid off in his Department as a result of contracting out his Department's work to Saztec Philippines Inc. in the past five years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No Home Office contracts have been let to Saztec Philippines Inc in the last five years.

Data Access Requests

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many subject access requests were made under the Data Protection Act 1984 to the Metropolitan police last year; and what proportion were made to criminal records.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There were 1,623 subject access applications in 1991. Of these 1,576, or 97 per cent. were made to criminal records.

Prison Service (Sick Leave)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average sick leave figure in the prison service; how many days are lost in the 23 establishments with the worst record; and if he will make a statement on the work of the consultant and the prison headquarters team set up to examine this problem.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Figures for the whole of the Prison Service are not readily available; but the average number of prison officer days lost through sick absence in the 12 month period ending March 1992 was 13·97 days and the average number of days lost in the 23 establishments with the highest level of sick absence was 21·12 days.

An external consultant was commissioned in autumn 1991 to review the Prison Service's handling of sick absence. She found that the average sick absence rate for prison officers was not out of line with other large organisations, although there was cause for concern in some establishments. She did, however, identify a number of ways in which the management of sick absence in the Prison Service could be improved.

In response to the consultant's report, a co-ordinating group, drawn from staff at headquarters and in the field, has been set up to assess the practicality of the recommendations and to oversee their implementation. The group will concentrate action on three main areas: monitoring and reporting, training and procedures for dealing with sick absence.

A guidance document on the management of sick absence was issued to all managers in prison establishments in March 1992.

Sex Offenders

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many hours of special training are given to staff who deal with sex offenders;

(2) how many prison staff have special training in the treatment of sex offenders.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The sex offender treatment programmes currently being run in a number of prisons in England and Wales are run by multi-disciplinary teams. These include professionally qualified psychologists and probation staff and also prison officers and other grades, all of whom have considerable experience of working with prisoners, and many of whom have counselling and other relevant skills.

In addition, last autumn, three weeks specialist training was provided to 84 staff involved in running the pilot core programmes, and a further week's training was provided to 29 prison psychologists who are supporting the programme. Further courses are being run in the current financial year.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are in prison convicted of child sexual abuse.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information about the age of victims of imprisoned sexual offenders is not recorded centrally. About 200 inmates of Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 31 March 1992 were serving sentences for unlawful sexual intercourse with a female under 16 years of age or gross indecency with or indecent assault on a child. Other inmates will, however, be serving sentences for rape, buggery and other sexual offences, and for murder, involving a sexual assault, where the victim was a child.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners convicted of child sexual abuse are receiving treatment to help them not to reoffend.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At 1 July 1992, a total of 171 prisoners had taken part in the pilot core programmes, introduced at the end of last year by the Prison Service to address offending behaviour. Of these, 122 had been convicted of sexual offences against children.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many prisons there are schemes for the special treatment of sex offenders.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Structured treatment programmes for sex offenders are currently being run at 14 prisons and one young offender institution.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are to monitor the effect of the special treatment of sex offenders.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office is currently funding an independent research study by a team of criminologists and clinical psychologists of a number of community-based treatment programmes for sex offenders. The study is addressing the content of treatment programmes and how they are delivered; the short-term impact on attitudes to offending and behaviour, and the longer term impact on re-offending. Similar arrangements will be made independently to evaluate the treatment programmes currently being run in prisons in England and Wales, following completion of the initial pilots.

Prisons (Private Caterers)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at which prisons food is provided by private caterers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Catering services for inmates are supplied by contract caterers at Downview, Belmarsh, Bullingdon, Holme House and Woodhill prisons. The Wolds remand prison, including its catering service, is run by private contractors.

Wolds Private Prison

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details of the inmate protests that have taken place at the Wolds private prison since it opened in April.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There have been four instances of inmate protest at HM Prison Wolds since April.

On 16 May a prisoner on morning exercise climbed onto the first floor windowsill of an unoccupied living unit. He tied himself to the window bars with a sweatshirt and stayed there for about four hours, protesting about being in prison. After he was persuaded to come down he went to the hospital to be kept under observation.

On 28 May, 43 prisoners in one living unit refused to go to bed at 2200 hours and remained in the communal living area while discussions took place with management about food distribution methods and drugs dependency treatment. During the night 39 prisoners returned to their own rooms of their own accord and four were escorted to the segregation unit. The incident finished at 0645 hours on 29 May. It was entirely peaceful throughout.

On 18 June, 28 prisoners in A unit, 12 on B unit and 34 on C unit refused to leave the association areas to go to bed at 2200 hours. The director agreed to their request for a prisoner committee comprising representatives of each unit to meet on a regular basis with prison management, and by 0130 on 19 June all prisoners had returned to their rooms voluntarily. The incident was entirely peaceful.

On 27 June, 48 prisoners in two units refused to go to their cells at 2200 hours. The sit-in was peaceful throughout in one unit and after agreement to the request for an early meeting with management and others to discuss medical provision the prisoners went to their cells at 0245 on 28 June. No specific complaints were voiced by prisoners in the second unit who caused damage of around £5,000 to furniture, recreational items and files. The incident was resolved without force with most prisoners returning to their cells voluntarily. Eight were escorted to the segregation unit. One prisoner cut his arm breaking a window and received appropriate medical treatment. The police are investigating the incident with a view to bringing charges if appropriate.

The Home Office controller or her deputy and members of the boards of visitors were present throughout on all these occasions.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the reports made by the Crown Controller into service delivery at the Wolds private prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The controller's reports on how the contract is managed and delivered contain information that is commercial in confidence. Reports by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons will be published and the board of visitors is free to publish its annual report.

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics he has as to the number of subject access requests, made to criminal records held by the Metropolitan police or the police national computer that have been made for vetting purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on this matter is not available, as applicants for subject access do not have to give their reasons.

Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when it is expected that the Royal Commission on criminal procedure will report.

Mr. Jack: It is anticipated that the Royal Commission on criminal justice will report by June 1993.

Immigration (Medical Examinations)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passengers arriving at United Kingdom ports of entry during 1991 and the first quarter of 1992 were referred to port medical inspectors for examination; what are the most common diagnoses made; and how many people have been *(a)* refused entry (i) wholly or (ii) partly on medical grounds and for what medical reason or *(b)* required to report for further medical treatment after entry, and for what medical reason.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Twenty-six passengers were refused entry principally on medical grounds in 1991, and two during the first quarter of 1992. The other information requested is not available centrally.

Public Information

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, column *344*, when he expects to complete his review of the Shingle Street incident files.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The review of the files dealing with the evacuation of the civilian population from several villages in East Anglia including Shingle Street during the second world war, which the Home Office has on extended closure, has now been completed. I have decided that all the files will be opened to access in the Public Record Office as soon as possible.

Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notices have been issued *(a)* in total and *(b)* to each airline under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 in each quarter since January 1991; how much money has accrued as a result; and how many such notices have been contested by each airline.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is not the practice to disclose information on the record of individual airlines under the

Act. The total number of notices issued to carriers—airlines and sea operators—in each quarter since January 1991 was as follows:

Quarter ending	*Number of notices*
31 March 1991	2,843
30 June 1991	2,759
30 September 1991	2,674
31 December 1991	2,031
31 March 1991	1,954

A total of £9·154 million was received in payments, many of which would have related to notices issued before this period. Representations were made by carriers in 4,683 cases.

Deportations

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many decisions to make a deportation order, by nationality of the potential deportee, where there is only a right of appeal under section 5 of the Immigration Act 1988 have been made in each quarter since 1 August 1988; and on what basis these decisions have been made.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's current policy on enforcing deportation decisions against genuine students who have been found to be working in breach of their conditions of entry; how many such deportation decisions have been made in each quarter since January 1991; how he would define a genuine student; and whether he will list the colleges which he would not recognise as providing courses of study for overseas students acceptable under the immigration rules.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Any overseas student who wishes to work during his free time or vacations may do so by obtaining permission from the Department of Employment. Each case in which a student is found working without such permission is considered on its merits. As required by the immigration rules, all relevant factors are taken into account before deciding whether deportation is the right course. A genuine student in this context is one who meets the requirements of the immigration rules for the grant of leave to enter or remain as student. Records are not kept in a form which would enable the number of students deported to be identified.

The immigration and nationality department keeps records of information which come to light about individual colleges, and account is taken of this by staff when dealing with applications from students. Staff are made aware of what information is available by means of internal notices which are part of staff instructions and are not published.

Citizenship

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many minor children born to a British overseas citizen parent outside the United Kingdom have *(a)* been registered or *(b)* been refused registration as (i) a British citizen of (ii) a British overseas citizen in each year since 1 January 1983.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is not available in the form requested. Minor children may apply for registration as British overseas citizens under section 27 of the British Nationality Act 1981. The numbers of grants made under this section, most of which will have been to minor children born abroad to a British overseas citizen parent, are as follows:

	Number
1983	2
1984	28
1985	64
1986	32
1987	27
1988	10
1989	29
1990	10
1991	12

DNA Tests

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many DNA tests to prove family relationships for immigration purposes have been carried out under the Home Office-funded scheme since its inception, listed by country of origin; what was the average waiting period for the test and for its results; and in how many of those tests the family relationships were proved to be as claimed by the applicants.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on the number of DNA tests carried out, the results received and their outcomes is given in the table. Information on the average waiting period for a test is not available centrally. The average time taken from receipt of samples to despatch of results is about six and a half weeks.

DNA tests on children under the Government scheme, results received and outcomes

Number of children

	Number of tests carried out		*Number of results received*		*Outcomes: Related as claimed to both patients*		*Related as claimed to one parent but not other*		*Not related as claimed to either parent*	
Country of origin	*1991*	*[1]1992*	*1991*	*[1]1992*	*1991*	*[1]1992*	*1991*	*[1]1992*	*1991*	*[1]1992*
Indian sub-continent[2]										
Bangladesh (Dhaka)	758	238	447	239	355	183	45	27	47	29
Pakistan (Islamabad)	438	246	198	40	156	35	11	5	31	—
India (Bombay, New Delhi)	34	7	6	4	6	4	—	—	—	—
Outside of Indian sub-continent										
Nigeria	3	—	2	1	2	1	—	—	—	—
Ghana	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sri Lanka	2	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—	—

Country of origin	Number of tests carried out		Number of results received		Outcomes: Related as claimed to both patients		Related as claimed to one parent but not other		Not related as claimed to either parent	
	1991	[1]1992	1991	[1]1992	1991	[1]1992	1991	[1]1992	1991	[1]1992
Philippines	2	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Germany[3]	2	—	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—

[1] 1992 first quarter. Results received in the first quarter of 1992 may have been for tests carried out in 1991.
[2] No tests have been carried out in Calcutta, Madras or Karachi.
[3] Thought to be of Indian sub-continent origin.
— Nil.

Asylum

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum were made *(a)* at ports of entry and *(b)* to the immigration and nationality department in each quarter since January 1991; how many asylum applications have been (i) decided, (ii) granted, (iii) refused, but exceptional leave granted, or (iv) refused in each quarter; and how many applications are pending at the latest convenient date.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information is given in the table.

Table 1 Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, by location of application, and decisions,[1,2] 1991 first quarter to 1992 first quarter

Number of principal applicants

Year	Applications received: Total applications	Applied at port[3]	Applied in country[4]	Decisions[2]: Total decisions	Granted asylum	Granted exceptional leave	Total refused	Refused asylum and exceptional leave after determination	Refused on third country grounds	Refused under para 101 of Immigration Rules[5]	Applications outstanding at end of quarter[6]
1991											
Quarter 1	11,790	3,490	8,300	1,370	140	910	315	295	20	—	39,670
Quarter 2	12,075	2,040	10,035	645	100	215	325	280	45	—	50,960
Quarter 3	10,600	1,970	8,630	570	90	195	290	255	35	—	60,810
Quarter 4	10,375	1,525	8,850	2,100	85	535	1,480	595	100	785	68,880
1992											
Quarter 1	5,185	1,335	3,845	6,330	165	1,500	4,665	565	150	3,945	67,500

[1] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest 5. 1991 decision figures are likely to understate because of delays in recording.
[2] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same quarter.
[3] Figures include certain in-country applications made in illegal entrant cases.
[4] In country figures include a small number of applications recorded as having been made overseas and referred to the Home Office for a decision. These cases may be under recorded.
[5] For failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period. Figures from 1 December 1991 only. These refusals in January—November 1991 are included in the column "Refused asylum and exceptional leave after determination".
[6] Figures are maxima which overstate because of earlier under recording of decisions. Figures are approximate and rounded to the nearest 10.

European Constituencies

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he will ensure that the review of European constituency boundaries will be completed in time for the 1994 European elections.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is currently no requirement for a review of European constituency boundaries to be undertaken before the 1994 European elections.

Mr. Salman Rushdie

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it remains the policy of Her Majesty's Government that adequate protection will at all times continue to be given to Mr. Salman Rushdie as long as his life is in danger.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Decisions concerning the protection provided for Mr. Rushdie are operational matters for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis based on the level of the threat and the police resources available. The necessary level of protection will continue to be provided by the Metropolitan police while the threat to Mr. Rushdie remains high.

South Wales Police

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his assessment of the current manpower needs of the South Wales police in relation to the latest crime figures.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Police force establishments are reviewed annually in the light of bids for extra police officers. Requests for increases are considered in relation to a number of criteria, including rates of recorded crime. Approvals for establishment increases for the current financial year were announced on 28 November 1991.

Police (Inquiry)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now announce the terms of reference and membership of his proposed inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I have appointed Sir Patrick Sheehy as chairman of the inquiry and Sir Paul Fox, Professor Colin Campbell, Mr. John Bullock and Mr. Eric Caines as members.

The inquiry will have the following terms of reference:

"To *examine* the rank structure, remuneration and conditions of service of the police service in England and Wales, in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and to *recommend* what changes, if any, would be sensible to ensure

—rank structures and conditions of service, which reflect the current roles and responsibilities of police officers;

—enough flexibility in the distribution of rewards to ensure that responsibilities and performance may be properly recognised in changing circumstances;

—remuneration set and maintained at a level adequate to ensure the recruitment, retention and motivation of officers of the right quality;

having full regard to

—the principle recommended by the Edmund-Davies Inquiry that police pay should reflect the special nature of the police officers' role;

—the principles set out in the police service statement of common purposes and values;

—the need to ensure affordability and value for money in public spending.

Background

The Inquiry should take into account:—

—the results of fact-finding studies into

(i) the current roles and responsibilities of police officers;

(ii) the current manpower profiles of the police forces and the possible impact on career development of changes in police retirement policy;

—relevant recommendations by the Audit Commission;

—all work currently being undertaken relating to manpower and personnel issues, including work on police performance measures and indicators;

—developments in pay generally;

—the special and different circumstances of the Royal Ulster Constabulary."

The purpose of the inquiry is to ensure that police rank and pay structures meet the long term needs of the public for a professional, competent and effective police service in the United Kingdom. The inquiry will report jointly to me, to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. In addition to the fact-finding studies mentioned in the terms of reference, the inquiry may decide to set in hand other research which it considers necessary and desirable. We also expect it to take evidence from a wide range of bodies and individuals concerned with the police and the services they provide. It will be expected to have regard to the differing circumstances in which police officers have to carry out their duties in different parts of the United Kingdom, considering in particular the special circumstances of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the responsibilities of the Metropolitan police in respect of other parts of the United Kingdom. The inquiry will be looking at rank structure, remuneration, including allowances as well as basic pay, and conditions of service and we expect it to make recommendations which will provide a sound basis for establishing these in a way which meets the present and future needs of the police and the public they serve.

DEFENCE

Submarine Reactor Fuel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the scope and reasons for the new regulations being introduced to replace those covering existing used core transport packages for the movement of spent irradiated submarine fuel.

Mr. Aitken: The national regulations for the road transport of radioactive materials apply equally to used core transport packages as to other loads. The revised regulations, which came into effect last year, were a result of implementation by the UK of new International Atomic Energy Authority regulations for the safe transport of radioactive material—safety series 6.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many facilities operated by or for his Department store or process radioactive materials; and if he will list all notifiable radiological incidents that occurred at these sites since 1979.

Mr. Aitken: The number of sites that exceed the threshold for exemptions from the Radioactive Substances Act, 1960, is currently under review but is in the region of 160. Records of the notifiable radiological incidents under the Ionising Radiations Regulations, 1985, are held by individual establishments and units and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total administrative cost of the Defence Export Services Organisation in 1991-92 and projected for 1992-93, both in full and also net of any offsetting administrative charges.

Mr. Aitken: The administrative costs of the DESO were £10·2 million for 1991-92 and are estimated to be £10·9 million for 1992-93. These costs are more than offset by the revenue earned by the organisation.

Chiefs of Staff

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on the procedure followed for the selection and appointment of the Chief of the Defence Staff and the chiefs of staff of the three armed services.

Mr. Rifkind: The arrangements are that the outgoing chief of staff puts to me, as Secretary of State for Defence, an assessment of the field of possible successors together with a recommendation. He will have checked that the candidates are willing and medically fit. I then take soundings, for example with appropriate officers senior in rank to the candidates, before reporting my conclusions to the Prime Minister.

Once the Government have reached a view, the approval of Her Majesty the Queen is sought.

Departmental Properties

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 June, *Official Report*, column *529*, if he will make a statement on the progress of the sale to a housing association of the 170 empty dwellings owned by his Department in Plymouth.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Negotiations are continuing with the Devon and Cornwall housing association.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 June, *Official Report*, column *529*, what plans he has for the remaining 106 empty dwellings owned by his Department in Plymouth for which he did not indicate plans in his answer.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: They are available for allocation to service personnel.

Eurosatory '92 Exhibition

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what equipment belonging to the United Kingdom armed forces was loaned or hired back to the company which produced it for display at the Eurosatory '92 exhibition in Paris.

Mr. Aitken: Information of this kind is not held centrally and disproportionate effort would be needed to ascertain whether any service equipment had been so loaned.

EMPLOYMENT

Trade Unions

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were in trade union membership for the latest date available; and what are the comparative figures with other EC countries.

Mr. McLoughlin: The total membership of trade unions known to the Employment Department at the end of 1990, the latest date available, was 9·9 million. Comparative figures for other EC countries are not available.

Industrial Disputes

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many days have been lost due to industrial disputes for the latest year available in local government and public services.

Mr. McLoughlin: A total of 323,000 working days were lost in local government and public services in 1991, the latest calendar year for which data are available.

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many days have been lost due to unauthorised industrial action in each year since 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: Because of difficulties in categorising disputes, data distinguishing between authorised and unauthorised action are not routinely collected. No such information is available for the years requested.

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many days have been lost due to industrial disputes in each of the years since 1979, expressed both as an absolute figure and as a proportion of employees in employment.

Mr. McLoughlin: Data expressed as absolute figures of working days lost, and working days lost per thousand employees in employment are given in the following table and have been extracted from an article on industrial disputes published in the May 1992 edition of the *Employment Gazette*.

Year	*Absolute figure in thousands*	*Working days lost per 1,000 employees in employment*
1979	29,474	1,273
1980	11,964	521
1981	4,266	195
1982	5,313	248
1983	3,754	178
1984	27,135	1,278
1985	6,402	299
1986	1,920	90
1987	3,546	164
1988	3,702	166
1989	4,128	182
1990	1,903	83
1991	761	34

Equal Pay

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she intends to implement the proposals for reform of the equal pay laws recommended by the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Mr. McLoughlin: The EOC's detailed and complex recommendations are receiving careful consideration.

Legislation (Consultations)

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations she has held with employers' organisations, the Trades Union Congress, individual trade unions and other relevant organisations about the proposed Employment Bill.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend and her predecessor have had discussions about these matters in the course of meetings with a number of organisations, including employers' associations and the TUC.

All such organisations are, of course, free to offer views about relevant issues. Many did so, for example, in the form of representations on proposals for further reform of industrial relations and trade union law put forward in the 1991 Green Paper "Industrial Relations in the 1990s" (Cm. 1602) and the 1992 White Paper "People, Jobs and Opportunities" (Cm. 1810).

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average period of assessment, counselling and guidance provided by her Department to *(a)* disabled people and *(b)* people with a mental illness for each year since 1985; if she has any plans to change this in future years; what guidelines she issues regarding the maximum length of assessment contracts; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of registered

disabled people in the Chesham and Amersham constituency for the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred these questions for reply.

Training

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the budget for employment training and youth training in 1991-92 for each training and enterprise council.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested for each training and enterprise council (TEC) in England is shown in the following table.

Information for Wales is for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales to answer.

TEC budgets for Employment Training and Youth Training for 1991-92
£ millions

TEC	ET	YT
London		
AZTEC	2·4	3·4
CENTEC (16 September 1991)	3·2	3·2
CILNTEC (14 October 1991)	2·2	3·1
LETEC	9·0	10·5
North London (16 September 1991)	3·2	2·4
North West London (16 September 1991)	1·8	1·5
SOLOTEC	3·8	4·7
South Tames (27 May 1991)	7·0	5·3
West London (16 September 1991)	2·0	3·4
South East		
Essex	5·8	12·3
Hampshire	5·0	16·8
Heart of England	1·6	4·9
Hertfordshire	2·8	5·4
Isle of Wight	0·6	1·6
Kent	5·5	14·3
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire	1·2	3·5
Surrey	1·8	4·5
Sussex	4·5	11·2
Thames Valley Enterprise	2·4	13·6
South West		
Avon	6·0	13·0
Devon and Cornwall	10·5	22·1
Dorset	2·5	7·1
Gloucester	1·9	6·4
Somerset	1·7	6·4
Wiltshire	1·7	6·3
West Midlands		
Birmingham	16·6	15·1
Central England	2·2	4·8
Coventry	4·9	12·9
Dudley	2·9	5·1
Hereford and Worcester	2·0	4·7
Sandwell	2·8	5·2
Shropshire	2·9	6·6
Staffordshire	6·0	19·6
Walsall	3·2	4·5
Wolverhampton	3·1	5·0
East Midlands and Anglia		
Leicester	4·7	14·2
Northamptonshire	2·5	6·2
Lincolnshire	3·7	11·1
Greater Nottingham	4·7	11·2
North Nottingham	5·0	8·2
South Derbyshire	4·1	9·2
North Derbyshire	2·2	6·2
Norfolk and Waveney	4·7	12·4
Suffolk	1·8	4·5
Bedfordshire	1·7	7·0
Greater Peterborough	1·6	4·3
CAMBSTEC	0·7	3·2
Yorkshire and Humberside		
Leeds	5·5	10·6
North Yorkshire	3·5	5·1
Bradford	4·7	6·9
Calderdale/Kirklees	5·5	9·8
Wakefield	3·2	6·0
Barnsley and Doncaster	7·5	11·1
Sheffield	6·8	12·6
Rotherham	3·3	6·0
Humberside	10·6	18·5
North West		
Bolton and Bury	2·5	6·6
CEWTEC	7·4	10·4
Cumbria	3·4	10·3
ELTEC	3·5	8·6
LAWTEC	6·1	12·9
Manchester	9·9	16·9
METROTEC	2·4	5·1
Oldham	1·6	4·7
QUALITEC	2·3	5·5
Rochdale	2·1	2·9
South and East Cheshire	1·8	4·2
Stockport and High Peak	1·7	4·9
Merseyside (24 June 1991	12·6	20·8
NORMID (24 June 1991)	2·3	7·1
Northern		
Teesside	11·8	14·8
Tyneside	13·5	20·1
Wearside	6·6	9·4
County Durham	10·6	15·7
Northumberland	3·5	5·1

Notes:
1. Where TECs became operational after 1 April 1991, the dates are shown in brackets.
2. ET Budgets exclude notional allowances (ie unemployment benefit + £10).

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps she is taking to ensure that training and enterprise councils cater appropriately for people with special learning difficulties.

Mr. McLoughlin: TECs are obliged through their contracts with the Employment Department to ensure that suitable high quality training is available for all trainees with special training needs. This includes people with learning difficulties. TECs' business plans are examined before approval to ensure that they have included objectives and targets for helping people with special training needs.

The Employment Department's regional contract managers review TECs' achievements against objectives at regular intervals.

Inspectors of the Training Standards Advisory Service are also used by the Employment Department's regional offices to examine specific issues including special needs provision.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the budget for employment training and youth training in 1990-91 for each training and enterprise council.

Mr. McLoughlin: The allocated budgets for ET and YT for each of the approved training and enterprise councils (TECs) for the financial year 1990-91 are set out in the following table.

Individual budget figures relate to the period from the date when the TEC became operational to the end of the 1990-91 financial year.

TEC budgets for Employment Training and Youth Training for 1990-91

£ millions

TEC	*ET*	*YT*
London		
AZTEC (12 November 1990)	0·7	0·9
South East		
Essex (23 July 1990)	3·6	7·0
Hampshire (17 September 1990)	3·0	7·7
Heart of England (17 September 1990)	0·8	2·3
Hertfordshire (3 April 1990)	1·9	4·4
Isle of Wight (15 October 1990)	0·3	0·7
Kent (12 November 1990)	2·1	4·5
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire (17 September 1990)	0·6	1·6
Thames Valley Enterprise (3 April 1990)	2·0	6·4
South West		
Devon and Cornwall (30 April 1990)	11·1	20·1
Dorset (30 April 1990)	2·0	5·5
Gloucester (7 January 1991)	0·3	0·8
Somerset (23 July 1990)	1·3	4·0
West Midlands		
Birmingham (12 November 1990)	4·4	4·7
Coventry (10 September 1990)	3·2	7·0
Staffordshire (5 October 1990)	3·3	10·1
Walsall (15 October 1990)	1·4	2·0
East Midlands and Anglia		
North Nottingham (25 May 1990)	2·7	7·2
South Derbyshire (7 January 1991)	0·7	2·2
Norfolk and Waveney (12 November 1990)	1·8	5·3
Suffolk (12 November 1990)	0·6	2·9
Greater Peterborough (4 February 1991)	0·1	0·4
CAMBSTEC (4 February 1991)	0·4	0·1
Yorkshire and Humberside		
Leeds (15 October 1990)	2·3	3·2
North Yorkshire (25 May 1990)	2·4	4·0
Bradford (7 January 1991)	0·7	1·1
Calderdale/Kirklees (3 April 1990)	4·8	9·3
Wakefield (7 January 1991)	0·5	0·1
Barnsley and Doncaster (7 January 1991)	1·3	2·0
Sheffield (1 October 1990)	3·3	4·7
Rotherham (30 July 1990)	2·2	2·8
North West		
Bolton and Bury (15 October 1990)	0·8	2·5
Cumbria (30 April 1990)	2·8	8·6
ELTEC (28 May 1990)	3·1	6·8
Manchester (12 November 1990)	3·6	5·3
METROTEC (23 June 1990)	1·8	3·7
Oldham (30 April 1990)	1·4	4·4
Rochdale (30 April 1990)	1·6	2·3
South and East Cheshire (9 April 1990)	1·6	4·6
Stockport and High Peak (20 August 1990)	0·8	1·6
Northern		
Teesside (30 April 1990)	12·4	15·5
Tyneside (30 April 1990)	14·4	17·1
Wearside (30 April 1990)	7·3	8·5
County Durham (1 October 1990)	5·2	8·6
Northumberland (17 September 1990)	1·8	3·5
Wales		
Gwent (4 February 1991)	0·4	0·6
North West Wales (4 February 1991)	0·3	0·4
South Glamorgan (4 February 1991)	0·4	0·3
West Wales (23 July 1990)	6·1	7·5
North East Wales (17 September 1990)	1·2	3·1
Mid Glamorgan (27 July 1990)	4·2	6·7

Notes:

1. The dates when the TECs became operational are shown in brackets.
2. ET budgets exclude notional allowances (ie unemployment benefit + £10).

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of the costs of the Government's youth training, employment training and employment action programmes are met by social security benefits, European social fund or her Department's funding.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1992-93 the Employment Department expects to spend £851 million on youth training (YT), £807 million on employment training (ET) and £178 million on employment action (EA), including allowances for participants.

An estimated 47 per cent. of ET expenditure and 45 per cent. of EA expenditure is for that part of participant allowances which is equivalent to previous entitlement to social security benefits. Young people on YT are not generally entitled to such benefits.

The latest information available in respect of the European social fund (ESF) is for 1991 when £157 million was received for ET and £16 million for YT. There was no ESF receipt for employment action. Expected receipts from the ESF are taken into account in setting the total expenditure plans for ET and YT.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what plans she has to change the youth training guarantee; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will make a statement about the youth training guarantee.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are no plans to change the YT guarantee. The guarantee provides for the offer of a suitable YT place to young people under 18 who are unemployed, not in full-time education and seeking training. The Government are committed to ensuring that the guarantee will be met.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the representations she has received from *(a)* training and enterprise councils *(b)* local education authority career services and *(c)* employers about the youth training guarantee.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is not available.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish figures of the number of young people seeking a youth training place for (i) standard regions of the Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate, (ii) training and enterprise councils or local education authority careers service areas or (iii) another convenient form, for the most recent date for which the information is available.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is not available.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will give the total number of

participants in youth training for the most recent date for which figures are available and in the previous three years for Great Britain and each of the standard regions broken down by sex and those on employer-based schemes.

Mr. McLoughlin: The full information asked for is not available. The following table gives numbers of young people in training by region and gender for years ending March 1989 and March 1990, and regional totals for March 1991 and March 1992. Information about the numbers of people on youth training programmes that were employer based is not held centrally.

Youth Training—Numbers in Training in Great Britain

	March 89			March 90			[2]March 91	[1]March 92
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Total	Total
South East	25,800	13,500	39,300	24,900	12,900	37,700	25,800	32,300
London	13,400	6,900	20,300	13,300	6,600	19,900	12,700	21,500
South West	18,400	10,900	29,300	17,200	9,900	27,100	20,500	22,100
West Midlands	24,700	17,500	42,200	22,400	15,100	37,500	31,500	29,800
East Midlands and Eastern	27,800	16,500	44,300	26,200	15,300	41,500	21,900	38,300
Yorkshire and Humberside	25,900	17,500	43,400	23,200	15,000	38,300	28,800	28,600
North West	35,200	22,900	58,100	31,000	19,600	50,600	30,600	48,600
Northern	17,400	11,900	29,300	15,700	10,800	26,500	19,700	20,800
Wales	14,700	8,200	22,900	13,900	7,900	21,800	16,400	16,500
Scotland	29,100	18,400	47,600	26,600	16,200	42,800	37,100	37,300
Great Britain	232,400	144,200	376,600	214,500	129,300	343,800	[3]314,200	295,800

Figures are individually rounded and may not add up to the totals.
Notes:
[1] March 1992 Youth Training and Training Credits figures are subject to adjustment.
[2] Information not available for males and females for March 1991 and March 1992.
[3] Total for March 1991 includes 69,200 trainees covered by providers contracted nationally and not included in the regional totals.

Source:
March 1989, 90: Spectrum
March 1991, 92: Osmosis/Pes 92.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list as per the requirement set out in the TEC operating agreement the number of youth training starts and the number of youth training trainees in training at the end of the four-weekly period as set out in the schedule of management information for *(a)* the most recent period for which information is available, *(b)* each of the previous periods back to 1 to 26 April 1991 and *(c)* for each TEC.

Mr. McLoughlin: As the information requested is contained within a number of tables I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when she last met representatives of training and enterprise councils to discuss the delivery of the youth training guarantee.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment meets representatives of training and enterprise councils regularly, and the priority which the Government attach to meeting the YT guarantee is frequently discussed.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the value of the youth training allowance, or its equivalent, in every year since it was introduced expressed in both actual prices and in constant price terms for 1992-93.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Youth Training Scheme/Youth Training—Minimum allowance levels (£)

	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	[3]1992-93
Minimum allowance (YT/YTS)[1]	25·00	26·25	27·30	27·30	28·50	29·50	29·50	29·50	29·50	29·50
At 1992-93 price level	41·70	41·75	41·10	39·79	39·40	38·04	35·68	32·98	30·82	29·50
Minimum allowance (YT/YTS)[2]	—	—	—	35·00	35·00	35·00	35·00	35·00	35·00	35·00
At 1992-93 price level	—	—	—	51·02	48·39	45·12	42·34	39·13	36·57	35·00

[1] Minimum level of allowance payable to first year trainees until 29 May 1990. Payable to 16 year old trainees thereafter.
[2] Minimum level of allowance payable to second year trainees until 29 May 1990. Payable to trainees aged 17 and above thereafter.
[3] 1992-93 price levels obtained by application of appropriate GDP deflator index.
Note: The Youth Training Scheme (YTS) was replaced by Youth Training (YT) on 29 May 1990.

Bridging Allowances

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people received bridging allowance in each of the standard regions including Scotland, and in total, in each month since January 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Social Services Guide

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many printing firms in Northern Ireland were invited to print the summary guide "A Charter for Patients and Clients" on Northern Ireland health and personal social services; whether this guide was printed in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Department of Health and Social Services has an agreement for printing with Her Majesty's Stationery Office. I understand from HMSO that three printing firms in Northern Ireland were among those invited to tender for the printing of the summary guide. The summary guide was printed in Great Britain.

Factor 8

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the operation of the Medicines Act (Exemptions from Licences) (Importation) Order 1984—SI 1984, No. 673—in relation to named patient arrangements for the supply of unlicensed factor 8 preparations and other unlicensed pharmaceutical products.

Mr. Hanley: I refer to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health on 1 July 1992, *Official Report* column *636*. Responsibility for the operation of the Medicines (Exemptions from Licences) (Importation) Order 1984 is a matter for the Medicines Control Agency.

Inter-party Talks

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his oral answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, columns 373-74, to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) what commitment he gave on the proposed strand 3 meeting of the Northern Ireland talks in his letter of 17 June to the hon. Member for Antrim, North.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: When I wrote to the hon. Member and to the other Northern Ireland party leaders participating in the talks on 17 June I was not able to give any commitment as to whether a meeting would take place on any particular date, because discussions with the Irish Government were still continuing. I accordingly gave none. The hon. Member will recall that the question from the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh related to a "written commitment to the Democratic Unionist party that a strand 3 formation meeting would take place this week." In a letter to the hon. Member for Antrim, North and other party leaders I did, however, confirm that the British and Irish Governments both envisaged that the meeting in question would take place the following week. I added that, for my part, I hoped it would take place in the early part of that week.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Support Payments

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount of all forms of agriculture support payments made in 1991; and what was the average amount of support payment per farm.

Mr. Curry: The publication "Agriculture In The United Kingdom: 1991" gives details of expenditure on agriculture support—table 9.1—and the number of farm holdings—table 2.3.

Table 9.1
Public expenditure under the CAP and on national grants and subsidies

£ million	*April/March (financial years)*				
	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92 (forecast)*
1 Market regulation under the CAP					
(i) Expenditure by the intervention Board[1]					
cereals	229·4	210·1	120·6	120·8	197·3
oilseeds	208·3	177·8	187·0	236·4	250·6
sugar	151·1	118·8	104·0	110·7	111·1
beef and veal	201·4	149·5	63·8	357·6	341·0
sheepmeat	119·4	133·2	78·6	126·5	154·7
pigmeat	−1·9	0·3	2·6	6·6	3·5
milk products	251·1	48·9	92·9	203·9	165·9
processed goods	47·6	45·6	38·5	44·6	54·6
other[2]	16·6	27·2	46·7	55·2	45·4
Sub-total	1,222·9	911·4	734·7	1,262·3	1,324·1
(ii) Expenditure by the Agriculture Departments:					
Repayments of Cereals Levies	1·7	2·2	24·2	19·2	1·7
Suckler Cow Premium Scheme	36·7	37·7	61·8	73·7	70·4
Annual Premium on Ewes	80·6	130·7	114·9	201·8	276·1
Milk Non-Marketing Premiums	—	—	—	—	—
Payments to producers giving up some milk production	51·0	74·1	65·2	59·6	54·5
Beef Special Premium Scheme—Northern Ireland[3]	—	—	11·6	6·2	7·3
Orchard Grubbing Scheme	—	—	—	—	1·5
Sub-total	170·0	244·6	277·7	360·5	411·7
Total	1,392·9	1,156·0	1,012·4	1,622·8	1,735·8

	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92 (forecast)
II Price guarantees					
Potatoes[4]	—	—	—	—	—
Wool[4]	0·7	0·1	2·9	18·2	38·0
Assistance to the Egg Industry	—	2·9	0·1	0·1	—
Total	0·7	3·0	3·0	18·3	38·0
III Support for capital and other improvements					
Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme (EC)[5]	—	—	0·4	3·2	6·3
Agriculture Improvement Scheme (EC)[5]	18·9	25·9	24·0	13·3	10·2
Agriculture and Horticulture Development Scheme[5,6]	32·3	21·6	15·1	12·2	7·7
Farm structures	0·4	0·4	0·3	0·3	0·3
Agriculture and Horticulture Grant Scheme [5,7]	3·6	1·0	0·1	—	—
Agriculture Improvement Scheme (National) [5]	9·0	7·1	7·2	0·9	0·3
Northern Ireland Agricultural Development Programme [5,8]	2·0	1·1	2·6	7·0	8·3
Farm Woodlands	—	—	0·3	1·0	2·1
Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme (National) [5]	—	—	11·5	32·1	33·8
Guidance Premiums	2·3	1·0	0·3	0·1	0·1
Farm accounts	0·7	0·4	0·2	0·2	0·3
Others[9]	0·3	0·2	—	0·2	0·4
Total	69·5	58·7	62·0	70·5	69·8
IV Support for agriculture in special areas					
Hill Livestock compensatory allowances:					
cattle	52·0	50·6	52·9	57·4	69·7
sheep	69·0	62·6	69·5	73·0	89·6
Additional benefit under AHDs, NIADP, AHGS, AIS (EC), AIS (Nat) FCGS (EC), FCGS (Nat)	20·9	19·6	20·1	18·6	19·8
Others[10]	4·1	4·9	8·1	10·1	11·3
Total	145·9	137·1	150·6	159·1	190·4
V Other payments					
Set-Aside	—	—	9·8	19·1	27·4
Milk outgoers scheme[8]	11·1	11·4	4·7	0·8	0·7
Weather aid 1985	—	—	—	—	—
Storm damage 1987	—	0·2	0·1	0·4	—
Sheep compensation scheme 1986	1·0	0·9	0·4	0·9	1·0
Co-operation grants	1·7	1·2	1·2	0·9	1·2
Crofting building grants and loans (net)	3·3	3·1	2·7	3·3	4·2
Farm diversification:					
Capital grants	—	0·5	2·3	2·8	3·0
Marketing and feasibility grants	—	—	—	0·1	0·4
Nitrate sensitive areas	—	—	—	0·3	0·9
Environmentally sensitive areas	2·9	6·8	8·6	9·4	11·6
Extensification	—	—	—	—	0·4
Others[11]	1·0	0·8	0·2	1·0	1·2
Total	21·0	24·9	30·0	39·0	52·0
Total I to V[12]	1,630·0	1,379·7	1,258·0	1,909·7	2,086·0

[1] The figures are net of receipts treated as negative expenditure. Receipts from levies on the production and storage of sugar and isoglucose and on third country exports, which are regarded as community own resources, are excluded.

[2] Includes eggs, poultrymeat, fruit and vegetables, hops, herbage seeds, dried fodder, peas and beans, fisheries and flax. Also includes expenditure on products covered by the CAP but not produced to any significant extent in the United Kingdom (olive oil, rice, wine, grape must and hemp).

[3] Payments in Great Britain are made by the Intervention Board and included in beef and veal expenditure in section (i).

[4] Payments in respect of potatoes and wool relate partly to the crop or clip of the year indicated and partly to the crop or clip in the preceding year or years.

[5] Farmers in special areas are also eligible for additional assistance. The estimated benefit is shown separately in section IV of the table.

[6] Includes the farm and horticulture development scheme.

[7] Includes the farm and horticulture capital grant schemes.

[8] Except for the Northern Ireland Agricultural Development Programme (NIADP) and the milk outgoers scheme expenditure from the Northern Ireland block is excluded.

[9] Includes loan guarantees, grants for agricultural drainage in Scotland and farm structure loans.

[10] Includes the integrated development programme for the Western Isles, the agricultural development programme for the Scottish islands and grants for crofting improvements.

[11] Includes producer organisations and forage groups and Shetland wool producers.

[12] Receipts from the European Community (to which the United Kingdom contributes) are set out below (£ million). Receipts do not always relate to expenditure in the year in which they are received. Reimbursement of spending on structural measures (Section III) is normally a year in arrears. Receipts for 1988-89 and subsequent years reflect the arrangements for depreciation of stocks agreed at the European Council in February 1988.

	£ million
1987-88	1,127·7
1988-89	1,597·0
1989-90	1,228·5
1990-91	1,635·9
1991-92[13]	1,744·6

[13] Forecast.

Table 2.3
Numbers and sizes of holdings (the data in this table exclude minor holdings)

At June of each year

		1986		*1991 (provisional)*[1]	
		Number of holdings ('000)	*Percent of total BSU*	*Number of holdings ('000)*	*Percent of total BSU*
Size of holding (BSU)[2]	under 4·0 BSU	102·8	2·7	102·6	2·6
	4·0 to under 16·0 BSU	65·6	13·5	60·9	12·5
(British Size Units (BSUs) measure the financial potential of the holding in terms of the margins which might be expected from its crops and stock The margins used are gross margins standardised at average 1978·80 values. The threshold of 4 BSU is judged to be the minimum for full-time holdings).	16·0 to under 40·0 BSU	50·4	29·0	48·0	28·0
	40·0 BSU and over	29·3	54·8	30·0	56·8
	Total	248·1	100·0	241·4	100·0
	Holdings 4 BSU and over:				
	Average size: BSUs	—	29·6	—	30·7
	: total area (hectares)	—	105·8	—	107·3
		Number of holdings ('000)	*Hectares ('000)*	*Number of holdings ('000)*	*Hectares ('000)*
Total area on holdings[2]	0·1 to under 20 hectares	102·2	834	97·9	820
	20·0 to under 50 hectares	62·8	2,073	60·4	2,001
	50·0 to under 100 hectares	43·1	3,051	42·7	3,032
	100·0 hectares and over	40·0	11,337	40·4	11,268
	Total	248·1	17,295	241·4	17,122
	Average total area per holding (hectares)	—	69·7	—	70·9
	% of total area on holdings with 100 hectares and over	—	65·6	—	65·8
		Number of holdings ('000)	*Hectares ('000)*	*Number of holdings ('000)*	*Hectares ('000)*
Crops and grass area[2 3]	0·1 to under 20 hectares	102·0	827	96·2	803
	20·0 to undr 50 hectares	63·0	2,079	60·3	1,991
	50·0 to under 100 hectares	41·2	2,904	40·9	2,877
	100·0 hectares and over	31·2	6,168	31·2	6,109
	Total	237·4	11,978	228·6	11,780
	Average crops and grass area per holding (hectares)	—	50·5	—	51·5
	% of total crops and grass area on holdings with 100 hectares and over	—	51·5	—	51·9

[1] The provisional 1991 figures include returns on about 3,500 holdings (net) in Scotland which have been reclassified as main holdings.
[2] Land in Great Britain let out under short term lets is attributed to the lessor, but land so let out in Northern Ireland (under the conacre system) is now attributed to the lessee. This difference, which applies to both the 1986 and 1991 figures in the table, affects both the number of holdings and their average size.
[3] The numbers of holdings shown in this part of the table are lower than those presented in the "total area" part of the table because holdings without crops and grass are excluded.

Summer Solstice

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from farmers or farming organisations over damage to fences, gates, hedges, land or frightening of animals arising from the various manifestations to celebrate the 1992 summer solstice.

Mr. Curry: Neither I nor my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, who has primary responsibility for matters of public order, has received any such representations. However, I understand that the president of the National Farmers Union recently met the Minister of State, Home Office to discuss the general problem of trespass on farm land.

Surplus Food

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the criteria applied in selecting persons or agencies empowered to distribute European Community surplus foods to certain pensioners at the time of the last distribution.

Mr. Curry: Charitable or non-profit making organisations were designated to distribute food to eligible persons if they appeared to the Agriculture Minister to be appropriate and were of a non-commercial character; already involved in the provision of goods or services to the most needy; and not concerned by way of commerce in production, wholesaling, storage or retailing of butter or beef. Preference was given to organisations providing cooked meals to the homeless or destitute, or capable of undertaking the distribution of food widely throughout their local community.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects some of the European Community's food surpluses next to be available for distribution to pensioners in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: I shall shortly be announcing the arrangements for the distribution of food in the United Kingdom under the 1992 EC surplus food scheme. I have already announced that the only change to the categories of people eligible for produce would be the inclusion of recipients of the disability working allowance.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the income, or other criteria, applied to decide which pensioners qualified for a share of the European Community's food surpluses at the time of the last distribution.

Mr. Curry: The following categories of people were eligible to receive food under the 1991 surplus food scheme: the homeless and destitute and those in receipt of income support or family credit, living in welfare hostels.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what method, and by which agencies, the share of the European Community's food surpluses was distributed in the borough of Thurrock at the time of the last distribution.

Mr. Curry: Thurrock borough council and the South Ockenden gateway club, were designated to distribute food under the European Community surplus food scheme in the Thurrock area. Arrangements for distribution of food were made by designated organisations in accordance with the conditions laid down in leaflets LP45 and LP46, copies of which were placed in the Library of the House.

Flood Risks

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information his Department holds on coastal areas considered to be at risk of flooding; how often this information is updated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: As part of its investigations into the likely effects of sea level rise, the Department has produced maps showing areas in England and Wales below the 5 and 10 m contour, the areas most at risk from flooding. This information will be kept up to date as required. In addition, regional offices of the National Rivers Authority hold more detailed information relating to their areas.

Peak National Park

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money has been allocated by his Department to environmentally sensitive areas in the Peak national park; and what is the nature of such projects.

Mr. Curry: The North Peak was designated as an environmentally sensitive area in 1988 and I intend to designate the South West Peak later this year. Both schemes lie within the Peak national park and aim to protect the heather moorland and other characteristic environmental features. The annual expenditure on environmentally sensitive area agreements in the North Peak is currently £735,000. I will be reviewing this scheme during the year with the aim of enhancing its environmental achievements.

Sea Fisheries

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the procedures followed for awarding the contract to build ESF Protector 3 for the Eastern sea fisheries joint committee; and what opportunities were provided for shipbuilders in the area which the new vessel will serve to compete on an equal footing with other contenders.

Mr. Curry: Expenditure by the Eastern sea fisheries committee is the responsibility of the committee and its financing local authority. The committee has sought European Community funding for the vessel and we are satisfied it has followed the tender procedure required under EC rules.

Sugar

Mr. Cann: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response he has made to the recommendation in the second report of the Agriculture Committee, Session 1991-92, on the trade gap in food and drink, as regards the sugar quota.

Mr. Curry: The Government's response to the Agriculture Committee's report on the trade gap in food and drink was published on 17 June—Cm 1982. Copies were deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Cann: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek to increase the EC quota for British sugar beet production to a level equal to or exceeding the domestic consumption.

Mr. Curry: The Commission has not yet made proposals for the reform of the EC sugar regimes for beet and cane sugar: we are pressing them to do so. United Kingdom domestic sugar consumption is supplied both from sugar processed from beets and from sugar refined from cane, imported under the Lomé sugar protocol. There is no case for seeking to increase beet sugar quota to cover our consumption. However, in any review of EC sugar quotas, the United Kingdom will argue for an increase in our share of the total.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculure, Fisheries and Food if he will list the notifiable diseases of animals.

Mr. Soames: The following diseases of animals are notifiable in Great Britain.

African Horse Sickness
African Swine Fever
Anthrax
Aujeszky's Disease
Blue Eared Pig Disease
Blue Tongue
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy
Brucella Melitensis in Cattle
Cattle Plague (Rinderpest)
Classical Swine Fever
Contagious Equine Metritis
Dourine
Enzootic Bovine Leukosis
Epizootic Lymphangitis
Equine Encephalomyelitis
Equine Infectious Anaemia
Foot and Mouth Disease
Fowl Pest (Fowl Plague, Newcastle Disease and Paramyxovirus) in Poultry
Glanders and Farcy
Goat Pox
Lumpy Skin Disease
Paramyxovirus in Pigeons
Peste Des Petits Ruminants
Pleuro-Pneumonia in Cattle
Rabies
Rift Valley Fever
Sheep Pox
Swine Vesicular Disease (SVD)
Teschen Disease
Tuberculosis in Cattle and Deer
Vesicular Stomatitis
Viral Haemorrhagic Disease of Rabbits
Warble Fly
Sheep Scab

Mastitis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number and percentage of *(a)* dairy cattle and *(b)* beef cattle suffering from mastitis in each year since 1982.

Mr. Soames: Mastitis is not a notifiable disease and comprehensive data are not maintained. The number of cases in all types of cattle recorded by veterinary investigation centres for the years concerned are as follows:

	Number
1982	16,021
1983	14,355
1984	9,189
1985	8,589
1986	7,052
1987	6,003
1988	5,992
1989	5,959
1990	7,008
1991	7,596
1992	2,304

Dredging

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the beaches and mudflats in England and Wales on which material dredged from ports and fairways has been used in each of the last five years and the number of tonnes deposited in each case.

Mr. Curry: The information sought is not collected centrally.

CAP Reform

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are Her Majesty's Government's plans to implement the agri-environment measures agreed as part of the May 1992 common agricultural policy reforms.

Mr. Curry: We welcome the positive environmental aspects of the CAP reform agreement. We have a year to draw up our implementation plans for the agri-environment measure and we will consult widely in doing so.

SCOTLAND

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in tabular form the waiting list for operations and procedures in each specialty for each health board area as at 31 December 1990 to 31 March 1991 and at the end of each successive quarter to 31 March 1992.

Mr. Stewart: The latest available information is set out in the "NHS Patient Treatment and Waiting Time Bulletin" for 31 March 1992, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Enterprise Allowance

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number of applications for enterprise allowance received by each local enterprise company in the area covered by Highlands and Islands Enterprise over the last 12 months and the total number of awards made; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Highlands and Islands Enterprise is responsible for monitoring the enterprise allowance scheme within its area and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Shellfish

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his answer of 16 June, *Official Report*, column *518*, what is the amount of additional resources which have been provided to the Marine laboratory in Aberdeen to assist the laboratory in its work relating to EC directive 91/492.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* The marine laboratory's ongoing programme already includes work which will be required under EC directive 91/492 and

its financial provision reflects this. An additional £42,000 has been provided for 1992-93 to assist with the work involved in the classification of shellfish harvesting areas.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional sums of money his Department has made available to environmental health authorities to facilitate the collection and transmission of shellfish samples in pursuance of EC directive 91/492.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer of 2 July 1992]:* In common with most local authority services this activity is met from the general revenues of the local authorities which are supported through aggregate external finance.

HEALTH

Abortion

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number of abortions performed in the Wessex regional health authority under the Abortion Act 1967 since its implementation; and how many, and what percentage of these abortions, were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother.

Mr. Sackville: Wessex regional health authority (RHA) was constituted on 1 April 1974 and data on this basis are calculated from 1 January 1975 to 30 September 1991 (the latest date for which figures are available). During this period a total of 85,538 abortions have been performed under the Abortion Act 1967 in the Wessex RHA. Of these, 6 (·007 per cent.) were performed in an emergency "to save the life of the pregnant woman" (ground 5).

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number of abortions performed in the North West Thames regional health authority under the Abortions Act 1967 since its implementation; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother.

Mr. Sackville: North West Thames regional health authority (RHA) was constituted on 1 April 1974 and data on this basis are calculated from 1 January 1975 to 30 September 1991 (the latest date for which figures are available). During this period a total of 318,817 abortions have been performed under the Abortion Act 1967 in the North West Thames RHA. Of these 5 (0·002 per cent.) were performed in an emergency "to save the life of the pregnant woman" (ground 5).

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number of abortions performed in the West Midlands regional health authority under the Abortion Act since 1967; and how many and what percentage of these were performed to save the life of the mother.

Mr. Sackville: West Midlands regional health authority (RHA) was constituted on 1 April 1974 and data on this basis are calculated from 1 January 1975 to 30 September 1991 (the latest date for which figures are available). During this period a total of 354,547 abortions have been performed under the Abortion Act 1967 in the West Midlands RHA. Of these 5 (0·002 per cent.) were performed in an emergency "to save the life of the pregnant woman" (ground 5).

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number of abortions performed in the Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde regional health authority under the Abortion Act 1967 since its implementation; and how many and what percentage of these abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother.

Mr. Sackville: Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde district health authority (DHA) was constituted on 1 April 1982 and data on this basis are calculated from 1 January 1983 to 30 September 1991 (the latest date for which figures are available). The number of abortions performed in each DHA are not released as a consequence of confidentiality. There were however, during this period and under the Abortion Act 1967, a total of 7,997 abortions performed on residents of Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde DHA. One (0·01 per cent.) of these abortions was performed in an emergency "to save the life of the pregnant woman" (ground 5).

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number of abortions performed in the Wessex regional health authority under the Abortion Act 1967 in each year since its implementation; and how many and what percentage of these abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is shown in the table.

(1) Total number of abortions; (2) number and percentage of these abortions performed in an emergency 'to save the life of the pregnant woman' (ground 5), 1 January 1975 to 30 September 1991, Wessex Regional Health Authority[1]

Wessex Regional Health Authority

	Total	*Ground 5*	*Ground 5 as a percentage of the total*
1975	2,331	1	0·04 per cent.
1976	2,288		
1977	2,624		
1978	2,961	1	0·03 per cent.
1979	2,955		
1980	3,267		
1981	3,311		
1982	4,513	1	0·02 per cent.
1983	4,886		
1984	5,525	1	0·02 per cent.
1985	6,009		
1986	6,292		
1987	6,476	2	0·03 per cent.
1988	7,693		
1989	8,670		
1990	9,075		
1991	6,662		

[1] Wessex Regional Health Authority was constituted on 1 April 1974 and data on this basis are available from 1 January 1975 to 30 September 1991 (the latest date for which figures are available).

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will fund the development of the Quest cancer test as an alternative to the current method of cervical cancer screening.

Mr. Sackville: The Government are committed to reducing mortality from cervical cancer; that is why we introduced a national cervical screening programme. We are always willing to consider new proposals which might lead to improvements in health care and health promotion.

The Quest test for cancer has been considered in detail and an earlier application to fund a trial, assessed at the same time as 12 other proposals in the field of screening, was turned down in 1988. It is for the medical profession to decide whether to use the Quest test on the basis of published research findings.

NHS-Private Sector Co-operation

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out examples of co-operation between the national health service and the private health care sector of the type which her Department wishes to encourage.

Dr. Mawhinney: Detailed information is not collected centrally. We welcome cost-effective co-operation between the national health service and the independent sector. It increases the range of options available to patients, GP's and NHS managers.

Elderly People

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimates her Department has made of the numbers of elderly people requiring health care under the national health service in the years *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2010 and *(c)* 2020 respectively;

(2) what long-term estimates her Department has made *(a)* of the cost to the NHS and *(b)* expenditure in the private sector of health care for people over the age of 60 years in the years *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2010 and *(c)* 2020 respectively.

Mr. Yeo: Various studies have been undertaken in this area including some work done by the Department's economics and operational research division which will be published shortly in "The Health of Elderly People, An epidemiological overview: companion papers" a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

Hospitals

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on how many occasions and in what circumstances house officers contracted to work in hospitals of the North-East Thames region, attended patients in Nuffield hospital, Shenfield in Essex over the past two years;

(2) how many consultants who have contracts with the four Thames health regions also have contracts with private hospitals and clinics;

(3) how many consultants with national health service contracts also have contracts with the Nuffield hospital, Shenfield in Essex; and for how many hours each of those consultants is contracted to work in national health service hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the standard prescription charge for each year from 1962 to the present time.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is in the table.

Standard prescription charge for each year from 1962 to date

Year	*Charge* £
1962	0·10
1963	0·10
1964	0·10
1965 to 28 February 1965	0·10
1965 from 1 March 1965	nil
1966	nil
1967	nil
1968 to 9 June 1968	nil
1968 from 10 June 1968	0·12½
1969	0·12½
1970	0·12½
1971 to 31 March 1971	0·12½
1971 from 1 April 1971	0·20
1972	0·20
1973	0·20
1974	0·20
1975	0·20
1976	0·20
1977	0·20
1978	0·20
1979 to 15 July 1979	0·20
1979 from 16 July 1979	0·45
1980 to 31 March 1980	0·45
1980 from 1 April 1980	0·70
1980 from 1 December 1980	1·00
1981	1·00
1982 to 31 March 1982	1·00
1982 from 1 April 1982	1·30
1983 to 31 March 1983	1·30
1983 from 1 April 1983	1·40
1984 to 31 March 1984	1·40
1984 from 1 April 1984	1·60
1985 to 31 March 1985	1·60
1985 from 1 April 1985	2·00
1986 to 31 March 1986	2·00
1986 from 1 April 1986	2·20
1987 to 31 March 1987	2·20
1987 from 1 April 1987	2·40
1988 to 31 March 1988	2·40
1988 from 1 April 1988	2·60
1989 to 31 March 1989	2·60
1989 from 1 April 1989	2·80
1990 to 31 March 1990	2·80
1990 from 1 April 1990	3·05
1991 to 31 March 1991	3·05
1991 from 1 April 1991	3·40
1992 to 3 March 1992	3·40
1992 from 1 April 1992	3·75

South-East Essex Health Consortium

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been given to making the South-East Essex Health Consortium a new health authority covering the areas currently served by the Southend health authority, the Basildon and Thurrock health authority and the Brentwood part of the Havering and Brentwood health authority.

Mr. Sackville: I understand that North East Thames regional health authority is reviewing the present configeration of its district health authorities. Any proposal for change would be subject to full consultation.

Consultants: House Officers

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines or advice are given to house officers employed in national health service hospitals who are invited by their consultants to accompany or attend their practices and clinics in private hospitals;

(2) what guidelines are given to consultants with national health service contracts who also have contracts with private hospitals or clinics, about the accounting of their time distributed between their two contracts, their use of national health service equipment and their direction of house officers and other national health service employees.

Dr. Mawhinney: No central guidelines are issued on these matters. However, under their terms and conditions of service, whole-time and maximum part-time consultants are expected to devote substantially the whole of their professional time to their national health service duties. In addition, a whole-time consultant must certify annually that his or her gross income from private practice does not exceed 10 per cent. of his or her gross salary.

Where private practice is undertaken by a whole-time consultant outside the national health service hospitals where he or she is contracted to work, it is to be so limited that significant amounts of the consultant's time are not spent travelling to and from private commitments.

Consultants should be aware that junior doctors practice (including house officers) may only undertake private work outside the times for which they are contracted to an employing authority.

Equipment (Unauthorised Use)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the unauthorised use of national health service medical equipment by national health service consultants in private hospitals is deemed a prima facie dismissable offence.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for employers to decide what action to take in relation to allegations of misconduct.

Multiple Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the total numbers of *(a)* sets of (i) twins, (ii) triplets, (iii) quadruplets, (iv) quintuplets, (v) sextuplets and (vi) septuplets born in England and Wales in each year from 1980 to 1991, *(b)* maternities in England and Wales in each year and *(c)* multiple births of each type in each year which were conceived as a result of (1) in vitro fertilisation, (2) gamete intra-fallopian transfer and (3) other forms of assisted conception.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested on multiple and total maternities is shown in the table. Figures relating to multiple births following assisted conception are contained in the reports of the Interim Licensing Authority for Human In Vitro Fertilisation and Embryology and in the report of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, copies of which are available in the Library.

England and Wales

	1980	*[1]1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Twins	6,308	—	6,201	6,293	6,321	6,700	6,969	7,186	7,452	7,579	7,934	8,160
Triplets	91	—	70	89	80	93	123	125	157	183	201	208
Quadruplets	4	—	6	4	5	7	10	7	12	11	10	10
Quintuplets	1	—	—	—	—	2	2	1	1	1	—	2
Sextuplets	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Septuplets	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Total number of maternities with multiple births	6,404	—	6,277	6,387	6,406	6,803	7,105	7,320	7,622	7,774	8,145	8,380
All maternities	654,501	632,350	623,511	626,277	633,965	653,142	657,308	677,467	689,153	682,979	701,030	693,857

[1] Information on multiple maternities is not available for 1981.

Atopic Illnesses

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of asthma and other atopic illnesses were reported this year, last year and two years ago; and how many of these were for children under 10 years of age.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Cyclo-progynova Tablets

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is her intention that the dispensing of a pack of cyclo-progynova 1 mg tablets containing two different coloured sets of tablets should attract one or two prescription charges.

Dr. Mawhinney: A prescription charge is payable in respect of each quantity of a drug or appliance dispensed, unless the patient is entitled to charge exemption or remission. Cyclo-Progynova 1 mg tablets contain two separate preparations differentiated by colour and two prescriptions charges are, therefore, due when these items are dispensed. The fact that for convenience, and as an aid to patient compliance, the two preparations are supplied in one pack does not alter the patient's liability for prescription charges.

Allergies

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information her Department holds on the incidence of allergic diseases in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the grants paid for the international work of the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation in each year since 1977 in cash terms and at constant prices; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Since its foundation in 1977, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR) has received a Government grant to cover its affiliation fee to the international body, Rehabilitation International (RI), and to help with the expenses of sending delegates to RI's annual assemblies. The amount of those grants in cash terms and at constant prices is as follows:

Year	*Cash amount* £	*Constant* £
1977-78	15,000	15,000
1978-79	15,000	13,529
1979-80	15,000	11,594
1980-81	16,500	10,778
1981-82	16,500	9,829
1982-83	16,500	9,177
1983-84	17,000	9,037
1984-85	18,000	9,106
1985-86	19,000	9,118
1986-87	19,000	8,812
1987-88	20,000	8,806
1988-89	22,000	9,016
1989-90	22,000	8,474
1990-91	22,000	7,865
1991-92	22,000	7,350

Retired People, Waveney

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of the findings of the 1991 census by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys into the numbers of retired people in Waveney and their proportion to the total population of Waveney compared with 1981; and what consequential changes to funding distribution she expects to make.

Mr. Sackville: The findings of the 1991 census will be used progressively in the allocation of national health service funds from the financial year 1993-94 onwards as the census results become available at different levels of detail. Deciding the funding of district health authorities is the responsibility of regional health authorities, applying common principles of weighted capitation funding. Health authorities' capitation-based funding routinely reflects their resident populations' age structure, because the average cost of providing health services is higher for people in some age bands than in others. The funding formula gives successively greater weight to people in age

bands over sixty five. Projections of the age structure of regional and district populations (including Great Yarmouth and Waveney) which make full use of the 1991 census findings will be used in the funding distribution from the financial year 1995-96 onwards.

Dentists

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to accredit dental laboratories.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government support the concept of self-regulation and independent accreditation. We have no present plans to accredit dental laboratories.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate the Government have made of how much of the funds paid to dentists for laboratory fees is actually paid over to laboratories.

Dr. Mawhinney: Fees for treatments which require dental laboratory work include an element estimated to be the average cost to dentists of commissioning such work. It is then for individual dentists to agree prices directly with laboratories.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will make a statement on the performance of Denplan.

Dr. Mawhinney: Denplan is a private health insurance scheme. Private arrangements are a matter for dentists and their patients. All the treatment which is necessary to secure and maintain oral health is available under the national health service.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment the Government have made of the insurance-based dental services provided in Germany and Italy.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will require all dental laboratories to conform to British Standard 5750.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider direct payments from the national health service to dental laboratories instead of funds going through dentists' accounts.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no present plans to do this. This is an issue which could arise in the proposed fundamental review into the whole system of dentists' remuneration.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to replace current dentistry arrangements with a state-funded insurance system.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of dentists and the number of courses of treatment in *(a)* Darlington and *(b)* County Durham in each year since 1987-88.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested about Darlington is not routinely available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost for each of the five years requested. The table shows the number of general dental practitioners and the number of courses of dental treatment given in Durham family health services authority in each of the five financial years from 1987-88 to 1991-92.

Durham Family Health Services Authority

Financial year	*Number of dentists*[1]	*Courses of treatment*[2,3]		
		Children	*Adults*	*All patients*
1987-88	164	115,260	223,100	338,360
1988-89	162	116,170	237,890	354,060
1989-90	162	116,450	228,410	344,860
1990-91	172	97,150	232,760	329,910
1991-92	168	42,430	257,090	299,520

[1] As at 30 September in each year, including all principal dentists and their assistants on Durham FHSA's dental list. The figures quoted are those numbers of dentists who provided the courses of treatment shown. Some of these dentists will also be on the dental lists of other family health services authorities.

[2] The numbers of courses of treatment have been taken from a 5 per cent. sample and rounded to the nearest 10.

[3] The apparent decline in the number of courses of treatment to children is misleading. Under the new dental contract from 1 October 1990, most treatment to children is given under capitation arrangements under which it is not possible to monitor all treatment to children.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics she has for the dental health of the population of *(a)* Darlington, *(b)* County Durham and *(c)* the national average.

Dr. Mawhinney: Statistics on dental health are not collected centrally for district health authorities or counties. Information on decayed, missing and filled teeth (DMFT) among 5, 12 and 14-year-old children in Darlington is available from surveys collated by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry.

In 1990-91, 358 14-year-olds were examined in Darlington.
The mean number of decayed teeth was 0·54.
The mean number of missing teeth was 0·36.
The mean number of filled teeth was 1·59.
The average DMFT was 2·49.
71 per cent. had evidence of caries experience and 23 per cent. had active decay.

In 1989-90, 215 5-year-olds were examined in Darlington.
The mean number of decayed teeth was 1·01.
The mean number of missing teeth was 0·42.
The mean number of filled teeth was 0·28.
The average DMFT was 1·71.
43 per cent. had evidence of caries experience and 33 per cent. had active decay.

In 1988-89, 271 12-year-olds were examined in Darlington.
The mean number of decayed teeth was 0·18.
The mean number of missing teeth was 0·22.
The mean number of filled teeth was 0·99.
The average DMFT was 1·39.
52 per cent. had evidence of caries experience.

The latest figures available for United Kingdom are from the child dental health survey of 1983 and the adult dental health survey of 1988. In 1983, the average number of decayed or filled deciduous teeth for five-year-olds was 1·8. The average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth for 12 and 15-year-olds was respectively 3·1 and 5·9 permanent teeth. In 1988, 79 per cent. of adults had some natural teeth. Among dentate adults in the United Kingdom, the average number of missing teeth was 7·8, decayed or unsound teeth, 1·0 and filled teeth 8·4.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average earnings of dentists have been *(a)* in Darlington, *(b)* in County Durham, *(c)* in the northern region and *(d)* in England and Wales in each year since 1987-88, at current and 1987-88 prices.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested about Darlington is not routinely available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The tables show the average gross fee earnings of general dental practitioners in Durham family health services authority, Northern regional health authority, and England and Wales in each of the five financial years from 1987-88 to 1991-92, at current and at 1987-88 prices.

Average gross fee earnings per dentist

Financial year	*Durham FHSA (£)*	*Northern region (£)*	*England and Wales (£)*
Actual prices			
1987-88	56,434	56,476	55,971
1988-89	65,134	64,725	64,377
1989-90	69,996	65,143	64,008
1990-91	81,798	73,794	70,410
1991-92	100,527	89,483	84,833
1987-88 prices			
1987-88	56,434	56,476	55,971
1988-89	60,744	60,363	60,038
1989-90	61,247	57,000	56,007
1990-91	66,158	59,685	56,948
1991-92	75,988	67,640	64,125

Note: These averages relate only to earnings through fees by dentists in the population group of the Dental Rates Study Group. They exclude maternity payments, sickness payments, postgraduate education allowances and other such allowances; and they relate only to dentists who, for the year in question, were in contract for the complete financial year.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists have withdrawn from the NHS since October 1990 *(a)* in Darlington, *(b)* in County Durham and *(c)* in the northern region.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not available. The number of dentists on the dental list of Durham family health services authority (FHSA), and the number on dental lists in the Northern region (RHA), at 30 September 1990 and at 31 March 1992 (the latest available figures) are shown in the table. Information on the number of general dental practitioners in Darlington district health authority is not routinely collected and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	Number of dentists	
	30 September 1990	31 March 1992
Durham FHSA	144	146
Northern RHA	869	897

Hospital Treatment (Overseas Visitors)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether her investigation of the use of hospital treatment by overseas visitors has been completed; when it will be published; and when any new guidelines for staff will be reissued and published.

Dr. Mawhinney: The national health service management executive has completed its investigation into procedures for NHS hospital treatment of overseas visitors. It has confirmed that the existing guidelines are being correctly and fairly applied. We intend to reissue guidance later this year.

Southampton General Hospital

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will take steps to ensure that district health authorities using the basic medicine and neuro-surgery facilities at Southampton general hospital have sufficient funds to ensure that increases in workload may be fully funded;

(2) if she will take all steps necessary to ensure that no patients will suffer reduced access to treatment or examination at the Southampton general hospital as a result of the hospital management's need to overcome a £350,000 overspend in the first two months of the current financial year.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the Wessex regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to write to Sir Robin Buchanan, the chairman of the Wessex regional authority, for details.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had on the causes of the £355,000 overspend by Southampton general hospital in the first two months of the current financial year.

Mr. Sackville: The Department is in regular contact with Wessex regional health authority, which is keeping the situation under close review.

GPs (Equipment)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the regulations controlling the quality and suitability of equipment carried by general practitioners on call.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are no regulations dealing specifically with the quality and suitability of equipment carried by general practitioners on call.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department has issued on the equipment that on-call general practitioners should carry with them.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for the profession to issue any necessary guidance on clinical matters of this sort.

ENVIRONMENT

Thames Riverbus

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to seek the transfer of the existing riverbus service on the Thames to the London Docklands development corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has no such plans. The London Docklands development corporation has assembled a consortium of docklands interests who will together meet the expected deficit of riverbus in the short term. The LDDC has contributed to that funding package. The service is a private transport undertaking, and its long-term future must lie in commercial operation by the private sector.

Environmental Health Officers

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from individual local authorities or local authority associations about the recruitment of sufficient environmental health officers, with particular reference to those employed to enforce regulations governing, *(a)* food hygiene and *(b)* noise.

Mr. Maclean: I am not aware of any recent representations. Local authority responsibilities for food hygiene and noise are taken into account, along with other responsibilities, in the local government finance settlement.

Additional resources have already been provided for new work arising from food safety legislation.

Green Issues

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 18 June to the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), *Official Report*, column *663*, which Ministers will be the spokesmen in this House for those Departments where the green Minister is a member of the House of Lords.

Mr. Howard: That would be decided by the appropriate Secretary of State.

Surface Waters

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he supports the development of a European Community directive on the ecological quality of surface waters to return the quality of such waters to an unpolluted state.

Mr. Maclean: We will consider carefully any proposals that the Commission puts forward. We are already committed to securing improvements in water quality wherever they are justified.

Pollution Consent System

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the National Rivers Authority to replace the present pollution consent system with measures to eliminate toxic substances so as to return rivers and estuaries to an unpolluted state.

Mr. Maclean: None. Discharge consents and integrated pollution control authorisations, set so as to meet statutory water quality objectives, and in particular those relating to the EC dangerous substances directives, already provide precautionary controls on toxic substances as well as a means of meeting environmental goals and obligations.

Water Pollution

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those instances in which the National Rivers Authority has brought prosecutions against individual managers or directors of industrial concerns found to be committing a criminal pollution offence; and if he will say what sentence resulted in each case.

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the National Rivers Authority that it has not to date brought any prosecutions for water pollution against individuals in industrial concerns.

Community Charge (Travellers)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the success of collecting appropriate community charges from travelling people.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information is not available on the community charge collection rates from specific groups.

Councillors (Bankruptcy)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many councillors have had to resign their seats for reasons of bankruptcy in each year since 1967.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected by my Department.

Regional Office, Nottingham

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans there are for a new East Midlands regional office in Nottingham.

Mr. Howard: There are currently no proposals for a new east midlands regional office in Nottingham.

Environmental Rights (Booklet)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what responses he has received to his booklet on environmental rights and responsibilities issued in February.

Mr. Maclean: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on Tuesday 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) *Official Report*, column *381*.

Rent-a-Room Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what legislation he is considering to ensure security of tenure for tenants in relation to his Department's rent-a-room scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The new rent-a-room scheme will make no difference to tenants' security of tenure. We therefore have no proposals to make any changes to the legislation.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Over the next 12 months I shall continue to follow up commitments in the White Paper Cm. 1200 "This Common Inheritance" and its successor Cm. 1655 "The First Year Report". I shall also publish, with the help of my colleagues, a second anniversary White Paper in the

autumn. By the end of 1992 my Department will have developed an environmental housekeeping strategy for the management of its accommodation and purchasing. And over the next year and beyond I shall continue to ensure that environmental concerns shape the policy and work of my Department whenever appropriate, in this country, in our presidency of the European Community, and in following up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in the wider international community.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he calculates the expenditure of opt-out schools in deciding the designation of local authorities for charge-capping; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. and learned Friend does not calculate the expenditure of grant-maintained schools for the purposes of his decisions on designation for capping. He takes these decisions in accordance with principles which operate by reference to the overall amount of each authority's budget. Before deciding his principles, my right hon. and learned Friend has regard to all appropriate considerations.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will set out the budget and planned budget of the National Rivers Authority for the years 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 at April 1992 prices;

(2) if he will give details of the number of staff working for the National Rivers Authority for the years 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and planned for 1992-93.

Mr. Maclean: The figures are as follows:

	National Rivers Authority total expenditure		
	Actual	*At 1992-93 prices*	
Year	*£ million*	*£ million*	*Staff*[1]
1989-90	334	404	6,484
1990-91	350	391	7,111
1991-92	417	436	7,735
1992-93	457	457	7,953

[1] Full-time equivalents.

Notes:
Figures are from the National Rivers Authority's 1992 Corporate Plan.
Staff numbers are at 31 March of each year.

Urban Development Areas

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of people unemployed in April in each year from 1987 in each urban development area.

Mr. Robin Squire: Urban development areas do not correspond to areas for which unemployment figures are available.

Pesticides

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that information gathered regularly by various Government Departments on the sale and usage of pesticides in different localities should be passed on routinely and free of charge to local authorities to help them in the discharge of their duties to monitor drinking water quality.

Mr. Maclean: The Water Quality Regulations make the water undertaker responsible for regular monitoring of drinking water for traces of pesticides. In deciding which pesticides they should analyse for, water undertakers are expected to make use of all the data available, whether from Government Departments or other sources, about the usage and properties of particular pesticides. The drinking water inspectorate reviews each company's monitoring strategy annually to ensure it is doing so. Local authorities receive detailed annual reports on drinking water quality from the relevant water company, and it is not necessary therefore for local authorities to duplicate these procedures.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the public sector cost per additional permanent job created as a result of the enterprise zone experiment, excluding multiplier effects and construction jobs.

Mr. Robin Squire: Consultants commissioned to carry out "An Evaluation of the Enterprise Zone Experiment" calculated that the public cost per additional job in British enterprise zones, excluding multiplier effects and construction jobs, was £8,500 in 1986. The cost per job in 1989, calculated on the same basis, was about £8,700. Copies of the consultants' report, published in 1987 by HMSO, are held in the House of Commons Library.

Leeds Task Force

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has as to the number of businesses which have now been assisted as a result of the activities of the inner-city task force in Leeds.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government's former Leeds task force assisted more than 400 businesses in the Chapeltown and Harehills area.

EC Environment Proposals

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are Her Majesty's Government's plans to implement the EC habitats directive and the EC fifth environmental action programme.

Mr. Maclean: With regard to implementation of the EC habitats directive, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 16 June, [*Official Report*, columns *439-40*]. The fifth environmental action programme has not yet been approved by the Council of Ministers.

Stray Dogs (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the measures taken by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Leeds to control stray dogs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* None.

Orimulsion

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to monitor sulphur emissions caused by the burning of orimulsion at Ince and Richborough power stations; and with what results.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* Such releases of sulphur to the atmosphere are calculated from the sulphur content of the fuel. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is satisfied that resulting emissions comply with the limits specified.

Marine Dredgings

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the weight of *(a)* lead, *(b)* mercury, *(c)* cadmium and *(d)* organo-chlorines he estimates is or will be contained in marine or river dredgings dumped in United Kingdom waters in 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

Information about the annual quantity of contaminants, including lead, mercury and cadmium in wastes dumped in United Kingdom waters are published annually in the Ministry's aquatic environment monitoring reports and reported internationally in accordance with our obligations under the Oslo and London dumping conventions.

Data for the period 1986-89 are contained in report No. 26 "Monitoring and Surveillance of Non-radioactive Contaminants in the Aquatic Environment and Activities Regulating the Disposal of Wastes at Sea 1988-89"—ISSN 0142 2499—a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. Similar data for the year 1990 will be published very shortly.

Comparable information about the quantity of organo-chlorines is not available since samples are only analysed for such substances where there is reason to believe that such contamination might be present to any significant degree.

Dredging

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tonnes of material dredged annually from harbours, ports and fairways is used in the building industry; and what percentage of the dredged materials it constitutes.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

The information sought is not collected centrally.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what methods are used to assess the suitability of material dredged from harbours, ports and fairways for use in the building industry; who makes the assessment; and whether it is carried out on each boatload dredged.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to answers given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales on dredging on 12 June, at column *312*.

The Ministry has a duty under section 8 of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 to ensure before issuing a licence to dispose of dredged material at sea that all other disposal options have been examined and that it is satisfied that no practical alternative is available.

A detailed assessment of each application is made by Ministry scientists based on information provided by the applicant about the physical and chemical nature, origin, relative amounts and total tonnage of the materials involved and of the results of analyses of samples submitted. This assessment will include the possibility of commercial use as building aggregate or other beneficial uses including beach replenishment and coastal defence work.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

11. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many telephone lines are available to people claiming disability living allowance at the Blackpool office of his Department.

Mr. Scott: One hundred and twenty telephone lines are operated by the central inquiry handling service. These are dedicated to inquiries about disability living allowance and the lines are now open from 8 am to 5.30 pm. The benefits inquiry line which is open seven days a week has 29 lines plus a commercial back-up and call-back service. The main switchboard at Blackpool has 149 lines.

28. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many telephone lines are connected to the disability living allowance office in Blackpool.

Mr. Scott: The main switchboard at Blackpool has 149 lines. There are also 120 telephone lines, with links to Blackpool, operated by the central inquiry handling service which is dedicated exclusively to enquiries about disability living allowance. A freephone benefits inquiry line with 29 lines is also available.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants for disability living allowance have received the benefit since January 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The latest available information is that about 81,000 awards of disability living allowance had been made by 30 June 1992. This figure is for new claims and "top up" claims, including claims made on the ground of terminal illness.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on the current situation governing arrangements for processing claims for disability living allowance;

(2) what is the average time for dealing with new claims for disability living allowance; how many claims are currently being processed; how many are waiting to be processed; and how long he estimates it will take for the current claims to be cleared.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will consider allowing existing levels of benefit to continue to be paid pending disability living allowance being granted.

Mr. Scott: Existing levels of benefit can continue to be paid pending disability living allowance being granted. For old attendance allowance and mobility allowance cases with expired awards, priority measures have been taken by the Benefits Agency to ensure they are dealt with as quickly as possible and interim awards made if necessary.

Social Fund

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase the resources available to the social fund in order to meet demand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The 32 per cent. increase made to the discretionary budget over the last year will enable even more help to be given to those in need.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number and percentage of total applications which were refused for *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans for each of the years of the social fund's operation in his Department's office area covering the Dumbarton parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Scott: The two years for which information is available are 1990-91 and 1991-92. In 1990-91, a total of 1,177 grant, 1,516 budgeting loan and 100 crisis loan applications were refused by Dumbarton office. Last year's corresponding figures for the larger Benefits Agency district of Lomond and Argyll were 3,451, 3,681 and 158. A total of 37·6 per cent. of applications were not successful. Three quarters of the applications refused did not meet the basic eligibility criteria.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will increase the social fund allocations for 1992-93 to enable expenditure to be maintained at March 1992 levels throughout the year; and what would be the cost of doing so.

Mr. Scott: Social Fund budget allocations are made on an annual, not a monthly, basis. The allocations of £302 million for 1992-93 represents a 32 per cent. increase on April 1991 and is already higher than total expenditure for the financial year ending March 1992. We constantly monitor the fund to ensure that the highest priority needs are met throughout the year.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the proportion of income support recipients repaying social fund loans at *(a)* less than 15 per cent. of weekly income, *(b)* 15 per cent. of weekly income and *(c)* more than 15 per cent. of weekly income.

Mr. Scott: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the administrative cost of making and recovering a social fund loan to a young person whose need for income support has been accepted by the hardship unit; and what would be the administrative cost of arranging for income support to be paid immediately in these circumstances.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of people refused help from the social fund on the ground of inability to pay, expressing this number *(a)* as a whole number, *(b)* as a proportion of the total number of loan applications and *(c)* as a proportion of the total number of loan refusals, from 13 April 1988 to the present time.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the Library.

Income Support

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young people received severe hardship benefit in each of the standard regions, including Scotland and in total, in each month since January 1991.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of income support recipients are now having deductions made from benefit as a result of paying back social fund loans *(a)* nationally, *(b)* regionally and *(c)* for each local benefits agency district.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Members with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Invalid Care Allowance

13. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women are in receipt of invalid care allowance; and what was the comparable figure for 1978-79.

Miss Widdecombe: On 31 March 1992 there were 134,500 women receiving invalid care allowance, compared to 3,600 in January 1981, the earliest date for which such information is available.

Care Homes

15. **Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have benefited from increases in spending on income support for those in residential care and nursing homes since 1979.

Mr. Burt: In 1979 some 12,000 people were receiving supplementary benefit in residential care and nursing homes. By November 1991 some 253,000 people were benefiting from Government support.

Divorced Pensioners

16. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the position of divorced ladies who do not qualify for an old age pension on the basis of their former husband's contributions.

Miss Widdecombe: These ladies are in the same position as any person who does not qualify for a basic state retirement pension because of a deficient contribution record: they still have access to other benefits.

Attendance Allowance

17. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the operation of the Benefits Agency as it affects attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: The major changes in the assessment and adjudication arrangements for attendance allowance since April have been warmly welcomed by organisations of and for disabled people. These arrangements are assisting Benefits Agency staff in processing a very large number of claims.

Compensation Payments

18. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will review his Department's policy on the inclusion of criminal compensation payments in the calculation of benefit entitlement.

Mr. Burt: The vast majority of payments from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board have no effect whatsoever on social security benefits. The rules are kept under review, although there are no plans to change them at present.

Poverty

19. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the extent of poverty in Britain.

Mr. Burt: We continually monitor the effectiveness of the benefit system, and direct extra help to those in most need. Pensioners, disabled people and families on low incomes have all received valuable extra help, in real terms, since our reform of social security in 1988.

Pensioners' Savings

21. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioners retiring *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which figures are available had incomes from savings; and what was the real average level of savings on each of those dates.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1979, 68 per cent. of recently retired pensioners received income from savings; the 1988 figure was 78 per cent. At 1988 prices, the income from savings of these pensioners was £12 per week in 1979 and £26·30 in 1988.

Recently retired pensioners are defined as single women aged 60 to 64, single men aged 65 to 69 and couples in which the man is aged 65 to 69. This provides an adequate sample for analysis of the data.

Housing Benefit

22. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that his Department receives value for money from housing benefit paid to tenants in private rented property.

Mr. Burt: Regulations are designed to ensure that housing benefit is properly paid and there is a range of other measures such as subsidy controls and monitoring arrangements.

Occupational Pensions

23. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress he has made in setting up the committee to review the legal and a regulatory framework for the occupational pensions industry.

Miss Widdecombe: The Pension Law Review Committee has started its work.

24. **Mr. Jonathan Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners have an occupational pension *(a)* now and *(b)* in 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Fifty-seven per cent. of all pensioners receive income from an occupational pension. This compares with only 44 per cent. in 1979.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners have occupational pensions today; and what was the figure in 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: A total of 6 million people receive income from an occupational pension. Of these, 4·5 million are over state pension age. In 1979 there were 3·5 million occupational pensioners, of whom 3 million were over state pension age.

National Insurance

25. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what have been the total savings in expenditure that have accrued from the various changes made to national insurance benefits since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Between 1978-79 and 1991-92, expenditure on national insurance benefits has grown by around £6 billion in real terms. The costs and savings which have accrued from the main policy changes to national insurance benefits since 1979 are set out in the table.

Changes to national insurance benefits: estimated expenditure effects

Great Britain: £ million

	Financial year introduced	*Cash effect*[1]	*Cash effect (1992-93 prices)*
Uprating of long-term benefits by prices	1981-82	−280	−520
5 per cent. abatement in uprating of invalidity benefit, unemployment benefit, sickness benefit and maternity allowance	1981-82	−160	−300
Abolition of earnings related supplements to short-term benefits	1982-83	−390	−680
Introduction of statutory sick pay[2]	1983-84	−10	−20
Restoration of 5 per cent. abatement of UB	1984-85	80	130
Offsetting of invalidity benefit age addition by additional pension	1986-87	−140	−200
Restoration of 5 per cent. abatement of IVS	1986-87	120	170
Extension of statutory sick pay[2]	1986-87	−80	−120
Introduction of statutory maternity pay[2]	1987-88	40	60

	Financial year introduced	*Cash effect*[1]	*Cash effect (1992-93 prices)*
Unemployment benefit abatement for occupational/personal pension reduced from age 80 to 65	1988-89	−63	−80
Weekly earnings rule introduced for UB	1989-90		
UB "full extent normal"−ce minimis provision	1989-90	−49	−50
"Actively seeking work" test for UB	1989-90		
Abolition of pensioners earnings rule	1989-90	375	450
Widows: revised entitlement conditions for women widowed before April 1988	1988-90	13	20
Statutory sick pay: amendment of rates and higher/lower rate threshold	1990-91	−72	−80
Invalidity benefit: revised RMO procedures	1991-91	−8	−10
Statutory sick pay: higher rate freeze/change in threshold	1991-92	−108	−110
Statutory sick pay: 80% reimbursement	1991-92	−181	−190
Statutory sick pay: reimbursement at 100% for small employers	1991-92	3	3

[1]Figures shown represent the initial estimates of the effect on national insurance benefit expenditure only in the first full year following implementation. No account is taken of the impact on the changes on administration costs, income tax and national insurance revenues or expenditure on income-related benefits, other than as shown in note 2.

[2]Amounts shown represent the net effect on N.I. benefit expenditure after employees' recoveries from contributions to the N.I. Fund in respect of payments of statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay to their employees.

Resettlement Units

26. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the current state of the replacement programme for resettlement units.

Miss Widdecombe: Currently there are more than 500 replacement beds in operation; by March 1993 this will have increased to more than 800 and will have led to the closure of eight resettlement units, with a total bed capacity of 533.

Not only do the replacement facilities offer an overall increase in scale but, more importantly, they achieve a much higher standard and a greater mix of hostel provision.

Retirement Pensions

27. **Mr. Macklinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to improve the basic rate of retirement pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: This Government have pledged to maintain the value of retirement pension in line with prices. We have done that, and more since 1979, and we will keep to our pledge in the future.

Citizens Charter

29. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made on the application of the citizens charter to the operation of the Benefits Agency.

Mr. Burt: Significant progress has been made towards making the service more accessible, accountable and responsive to customer needs and expectations. The aims in the citizens charter have been expanded and clearly laid out in the agency's own customer charter, which sets out a framework for customer service. This underpins quality standards which local units are setting in consultation with their customers.

I have asked Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, to write to the hon. Member with examples of the achievements so far.

Allowances (Waiting Times)

30. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time taken to deal with applications for attendance allowance, living allowance and disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: Information is not collected in this form. More than 11,000 disability living allowance claims and nearly 8,000 attendance allowance claims are being cleared each week. These numbers are steadily rising as staff gain experience with the new systems.

Doctors

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the doctors used by his Department to examine claimants are men; and what guidelines he has issued on the need to increase the proportion who are women.

Mr. Scott: The employment of doctors to examine claimants for social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

War Pensioners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the countries where United Kingdom war pensioners are currently receiving a United Kingdom war pension or war widow's pension, showing separately the countries of the former Soviet Union and showing for each country the number of war pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: The operations of the war pensions directorate are a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member, and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Travellers

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what difficulties have been encountered in enforcing the availability for work rule on travelling people; what research he has commissioned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Unemployed travellers are required to satisfy the same benefit rules as other unemployed claimants; they must be available for work and actively seek it. The Employment Service makes every effort to ensure that benefit is paid only where these conditions of entitlement are satisfied.

Mortgage Interest

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in receipt of income support payments to cover mortgage interest hold joint mortgages with individuals not on income support.

Mr. Burt: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensions

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much total pension incomes have changed per annum between 1979 and 1992; and what was the equivalent figure between 1974 and 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Between 1979 and 1988, pensioners' average total net income grew by 34 per cent.—an average growth of over 3 per cent. each year. In the period 1974 to 1979 total growth was 3 per cent., a yearly increase of 0·6 per cent. Growth per annum 1979 to 1988 was therefore greater than that for the whole of the period 1974 to 1979. Analysis of pensioners' income on this basis for later years is not yet available.

Newcastle Offices

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will provide an access road into his Department's new complex on Whitley road, Benton, Newcastle from either Coach lane or the coast road, Newcastle;

(2) what consultations took place with North Tyneside council concerning the siting of his Department's new complex on Whitley road, Benton, Newcastle;

(3) what surveys were carried out into the traffic volume implications of the development of his Department's new complex at Whitley road, Benton, Newcastle;

(4) what consideration was given to the safety of children attending St. Bartholomew's primary school, Benton when the decision was made to site his Department's new complex at Whitley road, Benton, Newcastle.

Mr. Burt: The responsibility for investigating such matters as the provision of an access road, the traffic volume implications and the safety of children attending St. Bartholomew's primary school, Benton lies with the local authority.

Planning for the provision of the new DSS offices at Whitley road, Newcastle, and the need for consultation with outside bodies, are matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will visit the site of his Department's new complex at Whitley road, Benton, Newcastle in order to listen to the views of local residents about the development.

Mr. Burt: We have no plans so to do.

Maxwell Pension Schemes

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will introduce regulations to implement section 58B of the Social Security Act 1990; and what estimate he has made of the levels of payments to Maxwell pension schemes under that section.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, gave to the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on 30 June at column *504*, on the introduction of these regulations. We have no estimates of the level of payment that may be made in any particular case. This will depend on the amount of assets available to ordinary creditors.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what funds have been obtained by the Sir John Cuckney unit as part of the exercise to replenish Maxwell pension funds; and which organisations have been approved to make payments into the voluntary trust.

Miss Widdecombe: Sir John Cuckney is chairman of the Maxwell Pensioners Trust, which is being set up to enable voluntary contributions to be made by any individuals or organisations concerned about the plight of Maxwell pensioners and Sir John is holding discussions with a wide range of institutions about the contributions they may be willing to make. Sir John and his fellow trustees act as a board of advisers to the Maxwell pensions unit. The unit's role in securing the speedy return of assets to Maxwell pension funds is to provide all the assistance it can to liquidators, pension scheme trustees and others in carrying out this task. I warmly welcome the decision of NatWest to return some £25 million of Teva shares to Maxwell pension funds.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 19 June, *Official Report*, column *704*, what assistance the special unit established by his Department has provided to date to the liquidators, the trustees and others towards making contact with the authorities in Liechtenstein about Maxwell funds that could be held in that country.

Miss Widdecombe: The Maxwell pensions unit has not been asked to provide assistance in making contact with the authorities in Liechtenstein about Maxwell assets which may be held there; but remains ready to help where it can.

Retired People, Waveney

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment his Department has made of the findings of the 1991 census by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys into the numbers of retired people in Waveney and their proportion to the total population of Waveney compared with 1981; and what changes he expects to make in delivery of his Department's service as a consequence.

Miss Widdecombe: This is an operational matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and Public Information Office.

Child Benefit

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young people received extended child benefit in each of the standard regions including Scotland, and in total, in each month since January 1991.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	Weekly average of awards of extended Child Benefit
January 1991	1,184
February 1991	1,828
March 1991	2,208
April 1991	3,257
May 1991	4,302
June 1991	4,889
July 1991	NIL
August 1991	NIL
September 1991	25,270
October 1991	26,006
November 1991	25,243
December 1991	24,577
January 1992	1,510
February 1992	2,563
March 1992	3,131
April 1992	NIL
May 1992	3,498
June 1992	4,916

Notes: A NIL is shown for July and August 1991 as the extension period for Easter leavers finished before the Summer extension period began in September.
The NIL for April 1992 is due to the extension period for Christmas leavers finishing before the Easter extension began in May.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many requests for review of attendance allowance there have been in Carlisle following unsuccessful claims;

(2) how many claims have been made in Carlisle for disability living allowance since its introduction;

(3) how many claims were made in Carlisle for attendance allowance in the financial year ended April;

(4) how many people in Carlisle who claimed attendance allowance were successful; and at what rates;

(5) how many claims in Carlisle were made under special rules and what percentage was successful.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in the Makerfield parliamentary constituency qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in the Paisley, South constituency qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in Glasgow, Maryhill, qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in Leeds, West qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates the cold weather payments system in Glasgow, Maryhill, were triggered during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payments on each occasion;

(2) on what dates cold weather payments were made in Glasgow, Maryhill, in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and if he will indicate the period taken for payments to be made once the system had been triggered.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates and in what parts of the Paisley, South constituency the cold weather payments scheme was triggered during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payments on each occasion;

(2) on what dates cold weather payments were made in the Paisley, South constituency in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and how long it took on average for payments to be made once the system had been triggered.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates cold weather payments were made in Leeds, West in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and if he will indicate the period taken for payments to be made once the system had been triggered;

(2) on what dates and in what parts of Leeds, West the cold weather payments system was triggered during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payments on each occasion.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Members with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates and in what parts of the Makerfield constituency the cold weather payments system was triggered during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payments on each occasion;

(2) on what dates cold weather payments were made in the Makerfield constituency in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and what were the periods taken for payments to be made once the system had been triggered.

Mr. Scott: Such information as is available is in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 7 July 1992

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court Time

Mr. French: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what progress has been made on the Lord Chancellor's proposals concerning the management of court time;

(2) what measures he has taken to improve the use of court time.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Over the last two years a number of measures have been introduced to improve the use of court time in the civil courts: jurisdictional changes and new arrangements for the allocation of business between the High Court and county courts which ensure cases are directed to the most appropriate forum for trial; procedural changes which advocate the early exchange of more informative pleadings so that trials can be focused on the issues in dispute, and the development of 80 county court trail centres which offer continuous hearings.

In the Crown court and magistrates courts, recommendations to reduce delay made by a working party on pre-trial issues are being introduced. Three pilot schemes are already operating to monitor the effectiveness of magistrates committing defendants to appear in the Crown court on a specific date, either for pleas to be taken or directions given if the case is contested. The guidance for Crown court listing officers is being revised and will include maximum times for the period between committal and trial. Magistrates and their clerks have been asked to give the reduction of waiting times a high priority and are being encouraged to develop methods of listing which will minimise the time people have to wait at court.

Magistrates

Mr. French: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many applications have been made for the post of magistrate; and how many appointments have been made in each of the last five years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The first part of the question cannot be answered without disproportionate cost. The numbers of appointments made by the Lord Chancellor for each of the last five years are:

	Number
1991	1,687
1990	1,756
1989	1,687
1988	1,480
1987	1,213

Mr. French: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates have been relieved of their duties in each of the last five years owing to misconduct.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Prior to 1989, the records kept provide no differentiation between those who were removed on the grounds of misconduct and those removed on other grounds. However, the figures for each of the last three years are as follows:

	Number
1991	10
1990	10
1989	7

Mr. French: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what criteria are used in the appointment of magistrates.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The criteria used in the appointment of magistrates are set out in the Lord Chancellor's "Directions for Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace" at pages 12 to 14. A copy of these directions is in the Library.

Mr. French: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints are received each year concerning the conduct of magistrates.

Mr. John M. Taylor: During the period 1 May 1991 to 30 April 1992, a total of 70 conduct files were opened where complaints were received which, by nature of allegations made, could have involved possible disciplinary action by the Lord Chancellor.

Mr. French: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department to what extent political persuasion is taken into account in the selection of magistrates.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A candidate's political persuasion is neither a qualification nor disqualification for appointment. Political persuasion and other factors are taken into account in order to obtain, so far as possible, a bench which broadly reflects the area it serves.

Mr. French: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training magistrates receive; and how many are deemed unfit for duty after they have been selected.

Mr. John M. Taylor: All newly appointed magistrates receive induction training totalling a minimum of 16 hours before they sit to adjudicate. This should be completed within three months after appointment. Following this, within 12 months after appointment they undertake the basic course—year one—comprising sitting in court to adjudicate with two experienced colleagues; visits to a local adult prison and a young offender institute, and an introduction to the probation service—totalling six hours; and a training course of 12 hours. The basic course continues in years two and three after appointment and may either take the form of four hours' training in each year or be combined into eight hours' training as a residential course. Further training takes the form of 12 hours' training in each three-year period thereafter. Members of the juvenile court—youth court from October 1992—and family panels, and chairmen of courts receive specialist training. No justice has been removed because he or she has failed to complete the training satisfactorily.

Witnesses (Non-appearance)

Mr. French: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases are adjourned each year owing to the non-appearance of witnesses.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No figures relating to this subject are generally collected.

Immigration (Guidance)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the effects on his Department's work of the new guidance notes on the interpretation of the Immigration Act 1971.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The only recent policy guidance to immigration officers of which I am aware relates to primary purpose cases. The effect of policy on caseloads is continuously assessed but, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department made clear, in answer to a question from the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 30 June, *Official Report*, columns *523-24*, it is not possible to estimate accurately the number of applicants who may be effected by this guidance. The effect, therefore, on the number of appeals to the immigration appellate authorities is similarly unclear.

Court of Appeal

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he has plans to permit the Court of Appeal to be televised; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department has no plans at the present time to promote amending legislation to permit the televising of proceedings in the Court of Appeal.

Retired Judges

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to discontinue the system whereby retired judges are permitted to sit part time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has no plans to end the arrangements under existing legal provisions whereby retired judges may be asked to sit judicially from time to time. The Judicial Pensions and Retirement Bill *[Lords]*, at present under consideration in another place, contains a provision which would prevent a retired judge from sitting after reaching the age of 75.

Judicial Salaries

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on judicial salaries.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No. The Government are presently considering the salaries of members of the judiciary.

Plea Bargaining

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he plans to introduce a pilot project for court-based plea bargaining; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor and I are considering the matter, but there are no plans to introduce a pilot project for court-based plea bargaining at the present time.

Judicial Pensions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if it will be possible for judges to buy additional years under the new judicial pension provisions.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Judicial Pensions and Retirement Bill *[Lords]*, which has recently completed its Committee stage in another place, contains a regulation-making power to enable provision to be made to entitle qualifying judicial officers to make voluntary contribution towards the cost of provision of additional benefits under the new judicial pension scheme.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to lay before Parliament and publish the annual report of the Crown prosecution service for the year 1991-92.

The Attorney-General: The CPS annual report for 1991-92 was laid before Parliament at 11 o'clock this morning. I have caused a copy of the report to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Former Members

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what steps are being taken to make known to qualified former Members the availability of special guest passes.

Mr. Beith: It was agreed by the former Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) that the initiative for applying for special guest passes should lie with the former Members concerned. No specific steps are therefore being taken to alert those concerned to the availability of the new passes, although it is understood that a number of former Members have already submitted applications.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many special guest passes have been issued to qualified former hon. Members of the House.

Mr. Beith: Thirty-three.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many former Members are known to qualify for special guest passes.

Mr. Beith: Excluding the 81 former Members who have been elevated to the peerage and who therefore continue to enjoy certain facilities in this House, 205 former Members are known to qualify for special guest passes.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what special arrangements are in place within the precincts of the House of Commons for the parking of vehicles used by disabled people; how these arrangements are enforced; how the abuses of these arrangements are dealt with; what plans he has to improve such arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beith: The Serjeant at Arms has authorised four hon. Members, four Members' secretaries and 10 staff of the House to use on a first-come first-served basis the 12 parking spaces reserved for the use of vehicles driven by or used by photo-identity pass holders who are disabled. In addition, authority for the use of these spaces is given from time to time to disabled visitors and to photo-identity pass holders suffering from temporary incapacity.

Those who use the other parking bays in Star Court have been reminded not to use the spaces reserved for disabled people.

These arrangements are dependent in the first instant on the co-operation of all right hon. and hon. Members; but they do form part of the responsibilities of the Administration Committee in respect of regulations governing car parking in the precincts of the House. That Committee will act on advice from the Serjeant at Arms.

I understand no complaints of misuse or abuse have been received this year and it would appear that the arrangements are working satisfactorily.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what plans he has to improve access and facilities for disabled people in the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beith: The arrangements for access and facilities for the disabled are kept under regular review. The hon. Gentleman may have noticed the recent installation of a stair lift up to the Grand Committee Room and Jubilee Room and handrails leading to the interview rooms off Westminster Hall. Consultants were commissioned last year to look at what might be done to improve access to the main public areas. Their initial report has been examined and further advice is now being sought.

Telephone Directories

Mr. Steen: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what was the cost of producing new green plastic folders for the House of Commons telephone directory; why it was necessary to replace the black folders; how many were issued *(a)* to each hon. Member and *(b)* in total; who approved the cost; and how much was spent.

Mr. Beith: Some 3,500 new folders and directories are to be issued including a single personal issue to each hon. Member. The cost of the folders was £5,181. Their purchase was approved by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee of the Services Committee in the last Parliament. The Sub-Committee's successor committee, the Administration Committee, approved a mock-up of the new directory and the new folder.

The new green folders for the House of Commons telephone directory are to replace the current black folders which are wearing out and which are too small satisfactorily to contain the newly designed telephone directory.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his policy on the release of information concerning low-flying avoidance areas has changed since the introduction of the new open government measures.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department will continue to provide information on how to apply for avoidance status and on matters taken into account when applications are considered; applicants are informed of the decision in all cases. Our policy continues to be based on the considerations set out in the Government's reply—HC 659, October 1990, page v—to the Defence Committee's report on low flying.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the numbers of low-flying sorties by aircraft type for each month of 1992 to date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information for the period January 1992 to April 1992, the most recent month for which figures are available, is as follows:

Numbers of Sorties

Aircraft type	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*
Buccaneer	153	153	95	116
F-4	87	167	61	115
Harrier	511	698	433	541
Hawk	1,298	1,563	1,529	1,500
Jaguar	403	647	761	426
Jet Provost	567	730	669	615
Tornado	1,704	2,174	2,232	1,879
Tucano	348	422	349	273
A-10	442	522	586	542
F-15	0	0	4	14
F-111	633	693	916	858
Other aircraft (including helicopters)	3,482	4,922	5,541	3,696
Monthly total sorties	9,628	12,691	13,176	10,575

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to measure the noise levels generated by the F15E aircraft at low level.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We hope to measure the noise generated by the F15E aircraft at low level later this year.

Aurora

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times the radar operators at RAF Machrihanish have detected the new United States aircraft Aurora during the last 12 months; and if he will list by location where it has been detected by other RAF radar monitoring stations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The existence of such an aircraft would be a matter for the United States authorities.

"Agenda 21"

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that his Department's bases and facilities meet the guidelines set

out in paragraph 20.23, as amended, of chapter 20 of "Agenda 21" as agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is MOD policy to comply fully with United Kingdom environmental legislation except for certain operational activities where compliance is impractical and closely controlled exemptions are permitted. Appropriate guidance exists on the management of hazardous materials and wastes at defence establishments. It is MOD policy to minimise or eliminate the use of hazardous substances wherever practicable.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence following the agreement between the United States of America and Russia to cut strategic nuclear arms and to co-operate on the global protection against limited strikes system, whether Britain will develop a different tactical air-to-surface missile type delivery system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are continuing to study a range of possible options for the eventual replacement of WE177. These include French and American tactical air-to-surface missiles. No decision has yet been taken.

Jet Skis

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Queen's Harbour Master, Portsmouth has to extend restrictions on the use of jet skis in those waters off the Isle of Wight for which he is responsible.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

David Pascall

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what time RAF Leuchars was advised of the needs to provide an aircraft to rescue David Pascall on Sunday 28 June; at what time the aircraft was scrambled; how long was the flight time to the point of pick up of Mr. Pascall; how long was the flight time from the point of pick up to Vale of Leven hospital; and at what time the aircraft returned to RAF Leuchars.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: RAF Leuchars was advised on Sunday 28 June at 2.03 pm. The aircraft was airborne at 2.10 pm, reaching Mr. Pascall some 35 minutes later. Once Mr. Pascall was on board, the aircraft took 20 minutes to reach the Vale of Leven hospital, after which it returned to Leuchars, landing at 5.25 pm. The Royal Navy search and rescue flight at Prestwick, which operates to the same 15 minutes standby as the RAF search and rescue flight at Leuchars, would have had a similar transit time to the incident.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Aitken: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil servants in the Ministry of Defence whose pay currently exceeds this figure is 12.

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the 24 empty houses referred to in his answer of 18 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *160*, have been sold; how many are under offer; and how many have been sold to ex-service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None has been sold. Six are surplus to my Department's requirements and these are currently being offered for sale through the services discount scheme.

Service Children's Schools

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Service Children's Schools (North West Europe) Defence Support Agency for 1992-93.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The chief executive of Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)—SCS (NWE)—has been set the following key targets for 1992-93:

To implement, so far as it is feasible in the British Forces Germany (BFG) situation, the Education Reform Act to the statutory timetable laid down for England and Wales by: Introducing the National Curriculum to SCS (NWE) by subject and Key Stage; introducing pupil assessment by subject and Key Stage; and implementing Teacher Appraisal.

To implement the SCS (NWE) "Schools For the Future Plan" in line with BFG drawdown.

To produce Management and School Development Plans to enable "taut" full cost financial and management planning within an agreed budget and to achieve annual efficiency savings of at least 1 per cent.

To increase the overall pass rate at GCSE (grades A-G) and "A" Levels (grades A-E) by 10 per cent. Within this target achieve an annual 2 per cent. improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving grades A, B and C.

To ensure that all teachers meet at least two of the four qualification-match criteria for their post with at least 75 per cent. meeting three criteria and at least 50 per cent. meeting all four criteria. The criteria are: a recognised professional qualification; relevant Specialist subject or phase qualifications; broad and relevant previous teaching experience; and relevant post-entry in-service training;

To implement Parents' Charter requirements for: child's progress report to parents annually and on change of school; examination/Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) results to be reported to parents annually; and informing parents of relevant educational developments.

To be in a position to submit an application for a Charter Mark in mid-1993.

A copy of the annual report and accounts for 1991-92 will be placed in the Library shortly.

"Options for Change"

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will respond to the third report of the Defence Select Committee, Session 1991-92, "Options for Change: Army, Review of the White Paper, Britain's Army for the 90s".

Mr. Rifkind: I have today placed in the Libraries of both Houses a memorandum giving the Government's formal response to this report.

Trident

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the Trident programme.

Mr. Rifkind: I am pleased to announce that an order is being placed today with Vickers Shipbuilding and

Engineering Ltd. at Barrow-in-Furness for the construction of the Royal Navy's fourth Vanguard class Trident missile submarine.

Negotiations have resulted in a keenly priced contract, and a price lower on a comparable basis than those for the first three submarines. This reflects improvements in productivity at VSEL and the considerable experience the company now has in building this class of submarine.

The order underlines the Government's commitment to the United Kingdom Trident programme and to the effective maintenance of Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent, while obtaining the best possible value for money for the taxpayer.

Trident remains firmly on course for introduction into service with the Royal Navy in the mid-1990s.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants (Shares)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all regulations covering senior civil servants' shareholdings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Central rules covering civil servants' shareholdings are contained in the "Civil Service Pay and Conditions of Service Code", paragraphs 9874 and 9875; and the "Establishment Officers Guide", paragraph 4065. Copies of both documents are in the Library of the House. In some cases, Departments and agencies supplement these rules by further regulations and guidance in handbooks or equivalent documents for their staff. These are not held centrally.

Civil Service College (Theft)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the value of the 3 ft 6 in diameter table stolen from the Civil Service college, Sunningdale; what period of time elapsed before it was noticed it had been stolen; in what circumstances it was stolen; whether it has yet been recovered; how many other items were stolen at the same time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert Jackson: This is a matter for the chief executive and I have asked her to reply direct to the hon. Member. Copies of the letter will be placed in the House of Commons Library and Public Information Office.

Duchy Aid

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many requests were made to the Duchy of Lancaster for financial aid in each year since 1982; if he will give the numbers that were unsuccessful; and if he will list the criteria by which such applications are judged.

Mr. Waldegrave: Since 1982 some 750 payments have been made by the Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund. Most of these were selected by local advisers within the county palatine. There have been few unsuccessful applicants. These were either not connected with the county palatine or other areas of duchy interest, or had a reasonable prospect of raising funds elsewhere.

Decisions as to suitability have been based on the need for, and benefit to be derived from, each payment, while taking into account the wish to spread payments throughout the county palatine.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what consideration will be given by the Duchy of Lancaster to the application for financial aid from the Lancashire free legal action centre.

Mr. Waldegrave: The application for financial aid from the Lancashire free legal action centre in Blackpool is being considered with other requests for financial assistance the duchy office receives. In keeping with normal practice we will be taking local advice before any decision is made.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if she will commission additional research with the Medical Research Council for the development of Interleukin receptor antagonist—IL-Ira—in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Medical Research Council is funded by grant in aid from the science budget, and is an independent body which normally decides its research priorities on its own expert judgment. It is not currently funding research to develop interleukin receptor in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. However, it is supporting a considerable body of work relevant to the actions of interleukin in immunology, and has recently launched, with the help of additional funding from the science budget, a neuroscience approach to human health to develop further its research in fields such as Alzheimer's disease. The MRC welcomes high-quality research proposals relevant to the disease, and will consider them in competition by the usual peer review mechanisms.

Information Disclosure

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will set out the improvements in widening the scope of information disclosure to the public that are expected to arise from the European Commission's proposal for a council regulation on security measures applicable to classified information—Com (92) 56 final.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government consider that the draft regulation in its present form is unworkable. In consultation with other member states, the Government's aim will be to ensure that, within a framework which encourages greater openness in the EC's business, any genuinely sensitive material is effectively protected through appropriate security measures.

TRANSPORT

River Safety

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will publish the report of the inquiry into river safety by Mr. John Hayes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: After the tragic collision between the Bowbelle and the Marchioness in August 1989 an

investigation by the marine accident investigation branch —MAIB—was immediately mounted. Directions on two new safety measures were made straight away, and action put in hand on six further safety recommendations which were announced in the MAIB interim report 10 days later.

The MAIB final report could not be published until April 1991, because of possible prejudice to legal proceedings, but its 27 recommendations were published separately in July 1990. All were accepted immediately, and prompt action taken to put them into effect. All but eight recommendations have been implemented; five of those outstanding have been the subject of public consultation, and resultant legislation will be in force this autumn; one depends on international developments; and consideration of the remaining two, relating to the involvement of military helicopters in civil search and rescue, is not yet completed.

The MAIB report commented, with the acknowledged benefit of hindsight, that action taken by the Department in the past had not gone as far as it should. My predecessor felt that further investigation was needed and invited Mr. John Hayes, secretary of the Law Society, to carry out an inquiry into the Department of Transport's handling of its responsibility for the safety of vessels on rivers and inland waters. I am today publishing his report.

While pointing out that

"The onus for the safety of travellers rests with the operators who undertake to provide a service for profit",

Mr. Hayes concludes that the Department

"showed technical competence and dedication but lacked the vision and drive to lead the river marine industry into accepting that high safety standards and commercial success were compatible."

I am considering carefully all Mr. Hayes's 22 recommendations. Several concern the overall approach of the Department to the exercise of its functions in this area. We are urged to take a much higher profile in promoting safety among a variety of fragmented operators and regulators. Conditions vary greatly in different parts of the country and I have therefore decided to establish a series of district marine safety committees throughout the United Kingdom to review for each area the way in which responsibilities for safety, rescue and accident prevention are presently distributed. The committees will identify risks and the scope for reducing them, assess the necessary new measures and ensure that systems are set up to support the arrangements.

Mr. Hayes made a number of suggestions concerning the way in which the Surveyor-General's Organisation should in future exercise its responsibilities in connection with safety on rivers and at sea. Following recent reports by the National Audit Office and a Committee in another place, I have had an internal review carried out. This has recommended that the organisation be reconstituted as a Marine Safety Agency, responsible to me and with the degree of independence enjoyed by other next steps agencies. I am therefore putting in hand work to establish whether the Surveyor-General's Organisation should become a candidate for executive agency status. I will make a further announcement of my conclusions in due course.

Mr. Hayes recommended that there should be an early review of the rescue arrangements and equipment on the Thames. The Government have given careful consideration to the recommendation but have concluded that a further review of this kind would not be justified. Action is, however, being taken to ensure that the lessons from the Marchioness/Bowbelle disaster have been fully assimilated. In addition, Thames rescue arrangements and equipment will also be examined by the relevant district marine safety committee as part of its wider review.

A full list of Mr. Hayes's recommendations and the Government's initial response to them is being placed in the Library.

Mr. Hayes's report makes a valuable contribution to the work we are doing to improve safety standards on our rivers and inland waterways, and I am most grateful to him for his work and that of his advisers, Captain Nic Rutherford and Mr. Mike Henderson.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects rolling stock for channel tunnel night passenger services to be ordered.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail and its continental partner railways have now confirmed with Metro Cammell their order for rolling stock. Night services are expected to begin in 1995.

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on discussions, within the Council of Ministers, about the intervention by the Commissioner for Competition Policy in the decision by British Rail, together with the national railways of France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, to operate through sleeper services via the channel tunnel; and if he will resist any attempt to prevent the provision of such services.

Mr. Freeman: There has been no discussion of the channel tunnel night trains within the Council of Ministers. The question of exempting from European Community competition rules the joint venture agreement between the participating railways covering the purchase and operation of the night trains is a matter between the railways and the European Commission.

Air Transport Policy

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to reply to the first report from the Transport Committee of Session 1991-92 on developments in European Community air transport policy.

Mr. MacGregor: My predecessor as Secretary of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), submitted the Government's response to the Committee on 16 March 1992. Copies of the response have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Norris: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil servants in the Department of Transport whose pay currently exceeds this figure is one.

Reduced-Mobility Workers

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Council of Ministers to approve the draft directive on safe transport to work of workers with reduced mobility; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Freeman: There was full discussion on the draft directive on safe transport to work of workers with reduced mobility in European Standing Committee A on 16 October 1991. I explained my position in detail at that time.

I welcome moves towards more accessible transport for people with disabilities and my Department is actively promoting and encouraging them. There are a number of legal and technical objections to the directive as currently drafted. I will be discussing with the industry, with disabled people as consumers and with European colleagues, the best way to make progress.

Unadopted Roads

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to extend local authorities' duties and powers to adopt currently unadopted roads.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have no such plans.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the obligations on local authorities to maintain those unadopted roads which have operated as public tracks for over 20 years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Section 31 of the Highways Act 1980 provides that a way over land which has been enjoyed by the public as of right and uninterruptedly for fully 20 years shall be deemed to be dedicated as a highway. But of itself this imposes no obligation for such a highway to be maintained at public expense.

M1/M62

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration has been given to the quality of life in local communities within the proposed M1/M62 link road.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The effects of the proposals on local communities are considered in the environmental appraisal framework.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the extent to which the M1/M62 link motorway will attract traffic from the Snake and Woodhead passes, and divert south Yorkshire trans-Pennine traffic through west Yorkshire via the M1.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: An assessment has been made which indicates that the transfer of trans-Pennine traffic from south Yorkshire to the proposed M1/M62 link road would not form a significant proportion of the total flow on that road.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how financial evaluations of cost-effectiveness have been undertaken for the proposed M1/M62 link road.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The economic evaluation of the scheme has been carried out using the Department's standard cost-benefit analysis—COBA. A copy of the COBA manual is in the House Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to announce the results of the public consultation process on the proposed M1/M62 motorway link; and if he will undertake to publish *(a)* the number of responses in favour of the yellow route, *(b)* the number of responses against the yellow route, *(c)* the number of responses in favour of the purple route and *(d)* the number of responses against the purple route.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A full analysis of the response to the public consultation will take many months, after which an announcement will be made. Information about the responses will be published at that time.

Totton Western Bypass

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received the inspector's report on the final stage of the Totton western bypass; and when he expects to announce his final decision on the route.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The inspector's report on the reopened inquiries into the Totton western bypass was received by the Secretary of State for Transport on 28 May 1992. A final decision on the route may be expected by mid-August.

TRANSPORT

Lowestoft Relief Road

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will instruct his officials to progress detailed discussions with staff at the Co-operative Wholesale Society factory at Lowestoft over the route of the A12 relief road and the new crossing of Lake Lothing; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects to be in a position to give the hon. Member for Waveney a substantive reply further to his holding letter of 2 March, Ref. C/PSO/1907/92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The Co-operative Wholesale Society's alternative proposals for a Lowestoft relief road are currently the subject of an assessment of economic, environmental and engineering aspects. The assessment is expected to be complete in approximately four to six weeks' time, when a substantive reply to my hon. Friend's correspondence on the subject will be sent.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that those vans which are of the nature of saloon or estate cars in shape are classified as in category 1 for toll purposes under the Severn Bridges Act 1992.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* No. Car-based vans fall within the description of small goods vehicles for tolling purposes, and thus fall in toll category 2.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the amount of traffic now taking the northern route for the journey into Wales following the changes in the system of collecting tolls on the Severn bridge;

(2) what change there has been in the amount of road accidents as a result of traffic taking the northern route into Wales following the changes in the system of collecting tolls on the Severn bridge;

(3) what assessment he has made of environmental damage to villages in Gloucester as a result of traffic taking the northern route into Wales following the changes in the system of collecting tolls on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* No assessment has been made of the effects of traffic diversion from the Severn bridge as result of the recent toll changes. There was a reduction in westbound traffic flows on the bridge immediately after the introduction of the new tolls. There is already some evidence to show that some drivers who may have diverted initially are now reverting to using the bridge.

Motor Cycles

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on type approval as relating to motor cycles.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Many representations have been received on EC type-approval, mostly from private individuals, but also from representative organisations and industry. Apart from questioning the need for type-approval, they stressed, among other things, that customisation, low-volume manufacturers and sale of second-hand machines should be protected. Some went on to advocate that type-approval should apply only to the original design of a motor-cycle and not to machines in use. While supporting the principle of EC type-approval, industry stressed that much more time was needed to bring the scheme into operation. The Government took up these and other points during EC negotiations, and are now content that the main concerns of the motor-cycle user and industry are met in the type-approval framework directive as adopted on 30 June.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the need for leg protectors for motor cyclists.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Many representations have been received on this matter, mostly from private individuals, but also from representative organisations and industry. The majority are opposed to leg protectors, and many reflect the view of the motor-cycle industry that they could increase injuries to other parts of the body, particularly the head. The Government's response to industry criticism has been in the form of a research paper by the Transport Research Laboratory (working paper WP/VS/213: "TRL Review of Research on Motorcycle Leg Protection—1991"). Among other things, it concludes that all the evidence to date, and there is much of it covering a very wide range of conditions, shows the TRL-designed leg protectors to be successful in achieving their objectives of reducing leg injuries without increase of other injuries, while being compatible with the production of motor-cycles. I have arranged for a copy of the TRL review to be placed in the Library today.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has has with the EC regarding type approval for motor cycles.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Full discussions were held in Council prior to the adoption of the EC motor-cycle type-approval framework directive on 30 June. A further 23 Commission proposals for the separate directives that will constitute EC motor-cycle whole-vehicle type-approval are yet to be considered by Council.

Street Furniture

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what street furniture local authorities can add to unadopted roads *(a)* with and *(b)* without permission of the road owners.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Local authorities may place any street furniture in unadopted roads that they may in adopted roads unless the power to do so says otherwise.

A27

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he proposes to take regarding the blighted properties purchased on the proposed route of the A27 in the Worthing area and then let at an uneconomic rent when the leases expire in August.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: All our properties will be retained until our land-take for roadworks has been confirmed following public inquiries. As they expire, existing tenancies will be extended for further fixed terms. Rent reviews will have regard to current market rent levels and the means of the tenant.

M42

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much the volume of traffic using the M42 motorway between the M6 junction and the M40 junction is greater than his Department's predictions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Department has made a number of predictions of likely traffic flows on this stretch of motorway over the period of several years during the phased construction of the M42 and M40 motorways. Projected flows for 1991 have varied between about 65,000 and 90,000 vehicles per day, with the whole of the M40 open to traffic. The figures vary for different parts of this stretch of motorway. The reasons for the disparity in the figures are changing circumstances affecting the basis on which traffic forecasts are made and the effects of developing plans for the trunk road network elsewhere. The actual flows for 1991 were about 95,000 vehicles per day.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of noise levels experienced by residents of Knowle due to traffic on the M42 motorway after the completion of the link between the M42 and the M40 motorways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Department has made no such assessment. There is no statutory basis for one. The Department will be making an assessment of noise levels in this area when it widens the M42 motorway as proposed.

Crossing Safety

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has to introduce safer road crossings.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A new type of pedestrian crossing, called a Puffin crossing, is being installed at 50 trunk road sites in England during 1992-93. This crossing is equipped to detect the presence of pedestrians both on the crossing itself and waiting to cross. It automatically gives sufficient time for slow-moving people to cross in comfort and is designed to improve road safety.

Solus 90

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those ships that currently comply with Solus 90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available. All passenger ships built after 29 April 1990 and engaged on international voyages are required to comply with Solas 90.

Air Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement in respect of the reported air near-miss on 26 June, involving an United Airlines Boeing 767 and a Venezuelan business jet over south Wales;

(2) if he will make a statement in respect of the reported air near-miss on 25 June, involving an Air UK F27 and a Royal Air Force Tornado at approximately 12,000 ft, 15 miles north of Grimsby.

Mr. Norris: The responsibility for the safety regulation of United Kingdom civil aviation rests with the Civil Aviation Authority.

All air-miss reports in United Kingdom airspace, involving civil or military aircraft, are investigated initially by the joint air-miss section of the national air traffic services, which is a joint CAA/Ministry of Defence organisation. They are then examined by the joint air-miss working group (JAWG), an independent committee drawn from a wide cross-section of responsible civil and aviation bodies.

This incident is the subject of active investigation at this time. I have drawn the hon. Member's question to the attention of the CAA and have asked it to write to him direct when the investigation is complete.

Air Fares

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) under what circumstances he is required to give approval for an air fare for scheduled flights in or out of the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will set out the exact process by which an application for the setting of an airfare, for which he is required to give approval, is made; to what extent it involves *(a)* the Civil Aviation Authority, *(b)* officials of his Department, *(c)* any other body and *(d)* Ministers.

Mr. Norris: At present, the Civil Aviation Authority has the power to regulate air fares. Fares on scheduled services within the EC performed by EC carriers have to be approved if they are reasonably related to the carrier's long-term fully allocated relevant costs, or otherwise meet the requirements of current EC legislation. Fares on services to points outside the EC are governed by bilateral arrangements. From 1 January 1993 all fares within the EC are to be set by free pricing: there will no longer be an approval system.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what powers he has to regulate the air fares of British charter airlines;

(2) what powers he has to regulate the air fares of non-British charter airlines flying in and out of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norris: The cost of a seat on a charter flight is part of the overall cost of the package offered by the tour operator.

As from 1 January 1993, European Community arrangements will cover charter services for the first time. Existing practice will be continued, as those arrangements stipulate that charter rates are to be determined by free negotiation between the parties concerned.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will set out the powers he has to reject, vary, or accept applications for levels of air fares for *(a)* British scheduled airlines and *(b)* non-British scheduled airlines on routes other than EC or transatlantic;

(2) if he will set out what powers he has to reject, vary, or accept applications for levels of air fares for *(a)* British scheduled airlines and *(b)* non-British scheduled airlines on transatlantic routes.

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority has power to regulate air fares *(a)* in the case of United Kingdom airlines, under the air transport licensing provisions of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 and *(b)* in the case of airlines using foreign-registered aircraft, under part X of the Air Navigation Order 1989. In approving or disapproving a fare for international services the Civil Aviation Authority will have regard to the United Kingdom's international obligations.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the powers he has to reject, vary, or accept applications for levels of air fares for *(a)* British scheduled airlines and *(b)* non-British scheduled airlines on EC routes.

Mr. Norris: EC regulation 2342/90 presently covers the setting of fares on scheduled services within the EC performed by British and other EC carriers. Generally, fares have to be approved if they are related to the carrier's costs. Fares charged by carriers from third countries on EC routes are governed by the bilateral agreements under which those services are permitted.

Arrangements for EC carriers operating within the EC will change substantially on 1 January 1993 when free pricing is introduced for all carriers. The approval system disappears, and a carrier can bring in a fare on 24 hours' notice.

There will be a safeguard against unfair pricing; but in agreeing this new regulation the Council and Commission made it clear that this safeguard was not intended as a means to reimpose a pricing policy on carriers. In the United Kingdom, whilst fares will be notified to the CAA, it will be for the Secretary of State to decide whether the safeguard should be activated.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the date of the next meeting between his Department and the relevant United States authorities to discuss the Bermuda agreement.

Mr. Norris: The next round of discussions with the US authorities about possible liberalisation of the Bermuda 2 air services agreement is due to begin on 20 July.

Scheduled Flights

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the United Kingdom airports from which scheduled transatlantic flights leave.

Mr. Norris: Scheduled passenger flights to airports in north America, south America, and the Caribbean leave the United Kingdom airports listed:

Glasgow
London Gatwick
London Heathrow
London Stansted
Manchester

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list United Kingdom regional airports from which scheduled flights leave to airports abroad, other than in north America.

Mr. Norris: Scheduled passenger flights to airports abroad, other than in north America and the Caribbean, leave the United Kingdom regional airports listed:

Aberdeen
Belfast International
Birmingham
Blackpool
Bristol
Cardiff-Wales
East Midlands
Edinburgh
Glasgow
Humberside
Leeds Bradford
Liverpool
Manchester
Newcastle
Norwich
Plymouth
Southampton
Teesside

Source: BAA Flight Guide, Summer 1992 edition.

Motor Vehicles Register

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will introduce a public register of motor vehicles on lease or hire purchase, together with an obligation to register, as a measure to protect innocent purchasers and intermediaries from fraud.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No. Hire Purchase Information plc (HPI) has for many years maintained a record of third party interests. Motor traders have ready access to this information and I understand that HPI is considering how it may be made more readily available to the general public. I see no reason for the public sector to duplicate this service.

Charter Flights

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list United Kingdom regional airports from which charter flights to airports abroad leave.

Mr. Norris: Comprehensive information about the United Kingdom regional airports from which charter flights leave for airports abroad in the current season is not available in the Department. Information relating to 1991 is available in "UK Airports: Annual Statements of Movements, Passengers and Cargo 1991", published by the Civil Aviation Authority as CAP 504.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make an assessment of the effect on small businesses in the Severnside area of the recent increases in toll charges on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* A report by Pieda plc which was recently published by the Department of Employment concluded, on the basis of a survey of businesses in Avon and south Wales, that the second Severn crossing scheme, taking account of the new tolls, would have a positive effect on local trading and commercial activity, and stimulate investment opportunities in south Wales. Copies of the executive summary of the report, entitled "The Economic Impact of the Second Severn Crossing", are in the House Library.

Road Blocks, France

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had concerning the impact on United Kingdom trade, tourism and the free movement of goods and people of the road blocks set up by French hauliers, dockers and farmers in Macon, Narbonne, Perpignan and elsewhere; what proposals he has to approach the French ambassador to the Court of St. James on the matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* We have received representations from or on behalf of individual transport operators and the relevant trade associations. My right hon. Friend is keeping in close and regular contact with Mr. Bianco, his French counterpart, and is urging him to find solutions to this appalling situation as quickly as possible.

Trust Ports

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what legislative provisions govern the freedom of trust ports not to release their annual report and accounts to interested parties or the public.

Mr. Norris: The relevant provision, which will be applicable where it has been incorporated in local harbour legislation, is section 50 of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847. This provides for the harbour undertakers to prepare annual accounts and send a copy to the county clerk, who will open them for inspection by the public for a small fee.

Yachts

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he gives *(a)* Commonwealth countries and *(b)* Caribbean nations on apprehending stolen United Kingdom registered yachts.

Mr. Norris: Tracing and recovering stolen yachts and apprehending those responsible is essentially a police matter working in co-operation with foreign law enforcement agencies.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve *(a)* the use of ships registered papers and *(b)* the registration of yachts within the EC.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has made of *(a)* the principal destinations and *(b)* the sale of United Kingdom registered yachts stolen from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Tilbury

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the management of the recently privatised Port of Tilbury to discuss the write-off of outstanding loans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: There are no Government loans to the Port of Tilbury.

Marine Theft

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last attended a conference on marine theft from the leisure sector in *(a)* the EC and *(b)* worldwide.

Mr. Norris: Never.

Roads, West Lancashire

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the proposed improvement scheme for the A59 and A570 roads in west Lancashire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Consulting engineers were appointed last year to investigate possible routes for three schemes in the Liverpool-Preston corridor; the A59 Ormskirk-Walmer bridge improvement (which would incorporate a bypass of Burscough); the A570 Ormskirk bypass; and the A570 Scarisbrick and Pinfold bypass. This work is still at an early stage. I cannot yet say when we shall be able to publish proposals.

Ports (Loans)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the outstanding loans between the Government and the Port of London authority and the Port of Tilbury.

Mr. Norris: The Port of London authority repaid all its outstanding Government loans in April 1992.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fire Station, Crossmaglen

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current projected start date for work on the new fire station, Crossmaglen, Newry; what are the reasons for delays in the commencement of the building work; and if he will take steps to ensure that the work is started within the current financial year.

Mr. Atkins: The fire authority considered tenders for the fire station at Crossmaglen on 23 June 1992 and awarded a contract. Work will commence within the next few months and should be completed in the spring of 1993. The delay in the commencement of building work arose as a result of the authority's decision to retender.

Customs Clearance

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce measures to assist customs clearance agents *(a)* to prepare for the social impact of and *(b)* to cope with the economic consequences of the removal of tax barriers within the EC on 1 January 1993.

Mr. Atkins: European social fund assistance is being used by the Training and Employment Agency and others to finance activities aimed at the retaining or redeployment of those employed in small and medium-sized enterprises threatened with redundancies. There is also scope for some assistance within the existing INTERREG programme which was specifically designed to help border regions deal with the advent of the single market. In addition, assistance may become available as a result of recent proposals by the European Commission on the redeployment of customs agents, but it will be some time before final details are known.

Official in the Department of Economic Development, including the Training and Employment Agency, can offer detailed advice about existing initiatives and have been in contact with customs clearance agents' representatives.

Scottish Power

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent communications his Department has had with Scottish Power concerning plans to connect the province's electricity grid with the Scottish grid via a sea bed cable.

Mr. Atkins: None. The project is being progressed by Northern Ireland Electricity and Scottish Power directly.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Mates: Three officials currently earn more than £63,047, the total salary of a Cabinet Minister, including reduced parliamentary salary.

District Electoral Areas

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when a boundary commissioner will be appointed for the purpose of forming district electoral areas; and what is the timetable for his reports.

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. Friend has today appointed Dr. Maurice Hayes as district electoral areas commissioner to report on the grouping of local government wards in district council areas for local elections. The commissioner is an independent officer and it will be for him to decide his precise timetable; but the submission of the commissioner's report will be in time to enable my

right hon. Friend to lay before Parliament a draft Order in Council making provision for electoral areas prior to the general local elections to be held in May 1993.

Water Disconnections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table showing the number of water disconnections in Northern Ireland in each year since 1979.

Mr. Atkins: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1979	48
1980	59
1981	134
1982	123
1983	345
1984	913
1985	651
1986	388
1987	318
1988	408
1989	292
1990	258
1991	385

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Summer Solstice Celebrations

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what reports he has received of damage to monuments or land in the counties of Hampshire, Wiltshire, Gloucester, Avon, Dorset, Somerset and Devon for which he has responsibility, resulting from the various manifestations to celebrate the 1992 summer solstice.

Mr. Key: Neither I nor my statutory advisers, English Heritage, have received any reports of any damage in the counties listed by my hon. Friend. In respect of Stonehenge, English Heritage advises that due to the vigilance of its representatives and the Wiltshire police, no damage occurred at the monument.

Grant Aid

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will establish grant-aid funding to heritage projects which do not gain private good from public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department of National Heritage supports a number of heritage projects, both directly and indirectly, through agencies such as English Heritage and the National Heritage Memorial Fund. In all of the grant regimes funded by DNH resources, the primary objective is to ensure the preservation of the historic buildings, sites, or works of art concerned, or to enhance our knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of the national heritage, by providing financial assistance which would not otherwise be available. Such policies are in the public, rather than private, interest.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Key: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil servants in the Department of National Heritage whose pay currently exceeds this figure is one.

Church Buildings

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will give financial assistance to the listed grade II church of All Saints, Clayton-with-Frickley, south Yorkshire to cover the costs of subsidence damage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The church is potentially eligible for grant towards repairs from English Heritage, and an approach has been made by the parish. However, the major part of the repair bill is attributable to subsidence caused by undermining and the parish is pursuing a claim against British Coal for a significant proportion of the costs. A decision by English Heritage will not be possible until the question of compensation has been settled.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the practice in other EC countries of state subsidy of heritage church buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: No specific study has been undertaken, but general information suggests that United Kingdom grant regimes for historic buildings compare favourably with those of most other European countries.

Sports Councils

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much cash from the Sports and Arts Foundation has been disbursed to *(a)* Wales, *(b)* the Sports Council for Wales, *(c)* the Sports Council for England and *(d)* the Sports Council for Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* The Foundation for Sport and the Arts has allocated grants totalling £1,902,380 to projects in Wales, up to 5 April 1992. No grants have been made direct to the Sports Council for Wales, the Sports Council GB or the Sports Council for Scotland. The foundation is an independent body whose grants are made at the discretion of the trustees within the terms of the foundation's trust deed.

Royal Parks Constabulary

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what statutory protection exists for constables of the Royal Parks constabulary from unfair dismissal; what statutory restrictions exist on their taking industrial action; what statutory police federation exists to represent them; and what statutory restrictions exist on their entitlement to join a trade union.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* No statutory protection exists from unfair dismissal for constables of the Royal Parks constabulary. In line with other police forces, they are an excluded category by virtue of section 146 (3) of the Employment Protection Consolidation Act 1978. There are similarly no statutory restrictions on their taking industrial action or their entitlement to join a trades union. Constables of the Royal Parks constabulary are

represented by the National Union of Civil and Public Servants and many have exercised their right to join that trades union. No statutory police federation exists to represent the Royal Parks constabulary.

PRIME MINISTER

Darwin Initiative

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, columns *200-1*, if he is now able to say what funding for the Darwin initiative will be; if he will make a statement on his plans to set up the initiative; how it will relate to the United States biodiversity project based in New York; what further action he plans to conserve biological diversity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

We are asking interested parties to come forward with ideas on how best to develop a framework for the Darwin initiative and to set priorities for action. We will consider the appropriate level of funding once we have decided those priorities. The Darwin initiative is based on United Kingdom expertise in the field of biodiversity, but we will be looking at action which other countries are taking.

In addition to launching this initiative I have also written to my EC and G7 colleagues urging them to take follow-up action to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including taking forward the convention on biodiversity.

Global Technology

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his speech at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, when he plans to hold the global technology partnership conference; where it will be held; who will be the invitees; which British companies will be involved; what discussions he held with British companies prior to announcing the conference; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

The technology partnership initiative will extend the work of the United Kingdom throughout the preparations for the Earth summit to promote the role of technology co-operation in achieving sustainable development. It will provide developing countries with the opportunity to gain direct access to information on environmentally sound technologies, know-how, best practices and case studies available in the United Kingdom and will open up direct channels of communication with British companies.

The initiative will be launched by a conference and exhibition in the first half of 1993. Officials are currently working on the details of both. We propose to invite representatives of developing countries and to approach United Kingdom companies and others who have experience in providing environmental solutions for developing countries.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister which non-governmental organisations he will be inviting to the global forum in June; if NGOs from developing nations will be involved in the preparation for the forum; where the forum will be held; what consultations he held with NGOs before announcing the forum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

We are discussing the arrangements with non-governmental organisations. Overseas NGOs will be invited to attend and we expect them to be involved in the preparations.

UNCED

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his speech at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, what extra amounts he intends to give to the following areas, stating for each over what time period the donation will be made and in what form *(a)* forestry conservation, *(b)* biodiversity, *(c)* energy efficiency, *(d)* population planning and *(e)* sustainable agriculture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at Rio, we are planning to make available substantial extra resources for these areas. New commitments will be made as part of the planning and management of our overseas aid programme.

Debt Burden

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he has any plans to reduce the debt burden on developing countries and extend the Trinidad terms to other G7 nations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are fully committed to the agreed international debt strategy, and have given a strong lead in tackling the debt burden of the poorest and most heavily indebted countries. In addition to relieving developing countries of over $1 billion of aid loans, this Government have been responsible for both the Toronto and Trinidad initiatives. These were the first initiatives to result in the partial cancellation of the more substantial and burdensome debts owed by the poorest countries to export credit agencies.

The Paris club began implementing Trinidad terms in December, and seven countries have already benefited. The agreed terms give a 50 per cent. reduction in debts falling due in the course of the debtor country's IMF programme of economic reform, and commit creditors to consider reducing the whole stock of debt in three to four years' time if the debtor keeps to its IMF and Paris club agreements. The Government hope that Trinidad terms can be further developed in the direction of our original proposals, which were for a benchmark figure of two thirds reduction applied immediately to the whole stock of debt. It would also be an important step forward if all creditors, without exception, were to implement debt reduction under Trinidad terms.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to ensure that *(a)* letters from hon. Members to Ministers concerning next steps agencies which are concerned with political rather than administrative or

commercial matters and *(b)* letters concerning the planning inspectorate will be replied to by Ministers and not chief executives.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's policy on dealing with letters from hon. Members on agency matters was most recently set out in the Government's reply to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's 1990 report on the next steps initiative, Cm 1263, which said:

"It is for Ministers responsible for particular Agencies to respond in the way they consider most helpful and appropriate to inquiries raised by Members. Ministers will normally ask the Chief Executive to reply to letters which concern day-to-day operational matters delegated to the Agency".

Royal British Legion (Training Centre)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, column *620*, if he will make it his policy for any grant from PERIFRA II in respect of the Royal British Legion's bid for the establishment of a training centre at Tidworth, for the purpose of giving specific training to service personnel and dependants for employment in civilian life, to be treated as additional to the Ministry of Defence existing budget, to the extent necessary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

The matter will be dealt with in accordance with the arrangements for grants from the European regional development fund set out in my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade's statement of 30 June at columns *525-26*.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy on applying the principle of subsidiarity to the work of local government within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

It is for Parliament to decide on the distribution of functions between central and local government.

Intervention Wheat

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister how many tonnes of common wheat held in intervention by the European Commission to which he referred in his answer of 25 July 1991, *Official Report*, column *782*, were released as emergency food and *(a)* in 1990 and *(b)* in 1991 and in each half of 1991 and *(c)* in the first half of 1992; and what is the predicted level for the whole of the current year.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Aid will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information requested is available from the European Commission.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 July.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the economic summit in Munich.

Child Health

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer on 24 June, *Official Report*, column *219*, if he will make a statement on the implementation of declaration 76 of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Harare in October 1991, relating to the framework for collaboration to put children first, particularly through co-operation programmes devised to enhance health and literacy levels among children; what priority is being given to enhancing child health in the developing countries in Commonwealth programmes; and what funding has been allocated to these programmes.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* I have been asked to reply.

Paragraph 76 of the Harare declaration endorses the declaration and plan of action of the survival, protection and development of children adopted by the World Summit for Children, which we support. The commitments undertaken at the summit to improve child health and security and to develop appropriate education are already among the basic concerns of the British aid programme.

We are making a significant contribution through our aid programme of some £45 million a year to health and population programmes in Commonwealth countries. A breakdown of the likely beneficiaries between adults and children is not available, but a considerable proportion of this assistance will directly benefit child health.

EDUCATION

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Forman: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil servants in the Department for Education whose pay currently exceeds this figure is two.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of local education authorities in England will have two or fewer grant-maintained schools operating within their area in September 1992.

Mr. Forth: A total of 76 per cent. of local education authorities fall into this category. Over 50 per cent. of LEAs will have at least one GM school operating by this September.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what procedures apply to the audit of public money spent by individual city technology colleges.

Mr. Forth: Each city technology college is required to have its accounts audited annually by independent

auditors. The auditors are required to report that they are satisfied that the college's internal control arrangements are appropriate and they have not identified any material weaknesses. The books and accounts of the college are also required to be open to officials of the Department for Education and the National Audit Office.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will set out the amount of the Further Education Funding Council transitional funds which will be required *(a)* to fund consultants' reports and *(b)* to meet the appropriate internal running costs of the FEFC.

Mr. Forman: Of the £25 million that will be available to the Further Education Funding Council for transitional funding in 1992-93, the council's running costs, including the cost of consultancies, will account for approximately one third. Just over £1 million will be spent in 1992-93 on surveys by consultants of equipment, health and safety, and colleges' management and financial controls and systems. These surveys will be of direct benefit to colleges and will save considerable duplication of effort and expenditure on their part.

Voluntary-aided Schools, Rossendale

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he has received an application for capital grant in respect of an extension to St. Veronica's voluntary-aided primary school, Haslingden, Rossendale.

Mr. Forth: Yes.

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he has received an application for capital grant in respect of developments of St. Mary's voluntary-aided primary school, Haslingden, Rossendale.

Mr. Forth: Yes.

Capital for Popular Schools

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if, in the consultation document "Capital for Popular Schools", the definition of popular schools includes grammar schools.

Mr. Forth: Yes. Details of how the popular schools initiative will be implemented, following our consultations, will be issued shortly to LEAs and others.

A-levels

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students have passed A-levels in English literature, history, sociology, art, maths, physics, chemistry and biology for each year since 1981.

Mr. Forth: The estimated number of school leavers who have passed A-level in English, history, social studies, creative arts, mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology for each year since 1981 are shown in the table.

School examination survey
School leavers
Number of leavers with A-level passes

Thousands

Subject	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*[1]1990-91*
English	33·6	35·3	36·4	35·4	34·0	31·5	32·9	34·1	36·8	41·8	43·6
History	23·1	24·5	24·6	23·8	22·9	20·8	22·6	22·3	24·2	26·3	25·9
Social Studies	4·1	4·7	4·9	5·0	5·0	5·0	6·1	6·5	7·9	9·1	10·3
Creative Arts	13·6	14·1	15·1	15·1	14·9	14·7	14·6	15·3	17·7	19·9	21·0
Mathematics	37·4	40·9	42·1	42·3	42·8	41·4	39·8	41·5	39·6	39·2	36·9
Physics	29·8	31·8	31·2	31·7	30·8	28·7	26·5	26·4	25·9	26·3	24·4
Chemistry	27·0	29·0	28·9	29·0	28·6	27·7	26·0	25·9	24·9	26·8	25·7
Biology	22·9	23·8	24·2	23·8	23·4	21·6	21·9	21·5	22·1	24·7	23·3

[1] Provisional.

SCOTLAND

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what information he has as to the number of accesses made to the police national computer by each constabulary over the last year; and what is the proportion of access requests made to the vehicle indexes of the new police national computer;

(2) how many accesses were made to each index of the new police national computer over the last year; and if he will include in these statistics an indication of the number of access requests that could search more than one index.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Gentleman today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Training

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the figures, by region, in Scotland for youth training and employment training budgets for *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93.

Mr. Lang: The outturn figures for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93 for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise for youth training and adult training, subject to an adjustment to the 1991-92 outturn for adult training for Scottish Enterprise to make it compatible with the coverage of the 1992-93 budget, are as follows:

£'000

	Scottish Enterprise		*Highlands and Islands Enterprise*	
	1991-92	*1992-93*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Youth training	92,356	90,150	7,956	6,080
Adult training	99,940	93,567	6,566	5,655

These budgets cover a wider range of activities than the youth training and employment training schemes. The allocation of resources by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to local enterprise companies is an operational matter for these two bodies; and I have asked the chairmen to write to the hon. Member.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael Cook

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information embassy or consular officials in Portugal received from the Portuguese authorities about the timing and decision of the appeal by Mr. Michael Cook; and if he will make a statement on developments in the case since the Adjournment debate on 9 June.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: When asked by our embassy in Lisbon on 26 June 1992 the Portuguese supreme court confirmed that Mr. Michael Cook's appeal had been heard and turned down on 17 June 1992.

Since the Adjournment debate, consular officials have again visited Mr. Cook. They are also in touch with his Portuguese lawyer and with his brother in the United Kingdom about the implications of the appeal verdict.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make an official request to the Portuguese authorities that none of the physical evidence connected with the Michael Cook case be destroyed until possible further proceedings are completed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We understand that Mr. Cook may be appealing to the European Court of Human Rights. We have therefore instructed our embassy in Lisbon to ask the Portuguese authorities to ensure that all remaining evidence is retained.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Over the next year I will, as the responsible Minister, oversee FCO involvement in developing international environmental policy following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and instigate policies for energy saving on the FCO estates. These policies will be carried forward over the lifetime of this Parliament.

Indonesia

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money is in the British embassy United Kingdom military training and assistance scheme fund in Indonesia; and for what purposes this fund is used.

Mr. Goodlad: A total of £14·7 million is available under UKMTAS worldwide in the current financial year. The allocation of funds to individual countries varies from year to year and is not made public.

In the case of Indonesia, UKMTAS funds enable a limited number of military personnel to attend developmental and educational training courses in the United Kingdom.

EC Draft Regulations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what categories of draft regulations will be accepted by the British presidency of the European Council as being put forward as list A items by the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Council's rules of procedure state:

"items for which approval of the Council is possible without discussion shall be included in Part A, but this does not exclude the possibility of any member of the Council or of the Commission expressing an opinion at the time of the approval of these items and having statements included in the minutes.

However, an 'A' item shall be withdrawn from the agenda, unless the Council decides otherwise, if a position on an 'A' item might lead to further discussion thereof or if a member of the Council or the Commission so requests."

It is clearly not possible now to predict which items will be taken as A items in any Council during the United Kingdom presidency.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Goodlad: There are 18 officers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and diplomatic service whose pay exceeds that of a Cabinet Minister.

Tibet

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the number of Chinese settling in the Tibetan autonomous region and in the Tibetan autonomous areas in Qinghai, Sichnan, Gansa and Yunnan provinces, and the practice of the Chinese authorities to encourage Chinese immigration into these same areas, by freely granting licences to trade.

Mr. Goodlad: There have been numerous reports about the number of Chinese settling in Tibet. However, there is little or no reliable independent confirmation that a policy exists. According to the most recent Chinese census in 1990, over 95 per cent. of the population of the Tibet autonomous region is Tibetan while 3·7 per cent. is Han Chinese. The Chinese authorities have announced their intention of creating a special economic and technological zone in Lhasa aimed at attracting investment from other provinces, and from foreign countries.

Brazil (Street Children)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will meet the Brazilian ambassador on a regular basis to discuss progress on bringing to justice the perpetrators of the killings of street children in Brazil.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his question on 30 June, at column *508*.

GCHQ, Cheltenham

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will reconsider his policy on trade union membership at Government communications headquarters, Cheltenham.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government remain convinced that membership of national civil service trade unions is incompatible with employment at GCHQ. However, we remain ready to listen to any proposals the Council of Civil Service Unions may have for alternative arrangements which would meet the Government's operational aims.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Expert Witnesses

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provisions have been made by police forces to give adequate notice to expert witnesses of the date and time of cases in which they are to give evidence in the Crown court.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Police forces recognise the need to give all witnesses as much notice as possible of the date of the trial, and generally do so as soon as they know the date from the Crown court lists. If the trial date is unexpectedly brought forward, however, they might only be able to give witnesses comparatively short notice.

Arrests (Reporting)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on police forces informing the media of opportunities to cover the arrest of people in connection with criminal charges.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Communications between the police and the press is an operational matter for chief officers, who must have regard to the relevant provisions of the Contempt of Court Act 1981.

The Holocaust

Ms. Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the adequacy of existing race relations legislation to deal with untrue claims about the holocaust.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government deplore the sentiments expressed by exponents of "holocaust revisionism" and other extreme right-wing groups.

It has always been the tradition in this country that people have the right to express their views—however controversial or repugnant they may be—provided that they do so within the law, including that covering incitement to racial hatred.

We believe that part III of the Public Order Act 1986 has played an important part in deterring acts which are likely or intended to stir up racial hatred and it is for the police and prosecuting authorities to decide whether proceedings should be taken in any particular case. We shall continue to keep the legislation and its operation under review but we have no plans at present for amending it.

Electoral Quotas

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, on the assumption of an unchanged number of parliamentary constituencies for England *(a)* the 1991 electoral quota and *(b)* the entitlement of each county and London borough.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The 1991 electoral quota for England is 69,281.

The entitlement of each county and London borough is given in the tables:

Borough	*1991 electorate*	*Entitlement*
A. London boroughs		
City of London[1]	4,019	0·06
Barking and Dagenham	111,789	1·61
Barnet	212,819	3·07
Bexley	168,332	2·43
Brent	175,902	2·54
Bromley	230,645	3·33
Camden	123,706	1·79
Croydon	236,777	3·42
Ealing	190,289	2·75
Enfield	197,718	2·85
Greenwich	159,404	2·30
Hackney	132,605	1·91
Hammersmith and Fulham	99,441	1·44
Haringey	144,577	2·09
Harrow	147,069	2·12
Havering	181,153	2·61
Hillingdon	179,470	2·59
Hounslow	155,701	2·25
Islington	110,802	1·60
Kensington and Chelsea	85,782	1·24
Kingston upon Thames	93,687	1·35
Lambeth	169,749	2·45
Lewisham	175,193	2·53
Merton	122,233	1·76
Newham	156,762	2·26
Redbridge	174,203	2·51
Richmond upon Thames	114,961	1·66
Southwark	178,189	2·57
Sutton	126,167	1·82
Tower Hamlets	105,968	1·53
Waltham Forest	164,556	2·38
Wandsworth	196,291	2·83
Westminster	108,546	1·57

[1] The whole of the City of London shall be included within a constituency, the name of which shall refer to the City of London.

County	*1991 electorate*	*Entitlement*
B. Metropolitan counties		
Greater Manchester	1,924,289	27·78
Merseyside	1,089,059	15·72
South Yorkshire	1,007,339	14·54
Tyne and Wear	876,143	12·65
West Midlands	1,982,139	28·61
West Yorkshire	1,576,418	22·75
Non-metropolitan counties		
Avon	726,177	10·48
Bedfordshire	388,868	5·61
Berkshire	548,402	7·92
Buckinghamshire	472,624	6·82
Cambridgeshire	491,068	7·09
Cheshire	739,530	10·67
Cleveland	418,596	6·04
Cornwall	369,868	5·34
Cumbria	384,381	5·55
Derbyshire	726,723	10·49
Devon	785,360	11·34
Dorset	524,037	7·56
Durham	471,299	6·80

County	1991 electorate	Entitlement
East Sussex	549,078	7·93
Essex	1,182,193	17·06
Gloucestershire	411,453	5·94
Hampshire	1,190,661	17·19
Hereford and Worcester	525,511	7·59
Hertfordshire	746,634	10·78
Humberside	671,522	9·69
Isle of Wight	101,784	1·47
Kent	1,154,802	16·67
Lancashire	1,069,715	15·44
Leicestershire	671,451	9·69
Lincolnshire	457,508	6·60
Norfolk	587,528	8·48
Northamptonshire	437,903	6·32
Northumberland	238,044	3·44
North Yorkshire	555,689	8·02
Nottinghamshire	784,219	11·32
Oxfordshire	420,055	6·06
Shropshire	313,966	4·53
Somerset	364,667	5·26
Staffordshire	805,603	11·63
Suffolk	481,342	6·95
Surrey	778,598	11·24
Warwickshire	378,145	5·46
West Sussex	557,811	8·05
Wiltshire	430,277	6·21

Probation Service, London

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take to prevent the services provided by the inner London probation service homeless action research team being adversely affected by the imposition of cash limited budgets.

Mr. Jack: Decisions on the deployment of resources within the inner London and City probation service are matters for the management of the service, subject to their statutory responsibilities and national policies, standards and objectives. In 1992-93, the first year of cash limits on central government support to probation service expenditure, to the cash limit for the inner London and City probation service represents a 26·7 per cent. increase over their 1990-91 outturn compared with a national increase of 25·7 per cent.

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current size of each index of the new police national computer; and if he will include in these statistics an indication of the minimum and maximum size of each index over the past year.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is as follows:

	Numbers
Vehicles (including stolen reports)	41,222,646
Persons (including wanted/missing and disqualified drivers)	5,658,603
Convictions	4,223,022
Fingerprints	4,305,814
Property	41,682
Police directories	3,542

Figures on the minimum and maximum size of each database over the last year are not available.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current size of each category in the wanted and missing persons' index of the new police national computer; and if he will include in these statistics an indication of the minimum and maximum size of each category on the index over the year.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is as follows:

	Numbers
Wanted	32,378
Failed to appear	36,410
Deserter	1,362
Locate	52,849
Missing	2,523
Found	22
Absconder	1,979
Recall	321
Arrested	2,947
Unstated	5,320

Figures on the minimum and maximum size of each category over the last year are not available.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current size of each category in the stolen and suspect vehicle index of the new police national computer; and if he will include in these statistics an indication of the minimum and maximum size of each category in the index over the year.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
Lost	373,042
Found	30,712
Removed	10,025
Blocked	6,258
Information	34,591
Seen	8,165
Correction	8,010

Figures on the minimum and maximum size of each category over the last year are not available.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many accesses were made to each index of the new police national computer over the last year; and if he will include in these statistics an indication of the number of access requests that could search more than one index.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The following accesses have been made to the new police national computer since it came into operation on 16 September 1991:

Number of accesses to the new police national computer since 16 September 1991

	Number[1]
Vehicles (including stolen reports)	17,935,412
Persons (including wanted/missing, disqualified drivers and convictions)	10,630,976
Fingerprints	507,199
Property	216,450
Police directories	164,852
Access to more than one database: Persons and fingerprints	452,698

[1] To 30 June 1992.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the number of

accesses made to the police national computer by each constabulary over the last year; and if he will give the proportion or access requests made to the vehicle indexes of the new police national computer.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is as follows:

Force	*Number of transactions for the year upto end June 1992*	*Proportion of transactions made to vehicle database on PNC2 since 16 September 1991 Per cent.*
Avon and Somerset	1,005,293	67·9
Bedfordshire	376,810	67·6
British Transport Police	157,147	36·9
Cambridgeshire	395,113	71·4
Central	178,845	47·0
Cheshire	465,682	62·2
City of London	131,595	53·6
Cleveland	366,251	52·8
Cumbria	411,513	60·3
Derbyshire	499,539	65·0
Devon and Cornwall	817,730	58·7
Dorset	500,510	55·5
Dumfries and Galloway	144,678	52·1
Durham	438,370	44·6
Dyfed-Powys	257,435	46·4
Essex	978,632	55·6
Fife	146,983	54·2
Gloucestershire	413,502	59·8
Grampian	296,778	53·0
Greater Manchester	2,311,500	63·1
Guernsey	26,788	2·8
Gwent	262,288	56·6
Hampshire	994,965	51·8
Hertfordshire	473,262	60·6
Humberside	522,632	60·6
Isle of Man	22,259	11·5
Jersey	52,208	12·8
Kent	1,113,895	59·0
Lancashire	1,301,886	57·9
Leicestershire	426,477	62·5
Lincolnshire	348,179	56·5
Lothian and Borders	746,958	65·1
Merseyside	896,264	51·7
Metropolitan	7,499,843	49·8
Norfolk	444,293	59·4
North Wales	444,936	50·3
North Yorkshire	532,677	59·1
Northamptonshire	376,313	63·1
Northern	123,843	49·4
Northumbria	1,120,302	68·5
Nottinghamshire	646,350	69·3
Royal Ulster Constabulary	20,357	68·3
South Wales	892,097	59·3
South Yorkshire	767,279	69·8
Staffordshire	506,686	55·8
Strathclyde	1,465,650	44·3
Suffolk	391,347	57·4
Surrey	373,719	61·4
Sussex	817,687	50·8
Tayside	293,099	47·8
Thames Valley	1,169,547	50·8
Warwickshire	337,650	60·2
West Mercia	423,034	59·2
West Midlands	2,119,945	59·0
West Yorkshire	1,470,260	55·8
Wiltshire	322,982	61·6

Prison Escapees

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a list of all prison escapees since 1974, including their original offences, sentences and time left unserved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested by the hon. Member is available centrally only for prisoners who escaped since 20 June 1988. However, it would not be right to publish information which relates to individual prisoners. A total of 936 prisoners are recorded as having escaped between that date and 20 June this year.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were recaptured in 1991 after escape; what was the average length of time before they were recaptured; and what were the comparable figures for 1981 and 1986.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of 251 prisoners who had escaped from prison custody were recaptured in 1991, some of whom escaped before 1991. This includes prisoners who had escaped from penal establishments and prisoners who had escaped while being escorted by prison staff outside penal establishments, some before 1991.

The figure does not include prisoners recaptured at or immediately following the time of escape; in these incidents the escape and recapture are subsumed in a single incident report of the escape; and this information could be retrieved only by a detailed manual search and at disproportionate cost.

The average length of time prisoners were unlawfully at large was 40 days.

On 20 June 1988 a new system of recording incident details came into operation. Prior to that date, records were not maintained centrally and information can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female prison escapees in (i) Wales and (ii) the United Kingdom in 1991 together with comparable figures for 1981 and 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The following information relates to England and Wales.

In 1991, 311 prisoners were recorded as having escaped from prison or prison escort in England and Wales. Of these, 306 were male and five female.

There are no female penal establishments in Wales, and consequently no female prisoners are recorded as escaping from penal establishments in Wales in 1991. There is one recorded escape from prison escort when a female prisoner escaped while attending Swansea magistrates court. The inmate had travelled to court, under escort, from a penal establishment in England.

There was one recorded escape incident from male penal establishments in Wales in 1991; two prisoners escaped.

The total number of escapees in 1981 was 201 and in the 12 months to 31 March 1987 it was 192. Information about the sex of those escapees is not available centrally.

On 20 June 1988 a new system for recording incident details came into operation. Prior to that date, records were not maintained centrally and detailed information can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Race Relations

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the harmonisation of race relations laws of the member states of the European Community.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government are opposed absolutely to discrimination on grounds of race; and this position is reflected in all our discussions with our European partners on these matters. The detailed legislative arrangements in other member states are, however, a matter for them, taking account of their particular circumstances.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil servants in the Home Office whose pay currently exceeds this figure is three.

Air Guns

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents involving personal injury caused by air guns have been reported in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Jack: Statistics on the number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in which air weapons were reported to have caused injury are published in Criminal Statistics, England and Wales. The 1990 edition gives figures for the years 1980-1990 in table 3.10. A copy of this publication is in the Library.

South Wales Police

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what fresh assessment he has made of the manpower needs of the south Wales police following criticism of his Department for using a mistaken assessment of the urban/rural split in the South Wales area.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 12 June to a question from the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones).

Football Matches

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing for Football League matches in England and Wales for each of the seasons 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and as a total over to same period *(a)* the combined total of arrests and ejections, *(b)* total attendances at such matches and *(c)* *(a)*, as a percentage of *(b)*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is contained in the following table:

Season	*Arrests and ejections (a)*	*Attendance[1] (b)*	*Arrests and ejections (a) as a percentage of (b)*
1991-92	8,556	20.487,192	0·04
1990-91	9,190	19,541,341	0·05
1989-90	12,918	19,466,826	0·07
1988-89	13,792	18,477,565	0·07
1987-88	12,689	17,968,887	0·07

[1] These figures which have been provided by the Football League may differ slightly from those given in earlier replies based on information from police.

European Frontier Control

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with his EC counterparts about publishing the convention on European frontier control; if he will take steps to arrange for its publication; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The question of publication has not been discussed between EC Ministers. International treaties are normally published only after signature. In this case, the provisions were explained fully in a reply to a written question by my predecessor on 20 June 1991, *Official Report*, columns *242-43*, in Home Office evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee. In view of the very long delay since agreement was reached on the general substance of the draft convention, I have now decided to make the draft text available to Parliament. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

European Community

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the meeting of Trevi and European Community Immigration Ministers in Lisbon on 11 and 12 June.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Discussion at the meeting of Trevi Ministers focused on the establishment of Europol—a European police office to facilitate the exchange of information and experience necessary to prevent and combat terrorism, unlawful drug trafficking and other serious forms of international crime. It was agreed that a convention between the member states would be needed before Europol could be fully operational. However, work on the first stage of Europol—the European drugs unit—is proceeding with the aim of establishing the unit by 1 January 1993 on the basis of a preliminary agreement among the member states.

It was agreed that a project team led by Germany should be established to take work forward on the unit. The project team would begin its work in Strasbourg. No decision was taken on the future location of Europol.

The meeting of Ministers concerned with immigration, which was attended by a vice president of the European Commission, was the 12th in the series of meetings held towards the end of each presidency since 1986. The European Commission made a statement on its communication setting out its views on the requirements of article 8A of the treaty of Rome which has now been deposited in Parliament according to the normal rules for scrutiny of Community documents.

I made clear the Government's view that article 8A applies only to EC nationals and had no effect on our

entitlement to retain a frontier-based system for controlling third country nationals. I emphasised that such a system necessitates a light check on EC nationals in order to ensure that the control of third country nationals is not evaded. I stressed the desirability of avoiding confrontation on this issue and I expressed a willingness to explore ways of keeping delays at frontiers to an unavoidable minimum in the interests of British and other Community citizens.

I join other Ministers in stressing the importance of the external frontiers convention, signature of which continues to be held up because of a problem raised by Spain over the application of the convention to Gibraltar.

On asylum, I announced that the United Kingdom hoped to ratify the Dublin convention shortly. Ministers agreed to consider extending the system of the Dublin convention to third countries, by means of a parallel convention.

Ministers discussed the issue of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Asylum

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for entry clearance in order to seek asylum in the United Kingdom were *(a)* received and *(b)* granted by country during 1991 and the first quarter of 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The available information on applications for asylum in the United Kingdom made abroad is given in the table. These figures may be under-recorded.

Applications[1], [3] for asylum in the United Kingdom received by British posts abroad and referred to the Home Office for decision[2], and grants[1], [3] of asylum, by nationality (provisional estimates[4])

Number of persons

	Applications received		*Grants of asylum[4]*	
Nationality	*1991*	*First quarter 1992*	*1991*	*First quarter 1992*
Angola	*	—	—	—
Bulgaria	*	*	—	—
China	—	*	*	—
Ethiopia	—	—	—	*
Ghana	*	—	*	—
Iran	5	—	5	—
Iraq	10	—	5	—
Kenya	*	—	—	—
Lebanon	*	—	—	—
Nigeria	—	*	—	—
Pakistan	*	—	—	—
Somalia	—	—	*	—
Turkey	—	—	*	—
Uganda	5	*	*	—
USSR	*	—	—	—
Yugoslavia	—	*	—	—
Zaire	*	—	—	—
Nationality uncertain	*	—	*	—
Total[2]	30	5	20	*

[1]Excluding dependants.

[2]In addition a further 20 applications during 1991 and the first quarter of 1992, made by nationals of Afghanistan, and 40 applications during 1991 made by nationals of Liberia, to the British high commissions in New Delhi and Lagos, respectively, were processed locally. No grants of asylum were made during this time.

[3]Figures may understate: rounded to the nearest 5, with "*" = 1 or 2.

[4]Grants in the time periods shown do not necessarily relate to applications made in those periods.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passengers seeking political asylum in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1992 up to the nearest available date were granted temporary admission.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The information requested on temporary admission is not available centrally.

The information on detention is not available in the form requested. However, information on passengers seeking asylum who at 3 July 1992 had been detained for seven days or more is given in the table.

	Prison department establishment	*IS detention*
Algeria	—	2
Angola	4	—
Chile	1	—
Colombia	—	1
Cyprus	1	—
Ghana	6	10
India	5	3
Iran	1	2
Ivory Coast	1	2
Kenya	—	2
Lebanon	6	8
Morocco	1	—
Namibia	1	—
Niger	—	1
Nigeria	4	7
Pakistan	1	1
Peru	—	1
Saudi Arabia	—	1
Sierra Leone	1	2
Sri Lanka	1	—
Uganda	3	—
Zaire	12	13
Zimbabwe	1	—
Total	50	56

WALES

Castell Alun High School

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will pay an official visit to Castell Alun high school.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no plans at present to do so. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State visited the school in May 1988.

Tourism

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Wales tourist board over its planned consultative paper on tourism and the environment in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend and I meet regularly with the Wales tourist board along with officials to discuss the development of suitable policies including the preparation of a new national tourism strategy to take tourism in Wales into the next century.

The board has announced its intention to issue a series of consultative papers dealing with some of the key themes to be covered within the strategy, including tourism and the environment. The consultations will be supported by research studies and other papers relevant to the strategy.

We commend the board in taking forward this initiative.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the budget of the Welsh tourist board is currently spent outside the United Kingdom on the marketing of Wales as a tourist location.

Sir Wyn Roberts: For 1992-93, 4·8 per cent of the Wales tourist board's net provisional budget will be allocated for the overseas promotion of Wales as a tourist destination.

Dentistry

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of the decision by Gwent dental practitioners not to accept new national health service patients.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is for the Gwent family health services authority (FHSA), as manager of general dental services in its locality, to address the issue of NHS dental care drawing upon its expert local knowledge. If the FHSA should experience any difficulty in securing NHS care for its local residents, it can apply to the Department for approval to employ a salaried dentist.

In the meantime, the community dental service provides a safety net for patients who are unable to obtain treatment under the general dental services.

Paediatrics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the health authority areas in Wales which currently have a paediatric pathologist in post; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available centrally.

Metabolic Disease

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much funding is currently allocated in each health authority area in Wales towards the provision of services for the detection of inherited metabolic disease; and if he will make it his policy to ensure adequate funding is granted to existing schemes for a two-year period to allow for successor arrangements to be fully evaluated.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Screening for inherited metabolic disease is undertaken for health authorities, by the medical genetics centre at the University hospital of Wales and through the supra-regional assay service. Funding has been devolved to the district authorities and details of specific costs are not held centrally.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has concluded his discussions with local authority associations concerning the reorganisation of local government in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Council House Sales

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for the phased release of receipts from the sales of council houses in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 19 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *715*.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. David Hunt: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil srvants in the Welsh Office whose pay exceeds that figure is one.

Recycling

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much paper, by volume and by cost, he estimates is used annually by his Department; what arrangements are made for its recycling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department uses an estimated 360 tonnes of paper, with an estimated value of £293,000 per annum. All restricted waste and shredded confidential waste are collected for recycling into various kinds of tissue-type paper. For other types of waste paper, the Welsh Office is currently trialling a waste paper recycling scheme. If the trial is successful, the scheme will be extended throughout the Department.

Unitary Authority

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if it is his intention that the new unitary authority based in Cardiff will be bounded on the north by a line based on the current natural physical boundaries which form the boundary between the current Cardiff authority and the current Rhymny Valley authority.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave him on 6 July 1992, *Official Report*, columns *7-8*.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the response of the Commonwealth Games Council for Wales to the recommendations of the Sports Council for Wales on the funding and organisation of the Commonwealth Games Council for Wales especially in respect of the Commonwealth games in Canada.

Mr. David Hunt: It is a matter for the Sports Council for Wales to assess the response of the Commonwealth Games Council for Wales to the recommendations contained in its report.

Tenants (Arrears)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will bring forward proposals for powers to issue regulations to local authorities in Wales to prevent eviction of local authority tenants for arrears of water and environmental charges.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No. Local authorities do not have powers to evict tenants solely on the grounds of the non-payment of water and environmental charges.

Trusts (Salaries)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to require national health service trusts to publish the salary and fringe benefit packages of their executive directors in their annual reports.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: NHS trusts in Wales will be required to publish annual financial statements. The information to be provided will include:

(i) Total emoluments paid to the chairman and to the highest paid board member;
(ii) Emoluments paid to other board members in bands of £5,000 with no lower limit;
(iii) The number of employees, excluding executive directors, who received remuneration in excess of £40,000 in bands of £5,000.

Water Disconnections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the number of water disconnections in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 24 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *204*. Information prior to 1984-85 was not held centrally. Since privatisation, this information is collected by the Office of Water Services. Data are also published by the Water Services Association in "Water Facts", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Foie Gras

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will show the volume of imports of foie gras into the United Kingdom, and their countries of origin, in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Soames: Provisional figures for 1991 show that the United Kindom imported 24,072 kg of foie gras—classified as "fatty livers of geese or ducks"—21,622 kg of which was dispatched from France and the remaining 2,450 kg from the Netherlands.
Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Curry: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. Only three staff in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and its agencies are currently paid above that figure.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishing vessels beneficially owned in other EC member states are registered as fishing vessels in the United Kingdom; and what countries are involved.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 9 June, *Official Report*, column *110*. There are now some 56 Spanish, 18 Dutch, two Danish and one Belgian vessels.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity Prices

Mr. Olner: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to review the regulatory system for controlling the level of domestic electricity prices.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what representations he has had from the Major Energy Users Council about the costs of electricity to the steel industry;

(2) when he will next meet the Energy Intensive Users Group and the Major Energy Users Council to discuss electricity-pricing mechanisms;

(3) if he will bring forward proposals to reduce the fossil fuel levy to large users of electricity and manufacturing industry to the extent necessary to bring their energy costs in line with European competitors;

(4) if he will bring in reforms to the regulatory mechanism to ensure that electricity costs for manufacturing industry are competitive.

Mr. Eggar: I recently met representatives of the Major Energy Users Council and Energy Intensive Users Group to discuss electricity prices for their members. Proposals they put forward will be considered.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the opencast coal sites which are now, or have previously been, operated by the R A Young Mining Company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for British Coal as the licensing authority under the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946.

Dounreay

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library details of what is stored in the high active shaft at Dounreay.

Mr. Eggar: This is a management matter for the Atomic Energy Authority. I am asking the chairman of the AEA to write to the hon. Member.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plan he has to remove market distortions affecting combined heat and power developers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: The operation of the electricity market is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply.

British Waterways Board

Mr. Conway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to implement the recommendations of the 1987 Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry

into the activities of the British Waterways Board; and if he will ask the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to institute a further inquiry.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the further external review of the British Waterways Board as recommended in paragraph 2.35 of the 1987 Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry into the British Waterways Board to commence.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: In response to a question from Lord Brougham and Vaux on 24 July 1990, Lord Strathclyde welcomed the British Waterways Board's third and final response to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's 1987 report. The board accepted almost all the commission's recommendations.

At paragraph 2.35 of its 1987 report, the commission recommended that a further external review of BWB's progress in improving its efficiency should be undertaken in five years' time. There is no immediate plan to invite the commission to undertake such a review.

Energy Study

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the details of the study conducted by the former Department of Energy in conjunction with the Major Energy Users Council.

Mr. Eggar: The study conducted by the former Department of Energy and the Major Energy Users Council is based on information supplied by individual companies; these details are commercially confidential.

Nuclear Safety

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to receive the published report from the nuclear installations inspectorate on the long-term safety reviews for Dungeness A, Oldbury, Sizewell A, Trawsfynydd and Wylfa.

Mr. Eggar: The Health and Safety Executive has already published the nuclear installations inspectorate's detailed findings on Berkeley, Bradwell, Calder Hall, Chapelcross, Hinkley Point A, and Hunterston A. I understand that Nuclear Electric's safety reviews for the remaining Magnox power stations are currently at various stages of assessment by the NII. However, the need for thoroughness in the assessment of these reviews precludes the setting of a precise timetable. Nevertheless, I am assured by the NII that its findings on each of the remaining stations will be published at the earliest opportunity with the last of them, which will address Wylfa, being completed in 1994.

National Engineering Laboratory

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the future of the National Engineering Laboratory.

Mr. Leigh: The National Engineering Laboratory became an executive agency of the Department of Trade and Industry in October 1990 with the mission, published in its framework document at the time, of becoming commercially viable with a view to eventual privatisation. Good progress has been made towards that object. The agency's targets for 1991-92, its first year as an executive agency, were published on 16 October 1990 and all of them were achieved.

Post Office

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the non-executive directors appointed to the board of the Post Office; on what basis they were selected; and for what levels of remuneration they are eligible.

Mr. Leigh: The non-executive members of the Post Office Board are as follows:

Mrs. H. M. Cropper
Mr. D. Gladwin CBE JP
Dr. D. Grieves CBE
Mr. D. Hodson

These members were appointed by the Secretary of State for the wide range of skills and experience in industry, and for the independent judgment they bring to the board. Remuneration of directors of the Post Office is determined by the Secretary of State, with the approval of the Treasury, on an individual basis. The levels of remuneration paid are within the ranges shown in the Post Office report and accounts for 1991-92.

Subcontractors (Late Payment)

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimates he has made of the effects of late payment in relation to payments due from main to sub-contractors.

Mr. Leigh: No such estimates have been made by the Department of Trade and Industry. I am nevertheless aware that late payment is a significant problem for sub-contractors.

Nuclear Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent changes have been made by his Department in the provision of public information on nuclear energy in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: It is the Government's policy to assist Parliament and the public by being as open as practicable in the provision of information on civil nuclear energy in the United Kingdom, subject to considerations of security, commercial confidentiality and the costs of preparing the information.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list for each year of operation since 1986 the percentage of the yearly total of nuclear material reprocessed at the Windscale B204 plant at Sellafield that arose from reactors operated by Nuclear Electric, Scottish Nuclear or their predecessor electricity boards;

(2) what proportion of the total weight of plutonium reprocessed at Sellafield, in the period 1986 to date, originated in Central Electricity Generating Board/ Nuclear Electric installations.

Mr. Eggar: The information has been extracted from the annual press releases on plutonium for the years in question as published by the former Department of Energy and placed in the Library of the House.

Feed of civil magnox irradiated fuel to the Sellafield reprocessing plant

Tonnes of uranium

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
(a) From NE/SNL fuel[1]	861	772	787	988	688
(b) From overseas reactors	121	32	88	141	51
(c) (a) as a percentage of total	88	96	90	88	93

[1] The information given is for Nuclear Electric plc (NE) and Scottish Nuclear Ltd. (SNL) in 1989-90 and 1990-91 and for their predecessor generating boards in the earlier years.

Plutonium dispatched from magnox sites

Kilograms of plutonium

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
(d) From NE[1]	2,050	2,050	2,100	1,984	2,067
(e) From SNL[1]	250	200	200	160	111
(f) (d) as a percentage of total	89	91	91	93	95

[1] The information given is for Nuclear Electric plc (NE) and Scottish Nuclear Ltd. (SNL) in 1989-90 and 1990-91 and for their predecessor generating boards in the earlier years.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will now make it his policy to make available through the Public Record Office or other appropriate routes all of those documents relating to the foundation of the civil nuclear programme withheld from public inspection beyond the 30-year period.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* The records in question continue to be reviewed in accordance with the criteria established under the Public Records Acts. Those which are withheld from public inspection beyond the 30-year period are progressively released as and when the reasons for their closure or retention cease to apply.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to renegotiate the confidentiality clauses in intergovernmental plutonium export agreements to permit the wider publication of information on amounts and end-use declarations involved.

Mr. Eggar: Intergovernmental exchanges of notes covering the transfer of significant quantities of plutonium are published documents. They contain information on the quantity of material to be exported and a declaration of peaceful end-use.

CE Marks

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment the Government have made of the progress of British construction companies in meeting the requirements for CE marks to be awarded.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

CE marks will be awarded within the framework of the EC construction products directive. They will be based on approved European technical specifications. It will be some time before these specifications are written. A recent sample survey by the Building Research Establishment has indicated that United Kingdom manufacturers are well placed to meet the procedures likely to be followed for CE marking. The Department is in close contact with the industry's representative organisations to ensure the developing requirements of the construction products directive are understood.

Power Cut, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the power cut in Cardiff on 30 June and its causes, costs and consequences and the measures which are being considered to avoid a repetition.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* It is for the company to explain the circumstances of a particular incident. I understand that South Wales Electricity is to make an investigation into this matter.

Chlor-alkali

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received concerning the impact of recent bulk electricity price increases on the future production of chlor-alkali in the United Kingdom; what information he has on the prices paid in other Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development countries by producers of chlor-alkali and other heavy industrial processes, whose viability is dependent on electricity price relativities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* I have met representatives of the chlor-alkali industry and of other industries which are major users of electricity.

According to data supplied under the price transparency directive, electricity prices paid by large and medium consumers in the United Kingdom are around the middle of the range of other EC member states. In addition, the latest available data shows United Kingdom electricity prices for industry to be below the OECD average.

Self-catering Accommodation (Fire Safety)

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 29 June, *Official Report*, column *405*, how long a consultation period he envisages for the draft amendment regulations and associated documents relating to the fire safety of furnishings in respect of self-catering accommodation under the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 1987; what period of moratorium he proposes with effect from 1 March 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* The Department plans to allow a period of two months for comments by interested parties on the draft amendment regulations and associated documents relating to the fire safety of furnishings in respect of self-catering accommodation under the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 1987.

The date on which the requirement will apply will be decided in the light of this consultation.

Electricity Division

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people were employed in the electricity division of his Department on the most recent date for which this information is available.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* Forty-seven people were employed in the Department's electricity division as at Wednesday 1 July 1992.

Small Firms Division

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to relocate staff of the small firms division of his Department currently based in Sheffield.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* My Department is conducting a review to determine the best location for the work of the small firms division and I will make a decision in due course in the light of the findings. Staff currently working in the division are on loan from the Department of Employment and, on any outcome of the review, will be able to return to that Department if they so choose.

Telephone and Postal Canvassing

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish any proposed changes either emanating from the EC or his own Department which would restrict telephone and postal canvassing for trade or other commercial purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* My Department has no plans for restrictions on telephone and postal canvassing for trade or other commercial purposes. We are discussing a European Commission proposal dated 9 June 1992 to the Council of Ministers for a directive on the protection of consumers in respect of contracts negotiated at a distance—distance selling. This proposal would impact on various kinds of direct marketing including mail order, telephone selling and automated telephone calling. A copy of the proposal is available in the Library of the House.

In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Home Affairs is discussing with the Commission a further Commission proposal for a directive on data protection which, if adopted, would also be likely to affect direct marketing activities as well as on cross-border data transfer.

Timeshare

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many complaints his Department has received about International Resort Sales and Travel Ltd.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 1 July 1992]:* I have as yet received no such complaints. I understand, however, that a number of complaints have been made to local trading standards officers.

Pyramid Selling

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many complaints his Department has received concerning pyramid selling schemes; how many of the complaints were upheld; and how many companies were prosecuted under part XI of the Fair Trading Act 1973, for each year from 1973 to 1992.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* My Department gets thousands of complaints about pyramid selling schemes, but the vast majority are on the mistaken assumption that such schemes are all illegal. The information requested on prosecutions under part XI of the Fair Trading Act 1973 is not available. To the best of my knowledge, my Department has prosecuted two companies and individuals. These prosecutions, which related to a single scheme, were in 1987.

Price Marking Order 1991

Mr. Ancram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will review section 10 of the Price Marking Order 1991 in the light of representations made to him on its effect.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* I am reviewing the order as a whole in the light of representations received. The draft amending order now in preparation will take account of these representations, so far as is practicable within the terms of the EC directives which the order implements.

HEALTH

Prescription Charges

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each year from 1970 to 1991 what was the total number of people in each of the exemption categories for prescription charges.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the tables.

Table 1

Estimated numbers of men aged 65 and over, women aged 60 and over, children aged under 16, recipients of Family Credit and recipients of Income Support in England 1970 to 1991 (millions)[1]

Year	Men over 65/ Women over 60	Children under 16	Family Credit[2] recipients	Income Support[3] recipients
1970	—	—	—	—
1971	7·6	11·6	—	1·006
1972	7·7	11·6	—	1·017
1973	7·8	11·6	—	0·808
1974	7·9	11·5	—	0·860
1975	8·0	11·4	—	1·150
1976	8·0	11·2	—	—
1977	8·1	11·0	—	1·289
1978	8·1	10·8	—	1·201
1979	8·1	10·6	—	1·114
1980	8·3	10·4	—	1·441
1981	8·4	10·2	—	2·085
1982	8·4	10·0	—	2·602
1983	8·4	9·9	—	2·815

Year	Men over 65/ Women over 60	Children under 16	Family Credit[2] recipients	Income Support[3] recipients
1984	8·4	9·7	—	3·055
1985	8·5	9·6	—	—
1986	8·6	9·6	—	3·334
1987	8·6	9·5	—	3·217
1988	8·7	9·5	2·0	2·811
1989	8·7	9·5	2·9	2·670
1990	8·7	9·5	3·1	2·598
1991	—	—	3·3	3·071

[1] *Source:* OPCS, DSS.
[2] Family Credit introduced from April 1988.
[3] Numbers of Supplementary Benefit recipients 1970 to 1987.

Table 2

Estimated numbers of young people aged 16-18 in full-time education in England for each academic year from 1979-80 to 1989-90.

Year	Number (millions)
1979-80	0·629
1980-81	0·665
1981-82	0·732
1982-83	0·759
1983-84	0·718
1984-85	0·700
1985-86	0·694
1986-87	0·684
1987-88	0·699
1988-89	0·720
1989-90	0·747

Source: DFE

Metabolic Disease

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to issue direct contacts for the provision of services associated with the detection of inherited metabolic disease.

Mr. Sackville: We recognise that particular care is required in developing appropriate contracting arrangements for specialist services which are provided for a disparate catchment population. The national health service management executive has agreed with regional general managers that regions should take a close interest in purchasing arrangements for such services, both in NHS trust hospitals and in those managed directly by districts. In taking on this role, regions have an interest in ensuring that those services which are required continue to be available and therefore that specialist services have a reasonable level of secure income.

Respite Care

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to collect information on provision of respite care in each local authority area;

(2) what figures her Department currently collects regarding respite care provided through local authorities; and when the figures will be published.

Mr. Yeo: Respite care can take many forms, such as a short-stay placement in a residential setting or hospital, attendance at a day centre, or arrangements for a care worker or volunteer to stay in the person's own home—perhaps for only a few hours a week—to provide respite for their main carer. Statistics collected by the Department do not therefore include respite care as a specific item.

Information is collected centrally on the numbers of short-stay admissions and short-stay residents in local authority staffed residential homes for adults for each local authority in England. These figures do not distinguish people receiving respite care from those receiving emergency, phased or intermittent care, which categories may all include elements of respite care. A copy of the publication—RA/91/2—containing the data for the year ending 31 March 1991 for the elderly and younger physically handicapped client groups is in the Library.

Revised central statistical returns identify the provision of accommodation to children under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 by means of an agreement covering a series of placements. This information will include episodes of respite care but does not specifically identify them. The first such returns relate to the period ending 31 March 1992; no publication date for the information has been set.

There are no current plans to collect additional information in respect of respite care.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will encourage local authorities to publish detailed information regarding respite provisions available in their respective areas.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities are expected to provide information to carers about the services available to support them, including respite care services. Community care plans should also include information about the provision of such services.

Atopic Illnesses

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department had undertaken concerning the relationship between the agricultural use of pesticides and the incidence of atopic illnesses.

Mr. Sackville: Biomedical research is a matter for the Medical Research Council which is funded by the Office of Science and Technology.

General Practitioner Fund Holders

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will hold talks with the chairman of the Mid-Cheshire trust on priorities given to fund-holding general practitioners in gynaecology.

Mr. Sackville: It is a matter for the trust to agree contracts with purchasers.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will investigate the effects on patients of fund-holding general practitioners in the Crewe and Nantwich area.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines she has issued to trust hospitals to ensure that patients from fund-holding general practitioners do not take precedence over the patients of non-fund-holding general practitioners.

Dr. Mawhinney: In June of last year, the national health service management executive and the joint consultants committee of the British Medical Association issued guidance on GP fund holding in EL(91)84, a copy of which is available in the Library. This sets out the criteria for

acceptable contracts to be agreed between GP fund holders and all NHS hospitals, whether or not they have trust status. It clearly states that hospitals should not offer contracts to fund holders which would disadvantage patients of other purchasers.

Multiple Pregnancies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to publish the counselling guide about multiple pregnancies for patients attending infertility treatment centres which was produced by Frances Price of Cambridge university as part of research commissioned by her Department.

Mr. Sackville: No decisions have yet been made concerning the possible publication of this booklet.

Leeds General Infirmary

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of *(a)* the cost of transferring the cardiothoracic facilities from Killingbeck to the Leeds general infirmary and *(b)* the cost of improving the Killingbeck facilities in the event of the transfer to the Leeds general infirmary not going ahead.

Mr. Sackville: I am advised that the net cost of transferring cardiothoracic facilities from Killingbeck to the Leeds general infirmary as part of an integrated redevelopment of Leeds general infirmary is estimated to be £2·1 million, taking into account site proceeds. The cost of upgrading Killingbeck to provide similar levels of performance is estimated to be £15·4 million.

Disability Working Allowance

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide for disabled persons who, because of low earnings, are entitled to disability working allowance to be exempt from national health service charges; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are no plans to exempt recipients of disability working allowance from NHS charges. Disability working allowance recipients may qualify for NHS charge remission on grounds of low income under the NHS low income scheme.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated cost of exempting all disability working allowance recipients from national health service charges.

Dr. Mawhinney: Current estimates indicate that extending NHS charge exemption to everyone expected to qualify for disability working allowance would increase the Department's programme expenditure by over £3 million in a full year.

Trusts

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the current chairs and members of all the hospital trusts so far established, with their previous and current jobs and business interests, and their current salaries.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information concerning chairmen's and non-executive directors' previous and current jobs is not held centrally. Remuneration paid to chairmen and non-executive directors is as follows:

Chairmen
Band 1 £19,285
Band 2 £17,145
Band 3 £15,125

Non-executive directors
£5,000 (all non-executives)

Lists of the initial appointments of chairmen and non-executive directors of first wave NHS trusts which were made on 17 and 21 December 1990 and second wave NHS trusts on 1 November 1991, are available in the Library. Since then, the following appointments to NHS trusts have been made.

CHAIRMEN

Aylesbury Vale Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Sir Timothy Raison appointed from 1 June 1992 to 30 November 1994

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
Sir Michael Knight appointed from 1 April 1991 to 30 November 1995

West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust
Captain Michael Fulford-Dobson appointed from 1 December 1991 to 30 November 1995

NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Leeds General Infirmary and Associated Hospitals NHS Trust
Mr. R. Farrar appointed from 7 February 1992 to 30 November 1994

Central Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust
Professor C. E. M. Normand appointed from 20 January 1992 to 30 November 1994
Mrs. D. J. W. Venables appointed from 18 February 1991 to 30 November 1993
Mrs. M. Ryder appointed from 23 January 1991 to 30 November 1992

St. Helier NHS Trust
Mr. R. B. Hill appointed from 1 December 1991 to 31 November 1992

East Somerset NHS Trust
Mr. J. D. P. Keegan appointed from 16 March 1991 to 30 November 1992

East Gloucestershire NHS Trust
Mrs. S. Pullen appointed from 1 December 1991 to 30 November 1992
Mrs. J. Ralph appointed from 1 June 1992 to 30 November 1994

Weston Area NHS Trust
Mr. R. Norton-Collins appointed from 1 May 1991 to 30 November 1994

Mental Health Foundation of Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust
Dr. J. F. Fleming-Patterson appointed from 1 May 1991 to 30 November 1994

Northern Devon Healthcare Trust
Mr. G. E. Andrews appointed from 1 April 1991 to 30 November 1995
Mr. D. Rowbottom appointed from 1 April 1991 to 30 November 1995
Mr. J. B. Nash appointed from 1 April 1991 to 30 November 1995
Miss D. M. Dibble appointed from 1 April 1991 to 30 November 1992
Mr. J. R. Urquhart appointed from 1 April 1991 to 30 November 1992

Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust
Mrs. Z. P. Manzoor appointed from 1 April 1991 to 30 November 1993

Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital

Miss J. Flindall appointed from 9 October 1991 to 30 November 1993

West Dorset Community Health NHS Trust
Ms. A. Neuberger appointed from 1 April 1992 to 30 November 1993

South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance and Paramedic Services NHS Trust
Mrs. P. Battersby appointed from 12 March 1992 to 30 November 1993

Barnsley Community and Priority Services Trust
Mrs. J. R. Lees appointed from 8 June 1992 to 30 November 1994

South Bedfordshire Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Cllr. J. N. Tizard appointed from 15 June 1992 to 30 November 1993

The Bart's NHS Trust
Sir Charles Reece appointed from 17 February 1992 to 30 November 1993

Optimum Health Services NHS Trust
Mr. B. Huett appointed from 27 May 1992 to 30 November 1994

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will acquire and publish information on the comparable salary and fringe benefit packages of executive directors of health trusts in England and Wales.

Dr. Mawhinney: Annual accounts for each NHS trust in England show the emoluments of the highest paid board member separately and the number of board members receiving emoluments in bands of £5,000 with no lower limit. These statements also show the number of employees, excluding executive directors, receiving remuneration of over £40,000 in bands of £5,000.

Copies of NHS trusts' annnual accounts, when available, will be placed in the Library.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of junior doctors in the national health service; what is the comparable figure for 1985; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: At 30 September 1990, the latest date for which figures are available centrally, there were 23,377 whole-time equivalent junior doctors in the national health service compared to 21,368 whole-time equivalent junior doctors at 30 September 1985. These figures are rounded to the nearest whole number and include all permanent paid and honorary medical staff.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average number of hours per week worked by junior doctors in the national health service; what is the maximum amount allowed by law; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: At 30 September 1990, the latest date for which information is available, junior hospital doctors in England and Wales were contracted to be on duty for an average of 79 hours per week. Information on the number of hours spent actually working is not routinely collected centrally.

There are currently no legal limits on the working hours of junior doctors. However, the new deal for junior doctors launched in June 1991 made clear our intention that, regardless of the contracted hours of duty for individual posts, from 31 December 1994 doctors in training employed on a full-time basis should not normally be expected to work for more than an average of 56 hours per week.

Specialists

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average number of weeks it takes a patient in the United Kingdom to see a specialist in the national health service; what is the comparable amount of time it takes for a citizen of (i) Germany, (ii) the United States of America and (iii) Japan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally. Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of tuberculosis have been notified nationally in the current year and in each of the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement;

(2) how many cases of tuberculosis have been notified in London in the current year and in each of the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The latest available information from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is given in the table.

Notifications of tuberculosis

Year	England and Wales	Greater London
1981	8,128	2,495
1982	7,410	2,146
1983	6,803	2,027
1984	6,141	1,833
1985	5,857	1,741
1986	5,993	1,701
1987	5,086	1,445
1988	5,164	1,486
1989	5,432	1,646
1990	5,204	1,603
[1]1991	5,436	1,794
[2]1992	2,692	893

[1] Provisional.
[2] Provisional (up to week ending 12 June 1992).

Advisory Committees

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the advisory committees and their memberships which advise her on matters relating to the European Community; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are no specific committees. We are advised by officials of the Department who consult other bodies on individual issues.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many civil servants in her Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Sackville: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil servants in the Department of Health whose pay currently exceeds this figure is seven.

Homelessness

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what medical provision is available for homeless men and women and children respectively.

Mr. Yeo: General medical and hospital services are available to homeless people on the same basis as the rest of the population.

In some areas there are significant numbers of homeless people whose needs for general medical services cannot be fully met under the normal arrangements, and the Department is funding special schemes. There are 10 such schemes already and more are being considered. These are designed to make general medical services available to homeless people at places where they are known to congregate. Each is staffed by a team of health professionals, including a GP.

In addition, a demonstration project for homeless people who are mentally ill has been set up in London where the problem of homelessness is most acute. The £20 million programme includes up to 150 specialist short-term hostel places, 750 move-on places and four community psychiatric outreach teams.

Child Employment

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will strengthen regulatory powers to ensure employers' adherence to child employment byelaws.

Mr. Yeo: The Government are very much aware of the need to protect children in whatever form of activity they may be engaged. We are generally satisfied that the safeguards which exist in legislation and byelaws to protect children who work are presently adequate.

Suicide

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people committing suicide in each year from 1987 to the latest convenient date, were recorded as being *(a)* homeless or *(b)* schizophrenic or suffering other mental illness; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women.

Mr. Sackville: The number of people who have been recorded as having committed suicide and were homeless in each year from 1987 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The number of those having been recorded as having committed suicide in the period in question as being schizophrenic or suffering from other mental illness is not available centrally.

Clinical Grading Appeals

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many clinical grading appeals have been decided in each month since the start of the current process; how many appeals have been allowed in each month, and how many disallowed *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Wales, *(c)* in Scotland and *(d)* in each health authority area in England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 1 July 1992]:* The Department does not collect information on appeals at employing authority level. The available information has been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Water (Lead Content)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has received from the drinking water inspectorate on the number of water supply zones which exceed 15 mg/litres in lead content; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The drinking water inspectorate has received data on lead in water supplies from the water companies of England and Wales under the requirements of the information direction. The data relate to the concentration of lead in water supplies taken from consumers' taps in 1991, being set out in concentration bands of 10 µg/1. Information was not sought specifically in relation to 15 µg/1.

In 1991, approximately 77,000 samples from 2,565 water supply zones were analysed for lead: 76·7 per cent. contained 10 µg/1 or less; 10·6 per cent. contained between 11 and 20 µg/1; and 3·7 per cent. contained more than 50 µg/1, the standard set in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989. At least one sample taken during 1991 from 1,908, 1,396 and 941 zones respectively contained more than 10, 20 and 50 µg/1 of lead. In each zone where there is a risk of the water exceeding the lead standard because of lead dissolved from consumers' pipes, companies are evaluating and, where appropriate, installing treatment to reduce the plumbosolvency of the water.

"Agenda 21"

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if Her Majesty's Government supported the amendments to paragraphs 20.1, 20.13, 20.15, 20.17, 20.20 and 20.26 of chapter 20 on the environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes including prevention of illegal international traffic in such wastes, of "Agenda 21" as presented to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Mr. Maclean: Yes.

Advisory Committees

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the advisory committees and their memberships which advise him on matters relating to the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: There are no committees dedicated to advising my Department on European Community matters. However, we consult as widely as necessary to ensure European Community proposals are given full consideration, and receive advice and views from a wide variety of sources.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households in the Paisley, South constituency qualify for grant aid under the home energy efficiency scheme; and how many houses have been improved under the scheme in each year since its inception.

Mr. Maclean: In order to be eligible for grant under the home energy efficiency scheme, an applicant or his or her spouse must be in receipt of one of five passportable benefits: housing benefit, income support, family credit, community charge benefit and disability working allowance. In addition, his or her property must meet certain criteria concerning existing levels of insulation and receipt of a grant for similar work under previous schemes. Data on numbers of households eligible in any particular area at a particular time are not available.

Figures for the number of homes treated under the scheme are not collected on a constituency basis. Within the network installer area which contains the hon. Member's constituency, 3,495 homes have benefited from home energy efficiency scheme grant since 1 January 1991.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households in the Inverclyde district council area qualify for grant aid under the home energy efficiency scheme; and how many houses have been improved under the scheme since its inception in 1991.

Mr. Maclean: In order to be eligible for grant under the home energy efficiency scheme, an applicant or his or her spouse must be in receipt of one of five passportable benefits: housing benefit, income support, family credit, community charge benefit and disability working allowance. In addition, his or her property must meet certain criteria concerning existing levels of insulation and receipt of a grant for similar work under previous schemes. Data on numbers of households eligible in any particular area at a particular time are not available.

Figures for the number of homes treated under the scheme are not collected on the basis requested. Within the network installer area which contains the Inverclyde district council's area, 3,495 homes have benefited from HEES grant since 1 January 1991.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households in the City of Durham constituency qualify for grant aid under the home energy efficiency scheme; and how many houses have been improved under the scheme since its inception in 1991.

Mr. Maclean: In order to be eligible for grant under the home energy efficiency scheme, an applicant or his or her spouse must be in receipt of one of five passportable benefits: housing benefit, income support, family credit, community charge benefit and disability working allowance. In addition, his or her property must meet certain criteria concerning existing levels of insulation and receipt of a grant for similar work under previous schemes. Data on numbers of households eligible in any particular area at a particular time are not available.

Figures for the number of homes treated under the scheme are not collected on a constituency basis. Within the network installer area which contains the hon. Member's constituency, 1,017 homes have benefited from home energy efficiency scheme grant since 1 January 1991.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes within the network installer area which contains the Leeds, West constituency have been improved under the home energy efficiency scheme since its inception in 1991.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* Within the network installer area, which contains the hon. Member's constituency, 2,058 homes have benefited from home energy efficiency scheme grant since 1 January 1991.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households in Preston have qualified for grant aid under the home energy efficiency scheme in the most recent available period; and how many houses have been improved under the home energy efficiency scheme in the network installer area including Preston since its inception in 1991.

Mr. Maclean: In order to be eligible for grant under the home energy efficiency scheme, an applicant or his or her spouse must be in receipt of one of five passportable benefits: housing benefit, income support, family credit, community charge benefit and disability working allowance. In addition, his or her property must meet certain criteria concerning existing levels of insulation and receipt of a grant for similar work under previous schemes. Data on numbers of households eligible in any particular area at a particular time are not available.

Within the network installer area which contains the hon. Member's constituency, 1,626 homes have benefited from home energy efficiency scheme grant since 1 January 1991.

Environmental Charter

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made towards issuing an environmental charter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced his intention to develop a charter for local authority environment services at the Prime Minister's seminar on 19 June. He has proposed that the charter should be developed through a working group of the central and local government environment forum and that it should build on the existing good practice in authorities. In addition, other environmental authorities will apply the charter principles to their services to the public.

Hoop Iron Housing

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proposals he has to assist former tenants who have purchased hoop iron housing and are now unable to sell their properties;

(2) what consideration he has given to reports on the problems associated with hoop iron housing; and if he will make it his policy to include properties with this type of construction in the definition of defective housing under the Housing Act 1985.

Sir George Young: At the Department's suggestion, the London borough of Sutton has commissioned a report on these houses from the Building Research Establishment, which is expected shortly. When the borough, and the Department, have had an opportunity to consider its findings, it will be possible to decide whether any assistance to owners is needed, and, if so, what form it should take.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Redwood: Four in the main Department and three in the Property Services Agency.

London Docklands (Vandalism)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the extent of building vandalisation in the London docklands area to avoid payment of rates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have not been advised of any empty properties in London docklands that have been unusable by their owners in order to avoid rates liability.

Salt Water

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has undertaken on the use of salt water in fire hydrants, street cleaning or domestic sewerage.

Mr. Maclean: None. The Water Industry Act 1991 requires water companies to make available supplies of water for fire fighting, cleansing and watering highways, and other public purposes, in addition to their duty to supply water for domestic purposes. To deliver non-potable water for certain of these purposes would require the development of a separate supply system to avoid contamination of drinking water. The use of salt water for such purposes could also have implications for the contamination of land.

British Waterways Board

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to commercialise the operations of the British Waterways Board.

Mr. Maclean: As far as is consistent with its statutory obligations, the British Waterways Board is already required to run its affairs on a commercial basis. How it manages its day-to-day operations is a matter for the board, but in all its activities BWB should achieve value for money, seek an adequate return on investment and increase opportunities for private sector participation.

Council Rents

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing average council sector rents in each year since 1979 in cash and constant prices.

Sir George Young: Average local authority rents in England were as follows:

Average unrebated rent (£ per week)

As at April	*As reported (£)*	*At 1992 prices (£)*
1979	6·40	16·36
1980	7·71	16·19
1981	11·43	21·42
1982	13·52	23·16
1983	14·05	23·14
1984	14·75	23·10
1985	15·63	22·89
1986	16·45	23·38
1987	17·24	23·51
1988	18·88	24·77
1989	20·76	25·21
1990	23·79	26·40
1991	27·26	28·43
1992	[1]30·55	[1]30·55

[1] Estimates.

In 1991 61 per cent. of council tenants were receiving housing benefit and therefore not paying the full rent.

Water Disconnections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the number of water disconnections in England in each year since 1979.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 24 June, *Official Report*, column *204*. Information prior to 1984-85 was not held centrally. Since privatisation this information is collected by the Director General of Water Services. It is also published by the Water Services Association in "Water Facts", copies of which are in the Library.

Local Authority Tenants (Arrears)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward proposals for powers to issue regulations to local authorities to prevent eviction of local authority tenants for arrears of water and environmental charges.

Mr. Maclean: No. Local authorities do not have powers to evict tenants solely on the grounds of the non-payment of water and environmental charges.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review non-domestic rating regulations to ensure the same treatment for self-catering holiday units as for bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Mr. Robin Squire: No. Bed-and-breakfast accommodation is not rated if the person who lives in the premises intends to make the accommodation available to six people or fewer and such use is subsidiary to the use of the property as his home. It would not be appropriate to apply such a test to self-catering holiday units.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his current policy on planning regulations and consents in environmentally sensitive areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Government's planning policy for areas of environmental sensitivity, including national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, is set out in planning policy guidance note 7, "The Countryside and

the Rural Economy". Paragraph 3.18 states that designation as an environmentally sensitive area under the Agriculture Act 1986 does not affect the status of the area in terms of national planning policies or development control regulations. However, the features which contributed to the designation of the area as an ESA may sometimes also be important features in local countryside planning policies and development control decisions.

Care Homes

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to restrict the liability of residential care homes to the council tax.

Mr. Robin Squire: It is right that residential care homes should contribute to the cost of local services from which they benefit. However, we have taken several measures to ensure that these contributions are modest and fair.

Special rules mean that the owner of a care home, not its residents, will be liable to pay the council tax bill. The size of that bill will be kept down by the banding arrangements, which ensure that larger dwellings give rise to less tax, proportionate to their value, than smaller ones.

There will be personal discounts for residents of care homes, so that they do not count towards the personal element of the tax. In many cases these discounts will reduce the council tax bill by 50 per cent. Finally, any home with a resident who, because of a disability, needs a room, an extra bathroom or kitchen, or circulation space indoors for a wheelchair will be able to apply to the local authority for a reduction equivalent to one valuation band.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will require county councils to provide information to district councils which is considered necessary by district councils for the purposes of their submissions to the Royal Commission on the restructuring of local government.

Mr. Robin Squire: Under schedule 2 to the Local Government Act 1992, public bodies have a duty to supply the Local Government Commission with any information which it reasonably requires in connection with any of its functions. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State intends to direct the commission to make such information available on request to local authorities provided the information is not sensitive for commercial or other reasons.

Planning

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to review the permitted development rights granted in the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 in relation to environmental assessment; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Yes. We are committed to ensuring that all projects which could have significant environmental effects are thoroughly assessed by planning authorities before going forward. The Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 already secures this for projects which require a planning permission. But certain minor classes of development defined in the General Development Order do not presently require a specific planning application and this may require amendment.

A consultation paper will shortly be issued with proposals for such amendments on which the views of industry, the public and planning authorities will be sought.

Peat

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the terms of reference of the working group on peat extraction.

Mr. Baldry: I am pleased to announce that a working group has been convened by my Department which will work to the following terms of reference. Membership of the working group includes representatives of the peat industry, mineral planning authorities, the statutory nature and countryside conservation bodies, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Forestry Commission and the Scottish Office Environment Department. The working group will advise my Department about:

current peat extraction and usage having regard to the overall peatland resource in Great Britain and the place of imports and alternatives, and having regard to the Government's general policies for reconciling the supply of minerals with sustainable development;

any required guidance at national level in respect of development control over existing extraction sites; guidance on rehabilitation of existing workings; and guidance in respect of future land-use issues affecting peatlands, especially the nature conservation of, and extraction from, lowland peat mires.

Particular topics that the group will need to consider include:

(i) occurrence and types of peat;

(ii) the nature conservation status of the identified peat areas, including the scale and extent of the protected areas; and the archaeological and landscape importance of peatlands;

(iii) current areas of peat production;

(iv) production and uses of peat, and the place of imports;

(v) peat working practices, rehabilitation and after-uses, including the issues of old peat permissions as part of the Department's review of the operation of the 1981 Minerals Act;

(vi) peat alternatives;

(vii) the effects of mineral extraction on other peatland land uses (eg. conservation, agriculture and forestry);

(viii) other land uses affecting peatlands (eg. agriculture and forestry);

(ix) use of information from the above to consider preparation of further planning guidance about nature conservation, peat extraction and other land-use matters affecting peatlands.

Information on these topics will be obtained through factual papers and other information provided by my Department and other members of the working group. The Department will also invite information and views on these topics from additional consultees.

The Department's remit for minerals and planning policy legislation and guidance covers England. The Scottish and Welsh Offices are associated with the group, whose work will assist in preparing any similar guidance for Scotland and Wales.

Rents

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from housing associations on the effect of reductions in Government grants on the level of rents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning met representatives of the National Federation of Housing Associations recently to discuss housing association matters, including the level of rents. He has also received some letters from individual associations. The Housing Corporation is monitoring outturn rents under the new financial regime and will shortly be putting proposals to the Department for grant rates in 1993-94. In reaching a decision we will take into account the views expressed by the federation and associations. Schemes are now financed by both grant and private loan and this, combined with the substantially increased resources which the Government are making available overall, should result in associations completing nearly twice as many new homes next year as they did last.

Education Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table for each local education authority in England showing their basic credit approval for *(a)* 1989-90, *(b)* 1990-91, *(c)* 1991-92 and *(d)* 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* I have today placed in the Library a table which gives the basic credit approval for all of the services provided by each local education authority in England for 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93. No basic credit approvals were issued for 1989-90 as section 53 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, under which they are issued, was not in force for that financial year.

Local education authority basic credit approvals

	1990-91 £000	*1991-92* £000	*1992-93* £000
Counties and Isles of Scilly			
Avon	13,614	14,671	16,746
Bedfordshire	7,361	6,957	9,505
Berkshire	11,926	10,729	6,687
Buckinghamshire	7,779	9,017	7,969
Cambridgeshire	18,327	12,828	9,944
Cheshire	15,578	15,213	20,930
Cleveland	11,397	9,680	9,847
Cornwall	13,003	13,274	11,067
Cumbria	12,826	14,164	12,615
Derbyshire	21,209	30,139	18,840
Devon	23,724	17,672	15,948
Dorset	8,702	2,993	8,790
Durham	9,797	12,975	13,322
East Sussex	15,373	25,028	22,926
Essex	32,312	36,716	29,470
Gloucestershire	12,527	11,152	12,340
Hampshire	22,172	28,415	22,449
Hereford and Worcester	9,250	12,486	8,841
Hertfordshire	14,131	15,685	14,497
Humberside	18,659	18,431	18,228
Isle of Wight	4,033	4,231	3,108
Kent	28,368	61,843	48,508
Lancashire	39,679	39,781	35,744
Leicestershire	17,990	15,846	17,926
Lincolnshire	11,198	12,990	16,076
Norfolk	9,388	8,281	8,834
Northamptonshire	9,601	12,897	7,631
Northumberland	5,025	8,022	6,283
North Yorkshire	11,268	14,124	15,110
Nottinghamshire	9,109	15,891	12,013
Oxfordshire	10,508	12,777	11,139
Shropshire	11,448	12,865	8,819
Somerset	10,228	10,698	10,201
Staffordshire	14,113	17,304	13,407
Suffolk	15,766	23,297	15,130
Surrey	9,454	12,104	8,908
Warwickshire	4,241	4,292	4,354
West Sussex	12,048	11,024	9,393
Wiltshire	12,700	11,580	8,956
Isles of Scilly	411	293	281
Metropolitan districts			
Bolton	14,272	11,150	12,185
Bury	7,680	5,992	5,295
Manchester	60,272	55,860	53,645
Oldham	17,236	19,779	13,687
Rochdale	17,279	22,245	13,824
Salford	21,127	17,424	13,968
Stockport	7,678	8,563	9,053
Tameside	8,694	8,762	10,952
Trafford	16,528	10,463	8,912
Wigan	18,150	21,202	15,178
Knowsley	10,864	13,941	20,756
Liverpool	48,548	40,148	33,819
St. Helens	14,000	18,637	16,968
Sefton	10,715	11,260	9,750
Wirral	15,043	14,164	14,346
Barnsley	16,295	15,994	17,009
Doncaster	13,264	12,646	11,058
Rotherham	11,272	8,613	10,075
Sheffield	43,962	45,432	43,145
Gateshead	12,148	13,122	9,921
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	19,034	19,707	17,886
North Tyneside	11,818	10,381	10,400
South Tyneside	10,635	9,777	7,938
Sunderland	19,481	19,051	19,110
Birmingham	87,409	92,368	90,930
Coventry	11,578	17,259	18,452
Dudley	16,568	23,354	19,431
Sandwell	20,519	18,590	23,123
Solihull	4,070	5,610	5,186
Walsall	18,623	14,959	12,929
Wolverhampton	15,145	23,424	18,433
Bradford	29,424	29,674	22,829
Calderdale	8,086	9,308	10,074
Kirklees	13,958	17,255	17,607
Leeds	40,098	57,583	55,917
Wakefield	25,626	18,035	17,124
London			
City of London	1,376	0	0
Camden	30,174	32,298	30,239
Greenwich	29,467	27,453	19,141
Hackney	30,902	37,940	33,387
Hammersmith and Fulham	20,271	18,662	22,319
Islington	33,371	29,145	26,822
Kensington and Chelsea	15,222	12,091	15,445
Lambeth	31,410	36,247	33,723
Lewisham	24,815	29,073	23,872
Southwark	39,942	35,076	34,273
Tower Hamlets	31,871	32,339	32,826
Wandsworth	26,631	19,211	26,183
Westminster	21,724	19,359	18,423
Barking and Dagenham	5,477	3,729	4,277
Barnet	6,298	1,714	8,148
Bexley	6,458	7,920	7,961
Brent	29,544	25,454	20,860
Bromley	4,557	12,044	14,196
Croydon	12,181	17,793	21,747
Ealing	24,316	22,034	19,110
Enfield	11,173	11,475	19,880
Haringey	31,477	28,777	28,092
Harrow	8,658	9,258	12,957
Havering	8,738	4,827	6,815
Hillingdon	5,379	8,858	17,790
Houndslow	10,224	12,487	17,602
Kingston-upon-Thames	6,886	5,150	5,794
Merton	15,751	5,876	5,604
Newham	28,952	35,411	35,073
Redbridge	7,164	6,206	13,947
Richmond-upon-Thames	10,685	7,953	7,456
Sutton	8,365	8,370	7,434
Waltham Forest	24,644	18,350	22,693

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his latest estimates for each local authority and for England of *(a)* the percentage of total budgeted poll tax income collected so far for 1990-91,

1991-92 and 1992-93, *(b)* the total amounts outstanding in pound sterling million and *(c)* the numbers of liability orders taken out for poll tax debt.

Mr. Redwood: I estimate that by 31 March 1992 charging authorities in England had collected 97 per cent. and 89 per cent. of their budgeted community charge income for 1990-91 and 1991-92 respectively. Figures for 1992-93 are not yet available.

I am arranging for a listing of the percentage of 1990-91 budgeted community charge income collected by each authority in the period 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1992 to be placed in the Library of the House.

With respect to the percentage of 1991-92 budgeted community charge income collected, I refer the hon. member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), on 17 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), at column *565*.

My Department does not collect figures for amounts of community charges outstanding or for the numbers of liability orders granted. Figures for the amount of community charge arrears at 31 March 1991, and for liability orders granted in 1990-91, were published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in "Revenue Collection Statistics 1990-91 Actuals", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Construction Industry Training Board

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many training places were awarded by the Construction Industry Training Board in the north-west last year; and how many of them were filled.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

The Construction Industry Training Board negotiates individually with each training and enterprise council the number of training weeks rather than training places under youth training the CITB will provide. In 1991-92 in the north-west a total of 158,905 weeks were contracted, of which 127,482 were delivered.

At March 1991 there were 2,235 young people in youth training with the CITB in the north-west.

The CITB is not itself a training manager for employment training but provides support to employment training training managers through direct contracts with them. The detail of these contracts is not known to the Department.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Regional Economies

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the degree of convergence between the English and Welsh economies based upon the statistical data provided in appendix E of the statistical supplement to the "Autumn Statement 1991" and the territorial gross domestic product data published in the regional accounts of the November 1991 issue of "Economic Trends".

Mr. Lamont: Simple comparisons of regional spending per head are misleading. Account needs also to be taken of a wide range of economic and social differences between the regions. Gross domestic product per head can provide a measure of the relative economic performances of regions of the United Kingdom although, due to the lack of regional price deflators, comparisons of regions' real rates of economic growth cannot be made. Gross domestic product per head in Wales was 82·8 per cent. of the level in England, very close to the equivalent 1980 figure of 82·4 per cent. This ratio has fluctuated a little, but has remained generally steady over the decade.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the variation in the position of the pound sterling against the deutschmark as at the close of business on each of the 10 working days following the reductions in the United Kingdom's bank base lending rates on *(a)* 8 October 1990, *(b)* 13 February 1991, *(c)* 27 February 1991, *(d)* 22 March 1991, *(e)* 12 April 1991, *(f)* 24 May 1991, *(g)* 12 July 1991, *(h)* 4 September 1991 and *(i)* 5 May 1992.

Mr. Nelson: The percentage differences from sterling's central exchange rate mechanism rate of DM2·95 as at the third concertation among central banks for the days in question were as follows:

Date	*Percentage*
9 October 1990	+1·95
10	+2·10
11	+2·06
12	+1·77
15	+0·70
16	+0·68
17	0·76
18	+0·14
19	+0·02
22	+0·03
14 February 1991	−1·62
15	−1·36
18	−1·38
19	−1·33
20	−1·19
21	−1·10
22	−0·95
25	−0·62
26	−0·88
27	−1·15
28	−1·11
1 March 1991	−1·13
4	−1·27
5	−1·17
6	−1·21
7	−1·04
8	−0·85
11	−0·85
12	−0·98
13	−0·76
25	−0·20
26	+0·45
27	+0·69
28	+0·86
2 April 1991	+0·76
3	+0·63
4	+0·71
5	+0·97
8	+1·23
9	+1·26
15	+0·97
16	+0·97
17	+0·94
18	+1·32

Date	Percentage
19	+1·48
22	+1·35
23	+1·09
24	+0·59
25	+0·31
26	+0·22
28 May 1991	+0·34
29	+0·24
30	+0·03
31	+0·10
3 June	+0·46
4	+0·47
5	+0·34
6	+0·22
7	+0·30
10	+0·13
15 July 1991	+0·14
16	+0·39
17	+0·19
18	+0·16
19	+0·19
22	+0·27
23	+0·24
24	−0·25
25	−0·28
26	−0·46
5 September 1991	−0·14
6	−0·25
9	−0·30
10	−0·57
11	−0·70
12	−0·87
13	−1·02
16	−1·23
17	−1·23
18	−1·23
6 May 1992	−0·76
7	−0·38
8	−0·18
11	−0·29
12	−0·27
13	−0·25
14	−0·44
15	−0·60
18	−0·64
19	−0·78

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he considers it will be prudent to move the pound sterling into the narrow band of the exchange rate mechanism; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Sterling will move to the narrow band of the ERM in due course at the current central rate of DM2·95.

Pension Funds

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the provisions which govern the power of the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation to investigate the conduct or control of pension fund managers.

Mr. Nelson: Schedule 2 to the Financial Services Act 1986 sets out the requirements which a self-regulatory organisation must meet in order to be recognised under the Act. These include adequate arrangements for the effective monitoring and enforcement of compliance with its rules and with any directly applicable conduct of business requirements.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to publish the latest Treasury forecast on the PSBR.

Mr. Portillo: No. Forecasts are published twice a year. The next forecast will be published in the autumn statement.

Oil Taxation

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those organisations and individuals whom he has consulted during his review of oil taxation.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government remain in contact with a range of parties interested in oil production taxes. For instance, my officials have had exchanges with oil industry representative bodies—the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association and BRINDEX—and individual oil companies in devising the oil tax measures now before Parliament in the Finance Bill.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to complete his review of oil taxation; and if he intends to report to Parliament before deciding what reforms, if any, to introduce.

Mr. Dorrell: As with other taxes, the fiscal regime for oil production is kept under continuing review. Proposals are put to Parliament as appropriate.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Dorrell: Eight.

Third World

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy that any future structural adjustments agreed with third world Governments should take fully into account the effect of the changes experienced by vulnerable groups in debtor countries.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The Government have made clear—most recently in my right hon. Friend's statement to the development committee at the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World bank—the priority they attach to Governments and the international financial institutions taking full account of their responsibility to devise and implement effective strategies for the reduction of poverty when designing adjustment programmes. It is the policy of the IMF and the World bank to pay full regard to the impact of adjustment programmes on the poor.

Inheritance Tax (Exemptions)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the hectarage of land where there is currently exemption from inheritance tax for access purposes in each county or region.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* I regret that this information is not readily available.

The Countryside Commission has estimated that, in England, there are about 130,000 hectares—315,000 acres—of heritage quality land for which a management agreement has been or is being negotiated. It is thought that about half of this area is land for which conditional exemption has been granted; the remainder relates to private treaty sales of land to bodies qualifying under schedule 3 to the Inheritance Tax Act, acceptances in lieu of tax, designations of land for heritage maintenance funds and conditional exemption claims which have not yet been agreed. Comparable figures for the rest of the United Kingdom are not available.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates and in what parts of the City of Durham constituency the cold weather payments scheme was triggered during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payments on each occasion;

(2) on what dates cold weather payments were made in the City of Durham constituency in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and what period was taken for payments to be made once the system was triggered.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates, and in what parts of the Falkirk, West constituency, the cold weather payments system was triggered during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payments on each occasion;

(2) on what dates cold weather payments were made in the Falkirk, West constituency in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and whether he will indicate the period taken for payments to be made once the system had been triggered.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates the cold weather payments system was triggered in Preston during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payments on each occasion;

(2) on what dates cold weather payments were made in Preston in response to a forecast of a qualifying period, indicating the period taken for payments to be made once the system had been triggered.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates cold weather payments were made in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and what was the period taken for payments to be made once the system has been triggered off;

(2) on what dates, and in what areas of the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow, the cold weather payments system was triggered during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payments on each occasion.

Mr. Scott: Such information as is available is in the Library.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in the Falkirk, West constituency qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in the City of Durham constituency qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Members with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Disability Living Allowance

Ms. Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will rewrite the section of the disability living allowance form on preparing a cooked main meal;

(2) if he intends to rewrite the claim pack for the disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms. Lynne) on 15 June at column *384*.

Ms. Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the claim pack for the disability living allowance will be available in a format accessible to blind and partially sighted people; and what the format will be.

Mr. Scott: The benefit inquiry line provides a forms completion service for disability living allowance. The claim pack is completed over the telephone and then sent to the person to be checked, signed and returned. The forms completion service is available in Braille and large print. The benefit inquiry line also provide audio cassette tapes to help visually impaired people to complete the disability living allowance forms.

Pension Rights

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he will take to reduce the gender imbalance in pension rights.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government have long been committed to the principle of equal treatment in pensions. We are now actively considering how best to achieve this in the state and occupational schemes.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons he decided that women widowed before the age of 45 years cannot receive widows' pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: The changes were made in 1988 to target help where it is most needed—older widows and widows with dependent children. This is fairer and reflects the reality of the changed employment pattern of women. Widows under 45 with dependent children continue to be eligible for widowed mother's allowance and there is now

a widow's payment of £1,000 for all eligible women immediately on bereavement regardless of entitlement to a subsequent weekly benefit.

Young People (Hardship Payments)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for special hardship payments to 16 and 17-year-olds have been made at each benefit office in Tyne and Wear in each year since the general right to benefit was withdrawn; and how many of these applications were successful.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pensioners (Income Support)

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will allow pensioners in receipt of income support to continue to have benefit entitlement for housing/community charge benefit without having to re-apply every 12 months.

Mr. Burt: The existing arrangements are currently being examined in conjunction with representatives of the local authority associations.

Lodgers

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he proposes to take to encourage the taking in of lodgers *(a)* generally and *(b)* among those of or near retirement age.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans for such initiatives in the social security system. However, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has introduced proposals for fiscal incentives in the current Finance Bill.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for South Hams, dated 23 April, regarding Mrs. J. Thorne of Southfield Rise, Paignton.

Mr. Scott: A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 3 July. I very much regret the delay in responding.

State Pensions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average level of *(a)* a single person's state pension and *(b)* a married couple's state pension in each of the last 15 years; and how pension levels have related to average earnings in each year.

Miss Widdecombe: Information is not available in the form requested. Details of the levels of the standard basic retirement pension, and how these have related to average earnings, are given in the table.

	Standard rate of retirement pension			*Retirement pension as percentage of average gross earnings*[1]	
Year	*Single*	*Couple*	*Average gross earnings*	*Single*	*Couple*
	£	£	£	£	£
November 1977	17·50	28·00	83·40	20·98	33·57
November 1978	19·50	31·20	95·80	20·35	32·57
November 1979	23·30	37·30	114·10	20·42	32·69
November 1980	27·15	43·45	135·10	20·10	32·16
November 1981	29·60	47·35	149·50	19·80	31·67
November 1982	32·85	52·55	160·60	20·45	32·72
November 1983	34·05	54·50	172·40	19·75	31·61
November 1984	35·80	57·30	187·40	19·10	30·58
November 1985	38·30	61·30	199·50	19·20	30·73
July 1986	38·70	61·95	210·90	18·35	29·37
April 1987	39·50	63·25	224·00	17·63	28·24
April 1988	41·15	65·90	245·80	16·74	26·81
April 1989	43·60	69·80	269·50	16·18	25·90
April 1990	46·90	75·10	295·60	15·87	25·41
April 1991	52·00	83·25	318·90	16·31	26·11
April 1992	54·15	86·70	337·50	16·04	25·69

[1] Average gross earnings = average gross weekly earnings of full-time adult males in Great Britain.

Child Support Act 1991

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated annual loss of revenue due to members of the armed forces being exempt from the provisions of the Child Support Act 1991.

Mr. Burt: It is intended that members of the Armed Forces will be subject to the child maintenance provisions of the Child Support Act 1991 in the same way as they are currently subject to court orders for maintenance. The necessary amending legislation is intended to be brought before the House in time for the implementation of the new scheme in April next year.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications his Department received in 1991 for back payment of attendance allowance; and how many of those applications were successful.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will specify the criteria used by his Department in determining applications for back payment of attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: Payment of attendance allowance cannot be made for any period before it is claimed.

Advisory Committees

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the advisory committees and their memberships which advise him on matters relating to the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I am advised by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) on relevant EC matters. This is a statutory advisory body made up of medical experts in occupational health, representatives of employers and employees organisations, a lawyer and an independent social researcher. A list of members can be found in their report published in May 1992, "Work-Related Upper Limb Disorders", Cm 1936.

Other advisory committees associated with the Department are kept informed of EC issues. The Department also discusses EC issues with representatives of the pensions and financial services sector as necessary.

War Disablement Pension

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the present level of war disablement pension for each rank; and what plans he has to increase the level.

Miss Widdecombe: Information regarding levels of war disablement pension is contained in leaflet MPL 154, a copy of which is available in the Library. For ranks above private the levels include rank additions: for most war pensioners these represent only a few pence a week but several pounds for some officers.

In order to simplify the war pensions scheme and provide a better service, rank additions will be abolished from April 1993. To ensure that no individual war pensioner will lose out as a result of the abolition the basic war disablement pension will be increased by 84p a week for non-commissioned officers and £5 for most officers.

Mrs. Joanna Rotas

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the progress of the application of Mrs. Joanna Rotas of Western Villas, Collins road, Totnes, south Devon, for *(a)* attendance allowance, made in October 1991 and *(b)* disability living allowance, made in March 1992; and when she can expect to learn whether these applications have been successful.

Mr. Scott: The administration of attendance allowance and disability living allowance are matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Burt: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil servants in the Department of Social Security whose pay exceeds that figure is three.

Social Fund

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what errors were made in the calculation of social fund allocations to district offices for 1992-93; when they were discovered; what changes were made in consequence and when; how many districts have had their allocations reduced or increased; and if he will supply details of the changes to hon. Members whose constituencies are affected.

Mr. Scott: An error in the data on which social fund discretionary budget allocations were based was identified on 17 March 1992; figures on income support caseload for a small number of districts had been attributed to the wrong districts. A full list of the revised allocations made to all districts was placed in the Library on 21 May 1992.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been his Department's response to the Social Security Advisory Committee's report "The Social Fund—A New Structure".

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 11 May at column *47*.

Benefits Agency Answers

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a daily addendum to the *Official Report* which includes details of answers provided to hon. Members by the director of the Benefits Agency.

Mr. Burt: Copies of letters from the chief executive of the Benefits Agency which respond to hon. Members' questions are placed in the Library and Public Information Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 29 June at column *577* about future arrangements.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will now publish the evidence of all the organisations that replied to him in his recent consultations regarding the Child Support Agency regulations.

Mr. Burt: A number of interested organisations were approached for their views on the proposed content of the various regulations to be made under the Child Support Act 1991. It is for the organisations themselves to publish their views, if they wish to do so.

Retirement Age

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those organisations that supplied evidence to him in his recent consultations over the question of the equal state retirement age for men and women; and if he will now publish the evidence provided by all these organisations.

Miss Widdecombe: Over 3,500 responses have been received from organisations and individuals on the question of equalising state pension age. We will be examining these responses in detail and will be prepared to

accept late responses. The publication of the evidence received, and other issues arising from the discussion period, are still under consideration.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment

10. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what specific measures she is taking to help the long-term unemployed.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am determined to provide the best possible range of help and advice for long-term unemployed people. I keep our comprehensive package of employment and training measures under review to ensure that they continue to offer the most practical and effective help in getting back to work.

27. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current level of unemployment; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Compared with the previous month, there was a welcome slow-down in May in the increase in seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment, which for the United Kingdom stood at 2,716,600.

22. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures she has planned to reduce unemployment in Ilford, South.

Mr. McLoughlin: The employment service and training and enterprise councils deliver a wide range of employment, enterprise and training programmes to help unemployed people find the best and quickest route back to employment. In Ilford, South, as elsewhere, these programmes are tailored to take account of special local circumstances.

18. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement about the level of unemployment in the northern region.

Mr. McLoughlin: In May 1992 seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment in the northern region was 153,800.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish a table showing unemployment rates by ethnic origin in Greater London on the same basis as the answer on 13 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *123*, to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman).

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is as follows:

Unemployment rates by ethnic origin in Greater London aged 16 and over Spring 1991

	per cent.
All persons[1]	9
White	8
Non-white	14
West Indian/Guyanese	15
Indian	12
Pakistan/Bangladeshi	18
other ethnic origins[2]	15

Source: Labour force survey.
[1] Includes those who did not state origin.
[2] Includes those of mixed origin.

Health and Safety

12. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the definition of health and safety as used by European institutions in assessing the procedures by which instruments of European legislation are processed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Article 118A of the treaty of Rome does not define health and safety, and we will continue to argue vigorously against its use where there are no proven health and safety risks.

Youth Training

15. **Mr. Mandelson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will increase the Government's provision for young people's training.

Mr. McLoughlin: We plan to spend over £850 million on youth training in the current financial year. This compares with a mere £63 million spent on YOP in 1978-79. I am satisfied that this Government has given training and enterprise councils the resources they require to meet the training needs of young people.

Bridlington Agreement

16. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will introduce legislation to make the Bridlington agreement unlawful.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Following proposals in the Green Paper, "Industrial Relations in the 1990s", my right hon. Friend intends to bring forward legislation which would greatly increase individuals' freedom to belong to the trade union of their choice. That legislation would make it unlawful for a union to exclude or expel an individual simply because it was required to do so through the application of the Trades Union Congress "Bridlington principles".

Employment

17. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how full employment is currently defined.

Mr. McLoughlin: Full employment is a concept with no generally accepted definition.

Training

19. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent review she has undertaken of the effectiveness of the Government's training programmes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am satisfied that, across the country as a whole, the Government's training programmes are meeting the needs of young people, unemployed people and the economy.

Single Parents

20. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action she is taking to allow single parents to carry out employment and training.

Mr. McLoughlin: We offer single parents help to join employment training through special eligibility conditions

and the chance to train on a part-time basis. In addition, all single parents who have been out of work for six months or more are eligible to join a job club. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is also making changes to the benefit system which will make it easier for single parents to go to work when they are ready to do so.

European Community Working Time Directive

21. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement about the EC's proposals to introduce a 48-hour working week.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The proposed working time directive was discussed at the Social Affairs Council on 24 June. I made it clear that the United Kingdom continues to have very severe doubts about the directive as a whole and its proposed legal base. In discussions on the text, the United Kingdom secured all its key objectives, in particular the right for employees to work for more than 48 hours a week if they choose to do so. Other member states continued to have difficulties with the directive as drafted and in consequence the Council did not reach a common position.

Women Workers

23. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how she intends to increase opportunities for women throughout the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have nothing further to add to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend on 9 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *140*.

Pregnant Workers

24. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will support the European Commission pregnant women at work directive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government are seeking to uphold the common position on the directive which was agreed by the Council of Ministers in 1991.

Travel-to-Interviews Scheme

25. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to review the pilot scheme for travel to interviews currently operated on the Isle of Wight.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am informed by the chief executive of the Employment Service that the pilot arrangements for travel to interviews currently operated on the Isle of Wight are being considered as part of an ongoing review of the travel-to-interview scheme. In the meantime, the pilot arrangements for the Isle of Wight will continue.

Training and Enterprise Councils

26. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps she is taking to raise awareness among small businesses of the services offered to them by training and enterprise councils.

Mr. McLoughlin: Training and enterprise councils (TECs) offer businesses, including small businesses, a variety of support services to help business development. In doing so, TECs work with other local organisations such as chambers of commerce and local enterprise agencies. TECs are therefore best placed to raise awareness and market these services at local level.

Work Statistics

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the estimated ratio of the work force to the non-working population *(a)* currently and *(b)* in the years (i) 2000, (ii) 2010 and (iii) 2020, respectively.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1991, the ratio of the estimated United Kingdom civilian labour force to the non-working population was 0·999. In the year 2000, the corresponding ratio is projected to be 0·995.

Labour force projections are not currently available beyond the year 2001.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is her estimate of the size of the work force relative to the size of the retired population in the years *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2010 and *(c)* 2020, respectively.

Mr. McLoughlin: In the year 2000 the United Kingdom civilian labour force is projected to be 29,449,000, 2·97 times the retired population.

Labour force projections are not currently available beyond the year 2001.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria she uses to measure the performance of employment services for disabled people; what plans she has to improve these services; what consultations she intends to carry out with disability organisations before introducing any amendments to service provision; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Employment Department's main provision for helping to meet the employment needs of people with disabilities is delivered through the Employment Service (ES).

The ES's objectives in its services for people with disabilities are to provide them with particular assistance to take advantage of work and training opportunities; and to help and encourage employers to make such opportunities available. The annual performance agreement between the Employment Department and ES sets out a performance target for the ES for 1991-92 that 2·5 per cent. of the total number of people placed in work are to be people with disabilities. In addition, the ES monitors the effectiveness of schemes using both management information, such as the numbers of people benefiting, and special research and surveys.

Proposals for improving the Department's services for people with disabilities were contained in the consultative document "Employment and Training of People with Disabilities" published in June 1990 and further proposals were made when the "Evaluation of Special schemes for People with Disabilities" was published in November 1990. We received many responses to these documents from various individuals and organisations, including organisations of and for disabled people.

As a result of these consultation exercises, we have announced and implemented changes in some areas and

we are considering other ways to improve our provision. For example, the ES is introducing placing assessment and counselling teams (PACTs) during 1992. PACTs will take on all the present functions of disablement resettlement officers, the disablement advisory service and the assessment functions of the employment rehabilitation service. These new teams will provide a more integrated service to both employers and disabled individuals.

Ministers consult regularly with the National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities on plans and performance nationally and on local matters with committees for the employment of people with disabilities. When reconstituting the Department's advisory bodies care has been taken to include in them individuals with knowledge of the needs of people with disabilities, some of whom are members of disability organisations.

In considering, planning and implementing improvements to employment services for people with disabilities the Department involves disability organisations as appropriate. For example, a number of interested organisations will be consulted on proposals arising from a recent review of funding for sheltered employment.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps are being taken by her Department to improve the accessibility of mainstream employment services to people with disabilities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Most people with disabilities who find work through our services do so using our mainstream services. These services are kept under review with the aim of ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities.

Since April 1991 people with disabilities have priority access to the main employment and training programmes —employment training, employment action, the job interview guarantee scheme, job clubs and the enterprise allowance scheme.

The Employment Service has issued guidance to mainstream personnel about their role in helping people with disabilities to find work. The new placing assessment and counselling teams and regional ability development centres will offer support and guidance to mainstream personnel, including help with training, in providing help for people with disabilities who do not require specialist help.

The Employment Service has issued to staff responsible for its premises guidance on improving access to jobcentres for people with disabilities which takes account of the latest standards in the building regulations.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the audit of non-specialist programmes against the needs of people with disabilities was completed; and if she will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department's consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities" referred to the Department's intention to audit new and established programmes and services to ensure that they meet the needs of clients with disabilities. Auditing is now under way but the process is continuous and so there will be no report on its completion.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to evaluate the policy of using agencies for the assessment and rehabilitation of disabled people.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Employment Service regularly monitors the effectiveness and quality of provision within individual agencies with which it contracts to provide specialist employment assessment and rehabilitation. It is currently considering carrying out further research into the effectiveness of rehabilitation.

Health and Safety at Work Festival

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 5 June, *Official Report*, columns *645-46*, if she will list the titles and originators of the videos chosen to represent the United Kingdom at the festival on safety, hygiene and health protection at work in Greece in October.

Mr. McLoughlin: A list of the titles and originators of the United Kingdom video entries to the European video film festival is not yet available from the European Commission.

The film festival was open to all health and safety videos made after 1989. Entries were made direct to the European Commission and there was no pre-selection or nomination process.

I will write to the hon. Member when the information is available and place a copy in the Library.

Nursery Facilities

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures her Department are taking to encourage industry to make nursery and creche facilities available for female employees.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department consistently encourages employers to consider the possible advantages to them of supporting nursery and creche facilities which could benefit all employees with young children. The booklet, "The Best of Both Worlds", describes some initiatives which different employers have taken.

EC Social Affairs Ministers

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will state the purpose of the informal meeting of Social Affairs Ministers of the European Community scheduled to take place on 12 and 13 October; when she expects to announce the agenda of that meeting; and in what manner the results will be communicated to Parliament and the public.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The informal meeting will focus on means of making progress on major employment and social affairs issues facing the Community. The discussion is, for example, likely to be concerned with how best to promote employment growth in the member states, and with ensuring effective implementation and enforcement of existing EC legislation across the Community. I shall arrange for the House to be informed of the main outcomes.

Building Trade

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many full apprenticeships in the building trade were begun in the north-west in each of the last five years and in 1981, 1971 and 1961.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information is not collected by the Department in the form requested. However, the labour force survey for the years 1987 to 1991 indicates that the numbers in the north-west of those continuing a construction trade apprenticeship were as follows:

	Numbers
1987	[1]under 10,000
1988	[1]under 10,000
1989	11,002
1990	11,226
1991	10,344

[1] Estimates for 10,000 people or fewer (after grossing up) are not shown, since they are likely to be based on small samples and therefore unreliable. This is in line with current practice for labour force survey based analyses.

Jobseekers Charter

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the working of the jobseekers charter.

Mr. McLoughlin: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Advisory Committees

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the advisory committees and their memberships which advise her on matters relating to the European Community; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment consults widely on all proposals for EC legislation and other significant Community instruments. She particularly values the comments of advisory committees whose responsibilities cover matters which are the subject of the EC proposal in question.

My right hon. Friend is advised by the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) on matters relating to health and safety at work, including proposed EC legislation in this area. HSC's advice follows consultation with its relevant consultative committees. The members of the Health and Safety Commission are:

Sir John Cullen *(Chairman)*
Councillor Eddie Carrick
Mr. Paul Gallagher
Mr. Peter Jacques CBE
Mr. John C. Marvin
Mr. Nigel J. Pitcher
Councillor Dr. Colin Shannon CBE
Mr. Rex H. M. Symons
Mr. Alan Tuffin
Dame Rachel Waterhouse

Civil Servants,

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many civil servants in her Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The total salary, including reduced parliamentary salary, of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil servants in the Department of Employment group whose pay currently exceeds this figure is three.

The chairman of the Health and Safety Commission, the chairman of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service and the President of the Central Office of the Industrial Tribunals, Scotland are also paid more than a Cabinet Minister but are not civil servants.

Wages Councils

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the future of the wages councils as they affect Wales.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government have made it clear on many occasions that the wages councils have no permanent place in the labour market in Wales or the rest of the United Kingdom.

International Labour Organisation

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the implementation by the Government of those conventions of the International Labour Organisation to which the Government are currently a signatory.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government continue to have full and proper regard to the importance of the International Labour Organisation conventions which the United Kingdom has ratified and to honour its obligations accordingly.

Earnings

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if she will provide a table indicating the average gross weekly earnings of *(a)* women and *(b)* men in each county area in the northern region for each year from 1979, (i) at current prices and (ii) at 1979 prices;

(2) if she will provide a table indicating the average gross weekly earnings of *(a)* women and *(b)* men in each standard region for each year from 1979 at (i) current prices and (ii) 1979 prices;

(3) if she will provide a table indicating the numbers and proportion of *(a)* women and *(b)* men earning less than 68 per cent. of the national average gross weekly wage in each county area in the northern region in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1991;

(4) if she will provide a table indicating the proportion of (a) women and (b) men earning less than 68 per cent. of the national average gross weekly wage in each standard region in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1991;

(5) if she will provide a table indicating the number of *(a)* women and *(b)* men earning less than 68 per cent. of the national average gross weekly wage in each standard region in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: The average gross weekly earnings of men and women by standard region and county can be found in tables 110 and 113 of part E of the new earnings survey report from 1979 onwards. Information on the retail prices index—all items—to convert 1979 figures to 1991 prices is published in table 6.4 of the latest *Employment Gazette* for April 1991, and in table 26 of the annual supplement to *Economic Trends* for April of earlier years. Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Sixty-eight per cent. of average gross weekly earnings for all full-time adult employees was £60·09 in 1979 and

£193·06 in 1991. Estimates of the numbers earning less than these amounts are not available. The proportions earning less than the available figures which are closest to these are shown in the table.

Full-time employees whose pay was not affected by absence

	Percentage[1] with weekly earnings less than:			
	April 1979 £60		*April 1991 £190*	
	Women	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*
Standard Regions				
South East	41·8	6·4	31·6	13·0
East Anglia	59·3	10·7	56·2	20·8
South West	60·5	11·8	53·7	22·3
West Midlands	56·6	7·0	57·6	21·3
East Midlands	59·8	8·4	57·5	21·7
Yorkshire and Humberside	61·0	8·6	56·4	23·2
North West	58·2	8·7	54·5	20·9
North	60·2	8·1	59·4	22·0
Wales	56·8	9·9	57·7	24·8
Scotland	59·5	9·3	54·7	23·2
Counties in the Northern region				
Tyne and Wear MC	58·2	9·4	57·2	22·5
Cleveland	54·4	4·8	58·9	20·9
Cumbria	67·6	7·8	57·4	16·7
Durham	62·9	8·4	63·9	25·6
Northumberland	62·8	9·8	65·0	26·7

[1] The percentages are not strictly comparable because the 1979 figures are for men aged 21 and over and women aged 18 and over while the 1991 figures are for men and women on adult rates of pay. Additional tables in part F of the 1983 NES report provide information on the change.

Source: New earnings survey, 1979 and 1991.

Employment Service

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will provide a table of expenditure showing the cost of running each regional office of the Employment Service aggregated by region, with Greater London shown as a separate region and excluding the funding programmes operated by the offices for each year from 1987-88 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1987-88 prices.

Mr. McLoughlin: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training Credits

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of all 16 and 17-year-olds is currently on a training credit scheme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* Training credits schemes currently operate in 10 of the 82 training and enterprise councils in England and Wales, and one of the 22 local enterprise companies in Scotland, and offer training to those 16 and 17-year-olds who leave full-time education.

The number of 16 and 17-year-olds currently on a training credit scheme represents an estimated 1 per cent. of the total number of 16 and 17-year-olds in Great Britain.

Training

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is her estimate of the number of young people seeking a youth training place for the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The information requested is not available.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the contribution of the European social fund to the Government's youth training, employment training and employment action programmes.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* In 1991, the latest year for which contributions received are available, employment training received £156·59 million and youth training received £15·81 million from the European social fund (ESF). There was no contribution to employment action.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 8 July 1992

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the speed limits for each aircraft type while low-flying over the United Kingdom at *(a)* 100 ft and *(b)* 250 ft; and if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which these speeds may be exceeded during interceptions or the run-up of simulated targets.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For military aircraft flying at 250ft in the United Kingdom low-flying system the normal maximum cruising speed is 450 knots, except for F-111s which, for aircraft handling reasons, are allowed to fly at speeds up to 480 knots. At this height aircraft may increase their speed to maxima ranging from 480 knots to 550 knots, depending on aircraft type, in special circumstances such as the run-up to simulated targets or during mock interceptions. The maximum speeds for aircraft flying at 100 ft above ground level are as follows:

	Knots
Jaguar	520
Tornado	500
Hawk	480
Harrier GR 5/7	420

Household Cavalry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the Household Cavalry will receive from Anglia TV for the assistance it is giving to that company's forthcoming television production "Riders"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Costs are still being collated and formal charges will be raised by MoD in due course.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of maintaining British armed forces in the Falkland islands in each of the last 10 years; and what is the estimated cost for the current year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The cost of maintaining British armed forces in the Falkland islands in each of the last 10 years (at outturn prices) was as follows:

	£ million
1982-83	780
1983-84	637
1984-85	644
1985-86	572
1986-87	402
1987-88	229
1988-89	102
1989-90	68
1990-91	66
1991-92	72

The estimated costs for 1992-93 are £67 million at 1992-93 prices.

USAF Bombing, Golspie

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he received a report from the United States Air Force into an incident on 5 June, when a practice bomb was dropped 8 miles off target by a United States Air Force jet into a site of special scientific interest near Golspie, Sutherland, Scotland; what compensation is being negotiated for the damage by fire to the rare lichen moss destroyed in this incident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The incident referred to took place on 4 June. A written report detailing the cause was received from the United States Air Force by the Ministry of Defence on 12 June. Full details of claims for compensation have not yet been received.

Defence Facilities

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to make available to interested United Kingdom citizens and organisations, aerial photographs of such United Kingdom defence facilities as are permitted to the Russian military forces under the Helsinki "Open Skies" treaty of 24 March.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The purpose of the "Open Skies" treaty is to establish a reciprocal confidence-building regime which will help us build trust with other parties to the treaty. Under the treaty, information gathered during "Open Skies" flights may be used only for treaty-related purposes. We would not want to see this provision waived, not least because aerial photographs from "Open Skies" flights could be of use to terrorist organisations.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met representatives of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association to discuss compensation; when he next plans to meet them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have discussed this matter with a number of hon. Members. I have not met and have not received any request to meet representatives of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association. The position on compensation remains as set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his answer of 5 June, *Official Report*, column 655.

Accommodation

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many units of personnel accommodation are vacant in each county in England and Wales, and in each region in Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Records are not maintained by counties in England, but at 31 March 1992, the latest date

for which figures are available, there were 9,002 MoD-owned service married quarters and civilian residential dwellings vacant in England, Wales and Scotland out of a total stock of 69,841. This excludes barrack and mess accommodation.

Region	*Vacant*
England	
Yorkshire	596
Northern	88
North West	126
South East	3,715
South West	1,617
East Anglia	566
East Midlands	700
West Midlands	322
Wales	
Clwyd	45
Dyfed	19
Gwent	17
Gwynedd	31
Powys	17
South Glamorgan	105
Scotland	
Borders	19
Dumfries and Galloway	1
Fife	117
Grampian	277
Highlands	15
Western Isles	48
Shetlands	6
Lothian	174
Strathclyde	318
Tayside	63
Total	9,002

Many of these properties were undergoing major works or modernisation, some were already allotted to service families who were due to move in shortly, and others were being considered for disposal. In addition, some 1,850 properties were in the process of being sold.

Army Redundancies

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement about redundancies in the Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A total of 3,338 Army personnel, comprising 838 officers and 2,500 soldiers, were selected in February 1992 for the first phase of redundancy. Of the total, all but 143 officers were volunteers.

As foreshadowed in my answer to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neil) on 8 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *296*, we shall shortly be promulgating details of the next phase of redundancy in the Army. This will follow the pattern of the first phase with the timetable and plans to be published at the end of July, and individuals informed during the first quarter of 1993. It is likely that the number of personnel to be made redundant in the second phase in 1993-94 will be in the region 6,500. Individuals will receive up to 12 months' notice and full resettlement assistance.

TRANSPORT

Scotland

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the extent of his responsibilities in Scotland.

Mr. MacGregor: I have general responsibility for transport policy throughout Great Britain, which I exercise in association with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales. My specific responsibilities for Scotland cover matters other than those for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is directly responsible. These are Scottish roads policy and legislation, including the construction, maintenance and management of motorways and trunk roads; capital allocations and grants to local authorities for local roads and public transport; some aspects of bus policy; subsidies to some local ferry, airport and air services; Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd; transport piers and harbours other than ports, freight facilities grants; toll bridge regulation; and civil emergencies planning. There is very close consultation between my Department and the Scottish Office over all aspects of transport policy affecting Scotland.

Traffic Flows

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the average daily vehicular flow on the A420 between Swindon and Oxford in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) what was the average daily vehicular flow on the A417 between Cirencester and Gloucester in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* the latest year for which figures are available;

(3) what was the average daily vehicular flow on the A419 between Swindon and Cirencester in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The latest available estimates are for 1990 when the average daily traffic flow was 17,000 vehicles on the A417 between Gloucester and Cirencester, 25,000 on the A419 between Swindon and Cirencester and 14,000 on the A420 between Swindon and Oxford. The Department's national traffic surveys do not allow changes in traffic levels between years to be estimated for particular roads.

Airport Directors

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those directors of airports, operated on behalf of municipal authorities by companies, who are also councillors on the authority or subject to appointment by them and give the percentage of the non-independent directors in each case.

Mr. Norris: The information relating to airports owned by public airport companies is as follows:

Airport	*Local authority members*	*[1]Other non-executive directors*	*Executive directors*	*Total*
Birmingham	9	1	4	14
Blackpool	5	1	2	8
Bournemouth	6	—	2	8
Bristol	5	—	2	7

Airport	Local authority members	[1]Other non-executive directors	Executive directors	Total
Cardiff-Wales	9	3	3	15
East Midlands	18	—	3	21
Exeter	5	1	2	8
Humberside	12	1	3	16
Leeds Bradford	15	—	3	18
Luton	6	4	3	13
Manchester	18	—	3	21
Newcastle	24	—	3	27
Norwich	6	2	3	11
Southend	8	—	1	9
Teesside	11	1	3	15

[1] Includes former local authority member, local authority officers, businessmen and worker directors.

Under section 17(1) of the Airports Act 1986 it is the duty of the controlling authority of a public airport company to exercise its control over the company so as to ensure that at least three of the directors of the company, or at least one quarter of their number—whichever is the less—are full time employees of the company with experience in airport management. Southend airport, which is managed on behalf of its owners by a management company, is currently exempted from this duty (under section 17(2) of the 1986 Act).

M4

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to provide lighting on any section of the M4 between junctions 7/8 and 15 which is not presently lit.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Work is currently taking place to light the M4 between junctions 10 and 11. We have no plans at present to light any other unlit sections of the motorway between junctions 7 and 15. The provision of lighting along these sections will be considered in conjunction with planning for widening the M4 presently in hand.

Lighthouse Authorities

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was paid by the general lighthouse authorities to the Commissioners for Irish Lights in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Norris: Nothing.

Roads

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, following the publication of the British Rail annual report, he will prepare and publish an equivalent document for British roads, listing all the costs and benefits.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Department of Transport report, published annually in February, includes details of the Government's expenditure on trunk roads and on transport supplementary grant for local authority roads in England. It also outlines expenditure plans for the next three years. Schemes in the road programme were last set out comprehensively in "Trunk Roads, England—into the 1990s" published in February 1990. Trunk roads in Wales and Scotland are the responsibility of the respective Secretaries of State.

Aircraft Seating

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to bring civil air transport seating up to the most up-to-date safety and fire precaution standards.

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority has the statutory responsibility for the safety regulation of civil aviation in the United Kingdom. I have drawn the hon. Member's question to the attention of the authority and asked it to write to him direct to inform him of the latest position on the safety of air transport seating.

Trust Ports

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to replace those directors of trust ports appointed by him whose port authority has refused to make its annual report and accounts available to the public.

Mr. Norris: So far as I am aware, this situation has not arisen at any of the small number of trust ports where the Secretary of State appoints some or all members of the authority.

Working Group

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the remit and membership of the transport working group; and how it will contribute to the development of the Government's policies for transport in London.

Mr. Norris: I will be chairing the transport working group whose broad remit will be to advise me on issues affecting public transport in London and to help improve transport co-ordination. The membership, selected for its practical experience, will be the managing directors of London Underground Ltd., Network SouthEast and London Buses Ltd.; the chief executive of the LDDC; the South East and Metropolitan traffic commissioner; the chairman of the London Regional Passengers' Committee; and representatives of the private sector bus operators, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the London tourist board and the London planning advisory committee. Sir George Young from the Department of the Environment will also be joining the group. I will be calling a first meeting in early autumn.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to publish his input into the conference on tourism in November.

Mr. Mellor: The English tourist board plans to publish the proceedings of the conference towards the end of the year.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the impact on tourism of the EC proposals for VAT on ferry fares, train tickets and air fares in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mellor: I have made no assessment of any such impact. An agreement reached by Finance Ministers enables us to maintain our existing zero rates.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to visit those educational establishments offering courses in tourism-related subjects.

Mr. Mellor: I have no engagements of this kind planned at the moment, but I look forward to seeing tourism-related courses in action in the future.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he last met the chairmen of the regional tourist boards.

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State frequently meets representatives of all sectors of the tourism industry on engagements around the country. My noble Friend Lord Astor attended the annual meeting of the regional tourist board chairmen held at the Belton Woods hotel near Grantham, on 1 July.

WALES

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in setting up a trust fund for the transfer of assets from the Cardiff Bay development corporation for the purpose of accumulation of capital assets.

Mr. David Hunt: Cardiff Bay development corporation has considered a number of options for meeting the costs of operating the barrage and the inland bay after its dissolution. A trust fund was one of the options considered by the corporation but the Government have not yet taken a final decision on the preferred choice.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his most up-to-date estimate of the cost of the mitigation works for the provision of alternative feeding grounds for wading birds on the south Wales foreshore on an out-turn cost on the comparable timing of construction basis to the £167·4 million cost of the barrage in his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, column *340*.

Mr. David Hunt: The out-turn cost of the mitigation works will depend on the method and phasing of construction, which will not be known before the feasibility study is completed in the autumn.

Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the level of unemployment among 16 and 17-year-olds in Wales and by county; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many persons aged 16 and 17 years who are not in employment or education are not currently on youth training programmes in each county in Wales and in total; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The 1988 Social Security Act changed the benefit entitlement of under 18-year-olds. It coincided with the guaranteed offer of a place on a youth training programme. Information is not centrally available on the numbers of 16 and 17-year-olds who are neither employed nor in education and who have chosen not to take a place on a youth training programme. However, among these are some who, due to exceptional social or domestic circumstances, are entitled to claim income support and are therefore included in the unemployment count. The numbers of these are shown in the following table:

Number as at April 1992 [*]

	Number
Clwyd	73
Dyfed	28
Gwent	47
Gwynedd	46
Mid Glamorgan	158
Powys	15
South Glamorgan	31
West Glamorgan	26
Wales	424

Source: Department of Employment.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the expenditure on regional assistance in each assisted area in Wales for the most recent available year.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Regional assistance: Estimated payments 1991-92

TTWA	*Forecast outturn*[1] *(£ thousands)*
Aberdare	515
Bangor and Caernarfon	681
Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny	5,014
Bridgend	10,795
Cardiff	3,133
Cardigan	352
Haverfordwest	78
Holyhead	311
Lampeter and Aberaeron	66
Llanelli	730
Merthyr and Rhymney	4,619
Neath and Port Talbot	4,501
Newport	4,830
Pontypool and Cwmbran	926
Pontypridd and Rhondda	16,842
Porthmadog and Ffestiniog	76
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	8,773
South Pembrokeshire	104
Swansea	1,736
Wrexham	6,454
Old-style regional development grant[2]	836
Total	71,372

[1] Comprises regional selective assistance, old-style and revised regional development grants and regional enterprise grants.
[2] Expenditure on the basis of individual TTWAs is not available.

Fire Services

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes in the management of the fire services in Wales he envisages will follow the introduction of unitary authorities.

Mr. David Hunt: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Over the next 12 months I will continue to progress the commitments made in respect of Wales in the Environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" (Cm. 1200) and in the follow-up report—"The Environment in Wales" published by the Welsh Office last September. I will also be publishing a further report in the autumn on our environmental programme in Wales and future plans. This will include an account of progress made by the Welsh Office in integrating environmental concerns into policies and programmes, including internal housekeeping practices, which will be developed further in the future.

Home Care Service

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning the home care service in Wales; what extra resources he plans to allocate concerning this service; if he will meet directors of social services from each of the counties in Wales to consider this service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government attach great importance to the development of all forms of care, including home care services, which will help enable people to be cared for in their own homes and communities, rather than in institutions.

The management of the home care service is the responsibility of social services authorities. It is a matter for those authorities to decide on a level of provision within the resources available to them. The proper assessment of need to make sure that services are optimally targeted to meet the needs of individuals is clearly essential, and indeed is required by Government policy on community care provision. It is for each authority to determine how best to go about this, but the Welsh Office has issued clear guidance on assessment and the provision of social and community care to help them. The "Caring for People" White Paper sets out our commitment to provide adequate resources for local authorities in the exercise of their wider responsibilities from April 1993. I have no present plans to meet directors of social services to discuss their management of the home care service.

Water-borne Viruses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the spread of water-borne viruses in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government are funding an ongoing epidemiological study to assess the minor risks to health of sea bathing. The first two interim reports of the study are available in the Library of the House and I look forward to receiving the final report and recommendations next year.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases there are of swimmers contracting water-borne viruses in Wales since April; what were the comparable figures for 1990 and 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not available.

Hydatidosis

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of hydatidosis were reported in Wales in 1991; how many related diseases in children were reported; what were the comparable figures for each year since 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the number of deaths and discharges from NHS hospitals in Wales for which a diagnosis of hydatidosis—ICD9 code 122—was recorded, in each of the years 1987-90, is given in the following table:

The figures show:

a. deaths and discharges for patients of all ages; and

b. deaths and discharges in which the patient was under 16 years of age.

Year	*All ages*	*Under 16*
1987	25	3
1988	11	0
1989	15	1
1990	18	0

The figures may understate the true position in that not all hospitals provide complete clinical details relating to patient discharges and deaths.

Corresponding data for 1991 are not available centrally at present.

Teachers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of first-year teachers in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom in 1991; what were the comparable figures for the previous two years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The number of full-time, qualified teachers in their first year of service is given in the following table:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*
Wales[1]	516	575	861
England[1]	12,857	13,790	14,449
Northern Ireland[2]	407	331	343
Total	13,780	14,696	15,653
Scotland[3]	—	719	—

[1] Source: Form 618G.

[2] Source: Teachers Payroll and Personnel System, Department of Education.

[3] Source: Scottish School Census. this is a biannual return therefore figures for 1989 and 1991 are not available.

Regional Development Grants

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the expenditure on regional development grants in each assisted area in Wales, for the latest available year.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Regional development grants: Estimated payments 1991-92
Revised regional development grants

TTWA	*Forecast outturn (£ thousands)*
Aberdare	182
Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny	1,117
Cardigan	18
Holyhead	95
Lampeter and Aberaeron	17
Merthyr and Rhymney	1,588
Neath and Port Talbot	753
Pontypridd and Rhondda	2,642
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	6,404
South Pembrokeshire	18
Wrexham	1,171
Total	14,005
Old-style regional development grants[1]	836
Total	14,841

[1] Expenditure on the basis of individual TTWAs is not available.

Regional Enterprise Grants

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the expenditure on regional enterprise grants and *(b)* the number of offers, in each assisted area in Wales for the latest available year.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Regional enterprise grants estimated payments and offers made 1991-92

TTWA	*Forecast Outturn (£ 000s)*	*Number of offers*
Aberdare	37	6
Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny	105	12
Cardigan	59	9
Holyhead	104	4
Lampeter and Aberaeron	34	4
Merthyr and Rhymney	142	13
Neath and Port Talbot	105	20
Pontypridd and Rhondda	101	23
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	472	41
South Pembrokeshire	42	7
Wrexham	230	30
Total	1,431	169

Assisted Areas

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the expenditure on regional selective assistance, *(b)* the number of offers and *(c)* the associated number of (i) new jobs (ii) safeguarded jobs, for each assisted area in Wales for the most recent available year.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Regional selective assistance—1991-92

TTWA	*Forecast outturn[1] (£000's)*	*Number of offers*	*Forecast number of new jobs*	*Forecast number of safeguarded jobs*
Aberdare	296	2	10	19
Bangor and Caernarfon	681	7	165	267
Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny	3,792	17	553	97
Bridgend	10,795	18	2,331	712
Cardiff	3,133	30	712	484
Cardigan	275	1	9	0
Haverfordwest	78	2	12	0
Holyhead	112	5	301	25
Lampeter and Aberaeron	15	—	—	—
Llanelli	730	16	316	102
Merthyr and Rhymney	2,889	20	602	717
Neath and Port Talbot	3,643	12	396	248
Newport	4,830	9	372	683
Pontypool and Cwbran	926	13	796	735
Pontypridd and Rhondda	14,099	23	637	387
Porthmadog and Ffestiniog	76	2	22	0
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	1,897	18	701	308
South Pembrokeshire	44	3	104	0
Swansea	1,736	14	660	443
Wrexham	5,053	13	619	490
Total	55,100	225	9,318	5,717

[1] Expenditure does not relate to offers of assistance made in 1991-92 but to offers made in previous years.

Auditing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the accounts of each of the non-departmental public bodies under his responsibility are audited by *(a)* the National Audit Office, *(b)* private accountants or *(c)* another body; if he will name the private accountants or other bodies used; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Comptroller and Auditor General audits the accounts of all but two of the executive non-departmental public bodies in Wales in existence at 31 March 1992, either certifying separate accounts or as part of the Welsh Office appropriation accounts.

The Cardiff Bay development corporation's accounts are audited by Ernst and Young and those of Housing for Wales by KPMG Peat Marwick.

The accounts of the Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting are audited and laid before Parliament by the Comptroller and Auditor General, but a primary audit is carried out by Touche Ross and Company.

"Getting in on the Act"

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's response to the recommendations of the Audit Commission report "Getting in on the Act" on provision for pupils with special educational needs.

Mr. David Hunt: I welcome the publication of this report which will help to stimulate valuable discussion about educational provision for children with special educational needs. The Government have already promised legislation in this area later in the year.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he supports the initiative taken by the Assembly of Welsh Counties to bring together the Sports Council for Wales and the Commonwealth Games Council for Wales to seek agreement on the future organisation and funding of participation in the games in Canada and beyond.

Mr. David Hunt: The Sports Council for Wales is responsible for ensuring that public funds made available to it are used effectively. I understand that the Sports Council for Wales has indicated its willingness to participate in the meeting proposed by the Assembly of Welsh Counties and I hope that this will be helpful in resolving the matter.

Unitary Authority, Cardiff

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether it is his intention that the new unitary authority based on Cardiff will have an eastern boundary based on the current boundary between the present Cardiff—south Glamorgan area and the present Newport—Gwent area.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him 6 July 1992 at columns *7-8*.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Famine Aid

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list by country what aid his Department is currently giving to countries suffering from famine; and what was the position 12 months ago.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Commitments of aid to relieve famine (in some cases compounded by civil strife) are:

Bilateral Assistance	*£ million 1992 to date*	*£ million 1991*
Horn of Africa (Regional)	9·00	4·1
Ethiopia/Eritrea	14·00	24·5
Somalia	2·00	5·4
Sudan	9·00	23·4
Kenya	2·00	0·2
	36·00	57·6
Southern Africa Drought (Regional)[1]	2·72	—
Lesotho	0·03	—
Malawi	9·56	—
Mozambique[2]	11·40	—
Republic of South Africa	0·10	—
Swaziland	0·04	—
Zambia	10·27	—
Zimbabwe	10·28	—
UNICEF/WFP Operations (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia)	1·50	—
Reallocations from Country Programmes to Drought Relief (Uncommitted)	2·30	—
	48·20	—
TOTAL (Horn + southern Africa	84·20	57·6

[1] For technical assistance and NGO activities in the region—remains to be allocated.
[2] Includes food aid for Mozambique refugees in Malawi (£3·9 million) and food aid intended mainly for Mozambique (£5 million).

Multilateral Assistance

In addition, our share of the cost of food aid allocated to the southern Africa region in 1992 under the EC special food aid programme is estimated at £11·3 million. Our share of EC allocations to the Horn of Africa is £12·4 million. Figures for other 1992 EC emergency aid programmes are not yet available.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Over the next 12 months my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will continue to follow up commitments made in the White Paper Cm 1200—"This Common Inheritance"—and its successor Cm 1655—"The First Year Report". She will also contribute to the second anniversary White Paper in the autumn. The ODA will continue to examine the environmental implications of all the activities it finances for developing countries, and to finance a wide range of measures which directly help tackle environmental problems in developing countries.

A particular priority for the ODA for the next year and beyond will be helping developing countries implement the agreements reached at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

International Development Association

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much Britain's contribution to the earth increment to the International Development Association will be; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The question of an earth increment, which was proposed by the president of the World bank at UNCED, is one of the issues being discussed in the context of the 10th replenishment of the resources of the International Development Association (IDA). The negotiations on the replenishment are likely to be completed sometime this coming winter.

Family Planning

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to improve world-wide access to family planning and education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are continuing to increase our support to population programmes in developing countries, focusing particularly on strengthening family planning services and support for the purchase of contraceptives. We are on course to achieve the goal which we announced in August 1991 of establishing at least 15 new bilateral population projects over the following two years. New contraceptive supply projects have been initiated in four African countries.

We are also looking for opportunities to increase our support for adult education, particularly in women's literacy which has a close relationship with the demand for family planning advice.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iran

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Iran concerning the well-being of the 3,000 members of the People's Mujahedin who were arrested at a protest in Mashad on 30 May.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As I told the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 3 July at column *758*, we continue to make clear to the Iranian Government our serious concern at their human rights record, both bilaterally and together with our EC partners.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has received from Amnesty International concerning mass executions carried out throughout Iran; and what response he has made;

(2) what representations he has made to the Government of Iran concerning the practice of carrying out mass executions in the country.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We receive reports from Amnesty International on the situation in Iran on a regular basis. We continue to make clear to the Iranian Government our serious concern at their human rights record, both bilaterally and with our EC partners.

Tibet

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the British diplomats who visited Lhasa and Shigatse in the Tibetan autonomous region from 16 to 25 May had about the proposed special economic zone in Lhasa; what discussion there was about British participation; and what results were achieved.

Mr. Goodlad: During their visit to Tibet in May the two British diplomats called on the local authorities, including the Economic Planning Commission. They were told of plans to establish a light industrial development zone and a high technology development zone in Lhasa, both intended to increase foreign trade and investment.

Western Sahara

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ask the United Nations Secretary-General to intervene personally to solve the current stalemate in holding a referendum in western Sahara by talking directly with the Moroccan and Saharawi leaders.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Secretary-General's special representative, Mr. Yaqub Khan, has been pursuing talks with all parties to the western Sahara dispute. The Secretary-General hopes that substantial progress will have been made by the end of August.

Spanish Fishermen

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his office has made to the Spanish Government regarding the instances of Spanish nationals being charged and convicted of fishing illegally in Scottish waters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My Department has made no representations to the Spanish Government on this matter.

Earth Summit

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he holds on which nation's delegations to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development were comprised only of Government representatives.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our information is incomplete. A copy of the final list of delegates to UNCED will be placed in the Library as soon as it is available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Knives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for a new knives campaign; how he proposes to publicise it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is for chief officers of police to consider whether publicising facilities for the disposal of knives would be a worthwhile crime prevention initiative in their force area. I understand that the Metropolitan police have recently launched a publicity campaign, which will run until 16 August, and that a similar campaign is planned for Greater Manchester in September.

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information is not yet available on the number of prosecutions under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which did not come into force until August 1991.

Telephone Interception

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the organisations authorised to carry out telephone interception since 1986.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Warrants authorising the interception of communications may be issued following application by the police, HM Customs and Excise and the security and intelligence agencies.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many claims of unauthorised interception of telephones were investigated since 1985; and how many have been prosecuted.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Information held centrally shows that there were four prosecutions under section 1 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 in England and Wales in 1988 and one in 1990. There are no centrally held records of the number of investigations.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will propose amendments to the Interception of Communications Act 1985 to make explicit that it is illegal to monitor or eavesdrop on domestic and industrial telecommunications unless a warrant is authorised, notwithstanding that a physical tap has not been put on the line.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 the intentional interception of communications in the course of transmission by means of a public telecommunications system is an offence unless carried out under the authority of a warrant issued by the Secretary of State or there are reasonable grounds for believing that one of the parties to the communication has consented to the interception. I have no proposals to amend the Act.

Wolds Remand Centre

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking over the disturbance at Wolds remand centre, Everthorpe on 27 to 28 June; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have received a report on the incident from the Home Office controller based in the prison. I am satisfied that it was handled in a calm and professional way by the contractor.

Gambling

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with his EC counterparts on the harmonisation of gambling policy within the EC; and what is the position of each member state on this subject in the context of the European single market.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This subject has not yet been discussed at ministerial level. As part of its consideration of gambling in the single market, officials of the European Commission met officials from all member states on 2 and 3 April to discuss the issues. We understand that there is wide support amongst other member states for our view that gambling policy should remain a matter for national authorities.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My hon. Friend the Minister of State will continue to ensure that the policy and work of my Department take full account of environmental concerns, in accordance with the principles set out in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" Cm 1200 and the first year report, Cm 1655. Current initiatives include the reclamation and development as wildlife conservation areas of land adjoining new and existing prisons; a wide range of measures to reduce pollution arising from the activities of prison service industries and farms; the cessation of incineration in the disposal of waste at prison establishments; a review of departmental policy on the purchase and use of ozone-depleting chemicals; and a continuing programme of energy efficiency measures in Home Office buildings.

Fireworks

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics his Department holds on the incidence of injury to animals from fireworks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

No information is collected on the incidence of injury to animals from fireworks.

Recorded Offences

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of offences recorded in each police authority area in 1991-92; what was the percentage change compared with the preceding year; how many offences were notified for each uniformed officer in each police authority area for 1991-92; and what was the percentage change compared with the preceding year.

Mr. Jack: The requested information on notifiable offences recorded by the police is published in table 2 of Home Office statistical bulletin 14/92, a copy of which is in the Library. The figures for the number of notifiable offences recorded by the police per police officer and the percentage change are contained in the following table:

Notifiable offences recorded by the police per police officer

Police force area	*Notifiable offences per officer in 12 months to March 1992*	*Percentage change from previous 12 months*
Avon and Somerset	49	10
Bedfordshire	53	−5
Cambridgeshire	49	25
Cheshire	37	22
Cleveland	55	9
Cumbria	39	25
Derbyshire	47	30
Devon and Cornwall	37	10
Dorset	39	1
Durham	48	15
Essex	39	13
Gloucestershire	50	31
Greater Manchester	56	12
Hampshire	47	18
Hertfordshire	34	16
Humberside	60	12
Kent	49	33
Lancashire	40	17
Leicestershire	50	17
Lincolnshire	38	11
London, City of	9	−1
Merseyside	33	9

Police force area	Notifiable offences per officer in 12 months to March 1992	Percentage change from previous 12 months
Metropolitan Police	34	11
Norfolk	47	16
Northamptonshire	52	15
Northumbria	65	11
North Yorkshire	38	12
Nottinghamshire	67	13
South Yorkshire	43	16
Staffordshire	40	19
Suffolk	35	10
Surrey	31	13
Sussex	38	13
Thames Valley	52	24
Warwickshire	41	20
West Mercia	37	14
West Midlands	45	15
West Yorkshire	59	25
Wiltshire	33	6
Dyfed-Powys	30	26
Gwent	40	20
North Wales	34	15
South Wales	52	12

Prisoners' Home Leave

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been released on home leave in 1992; and how many of these prisoners failed to return to custody.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information required is not held centrally at present but arrangements are being made for its future collection and publication.

Correspondence

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long he normally expects to take to respond to letters from hon. Members.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The aim is to reply to letters from hon. Members as quickly as possible. The time required in each case is influenced by factors such as the need to search records or to make inquiries outside the Department. Work is presently in hand to further improve the service to hon. Members.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be in a position to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Stretford of 18 May regarding Mr. R. H. (Reference R 303898/2).

Mr. Charles Wardle: I replied to the hon. Member on 24 June.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were recruited in 1991; what were the comparable figures for the previous two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: During 1991, 5,338 police officers were recruited in England and Wales. The figures for 1989 and 1990 are 7,364 and 5,560 respectively. Recruitment figures for 1991 reflect the fact that establishment increases did not come into effect until October.

Prisoners' Children

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any proposals to enable mothers of young children who are serving prison sentences to keep their children with them; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Facilities already exist in three prisons for mothers to keep their young children with them. At present there are a total of 37 places in mother and baby units; 15 places are at Askham Grange, 12 are at Holloway and 10 are at Styal. At Askham Grange and Styal children may remain until the age of 18 months, while at Holloway the age limit is nine months.

Plans have already been drawn up to extend the number of places. Ten more places will be provided at Styal by the end of the year, and work will start on a purpose-built unit at New Hall during the winter months, to provide a further nine places.

EC Border Controls

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will immediately make available the draft European Community regulation relating to European Community border controls.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) on 7 July 1992 at column *132*.

Immigrants Advisory Service

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans for the future funding of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd) announced on 29 January at column 566 that although the Government had a high regard for the service which UKIAS staff provided to its clients we were not satisfied with the manner in which the general council and executive committee oversaw the organisation.

The Government and the London representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have since transferred the funds available for refugee work from UKIAS to the new refugee unit. This unit was formerly part of UKIAS. It is, however, now a separate independent voluntary body supervised on an interim basis by a board chaired by Mrs. Usha Prashar which is devising proposals for a long-term constitution for the unit.

My hon. Friend also gave UKIAS notice in January that continued payment of the grant for the service's general immigration work depended on its making changes to meet the standards expected of an organisation receiving grant-in-aid. The necessary changes have not been made and the Government have now decided to terminate the grant to UKIAS.

The Government attach importance to the provision of satisfactory counselling services and representation for people with rights of appeal under immigration legislation. We wish to apply the funds which have hitherto been applied to UKIAS under section 23 of the Immigration

Act 1971 to a new voluntary body which will take over the general immigration work of UKIAS. My right hon. and learned Friend has invited Mr. Humfrey Malins to lead a small planning group, outside Government, whose task will be to draw up proposals for such an organisation. Others will be invited to be members of the group, which will be encouraged to complete its work as soon as possible.

In drawing up its proposals, the planning group has been asked by my right hon. and learned Friend to have particular regard to the need for the trustees of the new body to be able to meet their responsibilities under charity law and to satisfy the Home Office that there will be proper accountability for the grant paid. Provided these criteria are met, I hope that the group will then take steps to implement its proposals and establish the new body.

In the meantime, the Government hope that it will prove possible for advice and representation to continue to be available to appellants. We are, however, not prepared to provide any further funds for UKIAS while it is overseen by the present executive committee. We have today written to members of UKIAS's general council explaining that we would be prepared to fund UKIAS to provide legal advice and representation during this interim period only if the executive committee were replaced by a new, separate administration acceptable to the Home Office. We hope that the general council will respond positively, so that the service to UKIAS's clients can continue while plans for the new body are being made.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each police authority area in Yorkshire and Humberside and for England as a whole *(a)* how many bail hostel places were provided by the probation service at 31 December 1991, *(b)* what the average number of residents in these bail hostels was in 1991 and *(c)* how many convictions were recorded in 1991 of people who were resident in a bail hostel at the time of the offence for which they were convicted.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* As at 31 December 1991 there were 26 bail and 82 probation/bail hostels in England as a whole, providing 559 bail and 1,782 probation/bail places. Of these, 19 probation/bail places were provided by Humberside, 22 bail and 122 probation/bail places by south Yorkshire, and 45 bail and 95 probation/bail places by west Yorkshire. There are currently no hostels in north Yorkshire.

Statistics on the average number of residents are collected in terms of percentage occupancy. The 1991 figures, against 74·6 per cent. for England as a whole, are Humberside 64·3 per cent.; south Yorkshire 76·5 per cent.; west Yorkshire 83·0 per cent.

Information on the addresses of offenders at the time their offences were committed is not collected centrally.

Prisons, Wales

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons in Wales that are overcrowded, the maximum number of prisoners allowed at these institutions, and the current number of inmates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* Two Welsh prisons, Cardiff and Swansea, are overcrowded. In common with most other local prisons the operational capacity of these establishments—that is, the normal working capacity—is higher than the certified normal accommodation (that is, the uncrowded capacity). The figures for 24 June were as follows:

	CNA	*Operational capacity*	*Population*
Cardiff	325	447	437
Swansea	213	285	283

EDUCATION

Animal Experiments

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether experiments on live animals are included in the national curriculum.

Mr. Forth: No.

Public School Teachers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many public school teachers were trained at a cost to public funds; and what is the current cost of a three-year teacher training course.

Mr. Forth: Data on the number of teachers in public schools who were trained at a cost to public funds are not held centrally. The estimated average cost at 1991-92 prices of training a teacher in a higher education institution outside London through a three-year undergraduate course is about £19,000. The majority of undergraduate initial teacher training courses are of four years' duration.

White Paper

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what will be the title of his proposed White Paper on the organisation of education; and when it will be published.

Mr. Forth: As announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, we will publish the White Paper, complete with title, by the end of the summer.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will indicate the scope and purpose of his projected White Paper on education; and if he will list any consultative paper, speech or departmental circular of relevance to its contents, either at the present time, or after its publication.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already announced the Government's intention to publish a White Paper by the end of the summer. Its scope and purpose will be made public then. The speech given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the Adam Smith Institute on 16 June made it clear that the White Paper will include proposals for new types of schools to develop, and proposals to tackle the worst inner city schools.

Special Needs

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average length of time that children with special needs have to wait before being assessed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Information for each local education authority is not available centrally. However, there is recent evidence that some authorities are failing to meet the Government's guidelines that the procedures for assessment and the issue of a statement should not exceed six months. The Government have now decided that there should be comprehensive provisions for regulating the time and way in which the assessment and statementing procedures are carried out. My right hon. Friend is about to consult widely on the form and content of the regulations which will be required.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the Audit Commission's report on the assessment of children with special needs.

Mr. Forth: A press statement welcoming the publication of the report was issued on 25 June, and was placed in the Library.

University Students

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average cost per student per year of educating a university student in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forman: The Universities Funding Council provides the same level of funding for teaching for funded student places in each subject in all universities, irrespective of location. Allocations for research and other factors are made separately. Details of the UFC's allocations for all universities in 1992-93 are set out in UFC circular letter 4/92, a copy of which is in the Library.

New Schools

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many new schools opened in 1991; and what were the comparable figures for the previous two years.

Mr. Forth: Thirty-one new schools opened in 1991. This compares with 74 in 1990 and 47 in 1989.

Retired Teachers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many teachers retired in 1991; what were the comparable figures for 1982 and 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The number of members of the teachers' superannuation scheme for England and Wales who were awarded retirement benefits during the periods in question is as follows:

Financial year ended 31st March	*Total*
1982	16,462
1986	17,336
1991	21,318

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Machine Tool Industry

19. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet representatives of the Machine Tool Technologies Association to discuss the effects of the recession on the machine tool industry.

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry met the Machine Tool Technologies Association on 8 June. I plan to meet the association later in the year.

Manufacturing Industry

22. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many of the professional institutions associated with manufacturing he has met since taking up his appointment.

Mr. Heseltine: To date, I have had no formal meetings with the professional institutes. I have, however, had the pleasure of meeting many of the institutes' representatives during my business engagements.

Manufacturing Output

21. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received about manufacturing output.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Department receives considerable correspondence about the state of manufacturing industry.

30. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the level of output of manufacturing industry *(a)* in the north-west and *(b)* in Lancashire.

Mr. Sainsbury: In 1989, the latest year for which data are available, manufacturing output in the north-west was £14 billion. The figure for Lancashire will be published in "Regional Trends 27" on 9 July, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

33. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has recently received about manufacturing output.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Department receives considerable correspondence about the state of manufacturing industry.

RECHAR

23. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the operation of RECHAR.

Mr. Sainsbury: RECHAR programmes are now ready to proceed and I look forward to their making a useful contribution to the economies of coal field areas.

Assisted Areas

24. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his Department will be introducing any changes to the criteria for assisted area status.

Mr. Sainsbury: Measures of unemployment will continue to be the main criteria in the assisted areas map

review now under way. The consultation paper recently issued makes clear, however, that other factors will also be considered, including future job demand, other performance measures, activity rates, urban problems, peripherality and the incidence of known major closures or rundowns.

Shipbuilding

25. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had with representatives of management and employees of the United Kingdom merchant shipyards on matters relating to the European Community's seventh directive on the shipbuilding intervention fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I have had a number of discussions with management and employee representatives of the shipbuilding industry during the last few weeks.

Consumer Protection

26. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the implementation of European consumer protection legislation; and if he will make a statement.

28. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to ensure the effective implementation of European consumer protection law.

Mr. Leigh: Implementation of European Community consumer protection legislation into the national legislation of a member state is the responsibility of that member state. My Department has not made an assessment of the effectiveness of such implementation by other member states. If the hon. Member has information that they are failing to implement Community legislation effectively, he should send it to me.

Trade Deficit

27. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the visible trade deficit for the latest available month; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The United Kingdom had a visible trade deficit of £0·8 billion in May 1992.

EC Directives

29. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 17 June, *Official Report*, columns *500-51*, what assessment he has made of the effect of recent community directives on the profitability of small businesses.

Mr. Leigh: My Department's deregulation unit monitors proposals for legislation from the European Commission and identifies those which are likely to impose significant burdens on business. In conjunction with other Departments, we seek to ensure that the costs of those directives are properly assessed and taken into account by the Commission through its fiche d'impact system. Departments also take account of compliance costs when they consult business and interested parties on proposals both during negotiations and at implementation stage. The views of small business organisations are sought and taken into account in this process. The directives listed in the reply referred to are under consideration, and have been or will be subject to appropriate assessment and consultation.

Animal Experiments

31. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ban the import of all animals purchased for the purpose of experimentation.

Mr. Needham: No. Imposition of an import ban was rejected by Parliament during the passage of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Industrial Policy

32. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will next meet representatives of the northern region CBI to discuss industrial policy.

Mr. Heseltine: I shall be meeting representatives of the northern region CBI on 18 September.

Industrial Investment

34. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the level of industrial investment in the west midlands.

Mr. Sainsbury: In 1989, the latest year for which data are available, manufacturing investment in the west midlands amounted to £1·6 billion.

Trading Standards Officers

35. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the number of trading standards officers in post and the number required.

Mr. Leigh: According to returns submitted by local weights and measures authorities in England, Wales and Scotland, the number of qualified trading standards officers in post on 31 March 1991 was just over 1,500 against a complement of just under 1,800.

Telephone Charges

36. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the ranking of the United Kingdom in terms of local telephone charges compared to other countries in the OECD.

Mr. Leigh: Comparisons of individual telephone call prices can be misleading. Factors such as duration of call, time of day, distance and charging structure all have to be taken into account. Oftel publishes annually a comparison of the prices in the United Kingdom for typical residential and business customers. The most recent produced the following comparisons.

Country	*Residential Basket*	*Business Basket*
United Kingdom (BT)	100	100
France	78	92
Germany (DB)	99	99
Italy	105	133

Notes:
United Kingdom = 100; conversion of currencies by means of

purchasing power parities (PPPs).
United Kingdom tariff for local calls have fallen by between 14 and 19 per cent. since privatisation.

Industry Links

37. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he proposes to take to improve the links between industry and his Department in the northern region.

Mr. Heseltine: I announced on 3 July my plans for reorganising my Department so as to relate more closely to individual sectors of industry throughout the United Kingdom. These plans include the creation of a new industrial competitiveness division, a number of new divisions to cover key sectors not dealt with at present, and the assigning to all sectoral divisions of an explicit role to sponsor their industries. My Department's regional offices will continue to be the first point of contact for many firms. The offices based in Newcastle and Manchester will continue their work of building closer and more effective links with industry in the northern region.

Exports

38. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value of United Kingdom exports in each of the past three years to *(a)* the United States of America and *(b)* the 11 countries of the European Community.

Mr. Needham: United Kingdom exports to the United States of America were £12·2 billion, £13·0 billion and £11·3 billion in 1989, 1990 and 1991 respectively. Exports to the EC countries were £47·4 billion, £54·9 billion and £59·3 billion in the same three years.

Post Office

39. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Post Office to discuss Post Office reorganisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of the Post Office, Sir Bryan Nicholson, on 20 May and will continue to meet him on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues of mutual concern.

National Grid

40. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the changes necessary to the national grid for electricity consequent on the current text of the treaty on European union, articles 129 b, c and d.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Recession

12. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the long-term effects of the recession in industry.

Mr. Heseltine: British industry is well placed to grow as we recover from recession.

Insolvencies

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many recent representations he has received about companies with debts which declare themselves insolvent and are replaced by new companies with similar names run by the same people; what plans he has to take action; what general advice he issues to the creditors of such companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: A few representations have been made to my Department recently on directors of failed companies starting new companies with similar names. Provisions contained in the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 and, more specifically, section 216 of the Insolvency Act 1986 address these concerns where companies go into insolvent liquidation. Creditors are advised to report any breaches of the provisions to the liquidator, or my officials at the Insolvency Service.

Beer Orders

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate has been made of the effect of the Beer orders in the United Kingdom upon *(a)* the number of public houses, *(b)* the number of brewery companies brewing beer and *(c)* the number of tenants leaving the brewery trade; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Beer orders do not come fully into force until 1 November 1992. The Director General of Fair Trading will be reviewing them next year when their effects on the beer market can be assessed.

UN International Conventional Arms Transfer Register

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on how Her Majesty's Government believe the United Nations international conventional arms transfer register will play an important role in safeguarding against diversion of significant military material.

Mr. Needham: The United Nations register will show each year member states' exports to and imports from individual countries in certain major categories of arms, for example missiles and missile systems. One of the register's main purposes is to provide transparency in the trading of such items. The availability of this information to all member states will make it possible to trace the movement of significant military material, and to compare declared exports against declared imports. It is hoped therefore that the need to report transfers will act as a deterrent to those who would otherwise divert supplies of such equipment.

PERIFRA Programme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the rules and guidelines governing applications under the PERIFRA defence industry conversion programme; whether local authorities and training and enterprise councils may apply; and what is the number and regional distribution of applications so far received.

Mr. Sainsbury: In a letter dated 25 March 1992, the European Commission set out the conditions for grants under the PERIFRA programme, and invited Governments to send applications. A copy of this letter has been placed in the Library.

The closing date for applications was subsequently extended to 5 June 1992. Over 25 applications were

received from all parts of the United Kingdom, of which 12 have been forwarded to the Commission. We await its decision as to the projects to be awarded grant.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many papers concerning the development of civil nuclear energy his Department requested be withheld under section 5(1) of the Public Records Act in regard to the release of papers for *(a)* 1958, *(b)* 1959, *(c)* 1960 or *(d)* 1961.

Mr. Eggar: Information on the numbers of my Department's files which are closed or retained under the Public Records Acts is shown in the class lists which are open for inspection at the Public Record Office, Kew. Where individual papers have been withheld, this can be ascertained from dummy documents which are inserted in the relevant files.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been allocated by his Department in each of the last five years to the International Atomic Energy Authority to undertake monitoring work in relation to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Eggar: Monitoring work is carried out under safeguards agreements including those concluded pursuant to the non-proliferation treaty. The cost of safeguards forms part of the agency's regular budget. The United Kingdom has contributed the following amounts to the regular budget in the past five years:

	£ million
1987-88	3·5
1988-89	3·7
1989-90	4·0
1990-91	4·7
1991-92	4·9

Computer Programs (Patents)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy towards proposals under the general agreement on tariffs and trade to allow patenting of the general techniques underlying computer programs, and the patenting of software-related inventions.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* We welcome the proposals under the GATT agreement to protect computer programs as literary works under the Berne convention, 1971. Copyright protection extends to expressions and not to ideas, procedures, methods of operation or mathematical concepts as such. Since computer programs are treated as literary works in the United Kingdom and they are protected by copyright there is no conflict between the GATT agreement and United Kingdom law and practice. The United Kingdom Patent Office will continue to be able to exclude computer software from patentability.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list each recipient company and the level of grant provided through regional selective assistance since 1984-85 in the Darlington area.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* Details of offers of regional selective assistance are normally made public only after the company has made a claim and has been paid. Since 1984-85 there are 72 companies in the Darlington travel-to-work-area who have benefited from regional selective assistance. The firms and the offers made and accepted (excluding details of three cases where the amounts offered and accepted was less than £5,000) are as follows:

Name of company	*Offer value (£)*
Alan Tinley T. A. ATV Productions	5,000
Amdega Ltd.	220,000
Amech Eng. Ltd.	22,000
Areena Shoe Components Ltd.	50,000
Aycliffe Paper Winding Co.	5,000
A5 Hydraulics Ltd.	5,000
Baydale Architectural Metalwork Ltd.	75,000
Baydale Eng. (Peter Lanagan T. A.)	8,000
BSA Foundaries Ltd.	175,000
C. Harvey TA Shildon Manufacturing	15,000
C. P. Offset Ltd.	50,000
Cummins Engine Co. Ltd.	215,000
D. B. Harrison	12,000
D. Fenwick	10,000
Darchem Ltd.	65.000
Darlington Pattern Making Co.	6,500
Darlington Timber Supplies Ltd.	15,000
David A. C. Royle and Co. Ltd.	14,000
Direct Signs (Northern) Ltd.	15,000
Dunhouse Quarry Co. Ltd.	25,000
E. F. Shepherd	25,000
Edgeworth Electronics Ltd.	75,000
Epcot Leisure Ltd.	15,000
Ernest Bennett and Co (Darlington) Ltd.	25,000
F. W. Alderson (C. R. Lowe T. A.)	5,000
Faverdale Training and Adventure Ltd.	25,000
Forge Diesel Services Ltd.	5,000
Forge House Group	20,000
G. K. Tindal and Son	5,000
Glassfibre Flagpoles Ltd.	20,000
Granada Aluminium Co. Ltd.	37,500
Gregory and Blackburn	7,500
Harvey Plating Ltd.	75,000
Henry Williams Darlington Ltd.	20,000
Henry Williams Ltd.	45,000
Indescon Ltd.	35,000
J. Dyson & Co. Ltd.	10,000
J. J. Eng. (Durham) Ltd.	100,000
J. L. Moore & Sons	75,000
K. Stewart Eng. Ltd.	10,000
Kingsway Adventure Centre	44,000
Kohlangaz Fire Co. Ltd.	45,000
Malcolm Engineering Co. (Darlington)	25,000
Management Services (Northern) Ltd.	9,000
Mech-Tool Eng. Ltd.	70,000
Milicom Information Service Ltd.	450,000
Milicom Cellular (U.K.) Ltd.	450,000
Miniprints (North East) Ltd.	15,000
Mitre Plastics Ltd.	75,000

Name of company	Offer value (£)
Mitre Tooling Co.	35,000
Pharmapac (Barnard Castle) Ltd.	18,000
Priestgate Services (No. 29) Ltd.	30,000
Prolog Timber Ltd.	60,000
Railbar Ltd. (Bowhill Construction)	10,000
Rene Friedlin Ltd.	25,000
Renham & Wade	31,500
Rennyco Ltd.	5,000
S. & A. Fabrications	35,000
S. R. (Steel) Ltd.	5,000
Star Satellite Systems Ltd.	5,000
Stenga Ltd.	90,000
Teesdale Conservatories Ltd.	25,000
Teesside Training & Technology Centre	45,000
Thrivewell Ltd.	7,500
Turnbridge Project Services Ltd.	5,000
Vector Electronics	10,000
Wm. Smith & Sons (Barnard Castle) Ltd.	40,000
Yeoman Furniture Ltd.	25,000
3D Fibres Ltd.	20,000

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Commercial and Industrial Tenants

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has made of the effect on tenants of commercial and industrial property as a result of delays in implementing the proposals in the Law Commission consultation paper of 1986 "Landlord and Tenant: Privity of Contract and Estate", Law Commission paper No. 95; and if he will now take steps to implement the proposals.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has received a number of representations from those affected by the rules of privity of contract and estate. He is well aware of the difficulties faced by some tenants and has recently met representatives of both tenants and landlords. He is now considering their representations and hopes to make a statement about the Law Commission's proposals before long.

Porthmadog County Court

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the future of Porthmadog county court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department is currently examining the court services provided in Gwynned, where Porthmadog county court is situated.

No moves will be made to close Porthmadog county court or any other office without consulting users who have an interest in its future.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many accesses were made to each index of the new police national computer over the last year; and if he will include in these statistics an indication of the number of access requests that could search more than one index.

Mr. Mates: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 7 July at columns *128-29* by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Health Promotion Agency

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland where the first report of the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland was printed.

Mr. Hanley: The report was printed in Northern Ireland.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Over the next 12 months I shall continue to follow up commitments in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" (Cm 1200) and its successor "The First Year Report" (Cm 1655) and I shall also be providing a Northern Ireland contribution for a second year report in the autumn. Over the next year and beyond I shall continue to ensure that environmental concerns shape the policy and work of the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments, whenever appropriate.

Rate Collection Agency

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for the Rate Collection Agency in 1992-93.

Mr. Atkins: For 1992-93 the following performance targets have been set for the Agency:

1. To reduce rating debt to 1.95 per cent. of the gross collectable rate (excluding late assessments) by 31 March 1993.
2. To achieve a reduction of 2 per cent. in the real value of the unit costs of collecting rates per hereditament.
3. To generate refunds to 96 per cent. of ratepayers so entitled within 14 days of credits being identified.
4. To process by 31 March 1993 94 per cent. of applications in respect of the incoming year received from existing housing benefit recipients before 15 March 1993.
5. To achieve a reduction of 1·6 per cent. in the real value of the unit costs of processing housing benefit cases.
6. To achieve at least 96 per cent. of housing benefit assessments free of error.

Health and Social Services Boards

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the perceived religious affiliation of persons appointed to permanent posts in each of the health and social services board headquarters in Northern Ireland, by director, section and grade, over the past three years.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* The perceived religious affiliation of persons appointed to permanent posts in each of the health and social services board headquarters in 1990 and 1991 is as follows:

	1990			*1991*		
Board	*Protestant*	*Catholic*	*Not known*	*Protestant*	*Catholic*	*Not known*
Eastern	71	54	12	63	52	14
Northern	112	33	9	53	28	5
Southern	23	10	2	33	11	2
Western	23	61	8	24	37	7

It would not be appropriate to break these down by directorate or grade. Information for 1989 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Privy Purse

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will set out for each year since 1987 the heads of expenditure of the privy purse of the Duchy of Lancaster, stating in each case whether the payments were made for a charitable purpose.

Mr. Waldegrave: The accounts of the Duchy of Lancaster are placed in the Library of the House each year. It can be seen from these accounts that there is no such item as "the Privy Purse of the Duchy of Lancaster".

Greater Manchester Sheriff

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will be attending the ceremony of pricking the nomination of the sheriff for the county of Greater Manchester; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster normally attends when Her Majesty the Queen picks the names of the three high sheriffs for the county of Greater Manchester.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Scotch Whisky

Mr. McFall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer on 21 May, *Official Report*, column *203*, to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), what progress has been made in talks with his European partners at the ECOFIN meetings on the EC excise tax issue as it affects Scotch whisky.

Sir John Cope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend gave on 3 July 1992 at columns 755-56.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: I consider the environmental implications of Treasury policies as necessary.

VAT

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the annual gain to the Exchequer of imposing VAT at the standard rate on *(a)* books, *(b)* magazines, *(c)* newspapers, or *(d)* all currently non-rated or zero-rated goods and services other than fresh food and children's clothes.

Sir John Cope: The extra revenue accruing, in a full year, from applying the standard rate of VAT to the zero-rated items listed is approximately estimated, for the last financial year, at:

	Revenue effect[1] *1991-92 (£ billion)*
(a) Books	0·3
(b) Magazines	0·2
(c) Newspapers	0·5
(d) Goods and Services other than Food and Children's Clothing	
Domestic Fuel and Power	2·5
Construction of New Dwellings	[2]3·4
Passenger Transport	2·3
Water and Sewerage Services	0·5
Drugs and Medicines on Prescription	0·4

[1] These estimates make no allowance for the fact that changes in taxation may cause people to change their behaviour.
These estimates cannot be added together to give a meaningful total. Not all expenditure under these headings is zero-rated.
[2] Includes zero-rated expenditure on land purchased for construction of new dwellings.

These figures are based on information provided in table 4B.1 in the 1992-93 "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Goods and services which are not standard-rated or zero-rated are either exempt from VAT or out of scope. No estimates are available for these.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his target for the rate of increase of public sector pay in real terms.

Mr. Portillo: The Government set no such target.

Business Rate

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many appeals are outstanding against uniform business rate valuations on the Isle of Wight; and how many appeals have been heard.

Mr. Dorrell: For the Isle of Wight 202 appeals against uniform business rate valuations have been heard and 863 remain outstanding.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the appeals of the Isle of Wight against uniform business rate valuations resulted in *(a)* a reduction and *(b)* an increase.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Petroleum Revenue Tax

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the total annual revenue raised through corporation tax paid by companies also liable for petroleum revenues tax for each of the years since petroleum revenue tax was introduced;

(2) what has been the total annual revenue raised through petroleum revenue tax in each year since its introduction; and what is his estimated yield for the current financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: Revenues raised from United Kingdom oil and gas production by petroleum revenue tax and corporation tax are as follows:

£ million

	Petroleum revenue tax[1]	*Corporation tax*[2]
1975-76	0	5
1976-77	0	10
1977-78	0	10

	Petroleum revenue tax[1]	Corporation tax[2]
1978-79	183	93
1979-80	1,435	250
1980-81	2,410	341
1981-82	4,415	681
1982-83	5,669	521
1983-84	6,017	877
1984-85	7,177	2,432
1985-86	6,375	2,916
1986-87	1,188	2,676
1987-88	2,296	1,318
1988-89	1,371	1,230
1989-90	1,050	743
1990-91	860	971
1991-92	−214	647
[3]1992-93	100	600

[1] Including Supplementary Petroleum Duty in 1981-82 and 1982-83.
[2] Before ACT set-off.
[3] 1992-93 Financial Statement and Budget Report forecast.

Pensions

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those EC member states who pay their national government employees index linked inflation proofed pensions.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that this information is not held centrally.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Bank of England will respond to the fourth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of Session 1991-92, "Banking Supervision and BCCI: international and national supervision".

Mr. Lamont: I understand that the Bank of England has now responded to the fourth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in Session 1991-92 "Banking Supervision and BCCI: international and national supervision". A copy of this response has been placed in the Library, together with a paper on minimum standards for the supervision of banking groups recently agreed by the Basle committee of G10 banking supervisors, to accompany and reinforce the 1983 Basle concordat.

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is yet in a position to reply to the fourth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of Session 1991-92, "Banking Supervision and BCCI: international and national supervision".

Mr. Lamont: As the former Economic Secretary told the House on 12 March 1992 at column *603*, the Government will await Lord Justice Bingham's report on BCCI before reaching any conclusions on the Committee's recommendations.

Money Laundering

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the work of the financial action task force on money laundering.

Mr. Nelson: The financial action task force on money laundering (FATF) published its third annual report on 25 June. The FATF has focused on three key areas of work over the last year. It has reviewed the 40 recommendations that were drawn up in 1990 in the light of recent experience and developments in money laundering techniques. It has produced interpretative notes on matters such as unlawful use of shell companies and the use of lawyers as nominees for illegal entities. The FATF has also begun a study of ways to make it easier to track the movement of suspect funds through electronic payment systems.

The external relations working group of the FATF, chaired by the United Kingdom, has continued to encourage world wide action against money laundering, and has drawn up a detailed action programme for future work. Over the past year FATF members, including the United Kingdom, have taken part in a number of regional meetings to discuss money laundering including the Caribbean financial action task force in Kingston, Jamaica and the South East Asia Central bank board of governors in Jakarta. Links with other international organisations, such as the United Nations international drugs control programme and the Council of Europe are being developed.

Finally, the FATF has established an effective mutual evaluation programme to assess progress among its members in implementing the anti-money laundering measures that it has developed. Four of these in-depth country examinations have so far taken place. Australia, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom have been examined. The FATF report includes summaries of these assessments.

The report on the United Kingdom is very complimentary. It notes the scale and international nature of the United Kingdom financial sector and the importance we attach to its remaining clean. The report commends the co-operative nature of the United Kingdom response to the threat of money laundering, and the good relations between the financial institutions, the regulators and the law enforcement community. The report concludes that the United Kingdom approach to combating money laundering could serve as a model for other countries.

I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Library.

Banknotes

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the banknotes issued in *(a)* England, *(b)* Northern Ireland and *(c)* Scotland, indicating which notes are legal tender in each jurisdiction.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* In England, the Bank of England is the sole note-issuing authority and notes are currently issued in the denominations of £5, £10, £20 and £50. In Northern Ireland, four commercial banks (Bank of Ireland, Allied Irish banks, Northern bank and Ulster bank) issue notes of £5, £10, £20, and £100, with Northern bank and Ulster bank also issuing £50 notes. In Scotland, three commercial banks (Royal Bank of Scotland, Bank of Scotland and Clydesdale bank) issue £5, £10, £20 and £100 notes, with Clydesdale bank also issuing a £50 note and Royal Bank of Scotland a £1 note.

Bank of England notes are legal tender in England and Wales only. Notes issued by banks in Scotland and Northern Ireland are not legal tender anywhere. Notes

that are not legal tender may be used—anywhere in the United Kingdom—so long as both parties to a transaction agree that they are acceptable.

Financial Services (Regulation)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish the full report of the review by the Securities and Investments Board of the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation's regulatory responsibilities for Bishopsgate Investment Managers and London and Bishopsgate Investment.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* I am advised that publication of IMRO's review in full, whether by the Government or the Securities and Investments Board (SIB), might be severely prejudicial to criminal proceedings. SIB has announced it will be making a statement on SIB's assessment of IMRO's and its own performance together with the conclusions and decisions about resulting action from the IMRO review.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Claim Processing Times

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what rights to compensation or redress claimants have whose claims or review applications have not been processed within the Government's target periods.

Mr. Scott: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Cold Weather Payments

34. **Ms. Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in Rochdale qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in Glasgow, Central qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates the cold weather payments system was triggered in Glasgow, Central during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payment on each occasion;

(2) on what dates cold weather payments were made in Glasgow, Central in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and how long it took for these payments to be made.

Mr. Scott: Such information as is available is in the Library.

Attendance Allowance

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the date of the longest outstanding new claim for attendance allowance;

(2) how many new claims for attendance allowance, made before April 1992, are outstanding; and when it is expected that they will be decided;

(3) how many applications for review of attendance allowance, made before April 1992, are outstanding; and what is the date of the longest outstanding application for review.

Mr. Scott: The administration of attendance allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend and copies will be placed in the Library and Public Information Office.

Maxwell Pensions

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what contributions he has received into the fund set up for Maxwell pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 28 June further details about the Maxwell pensioners trust. Work on the trust deed is being taken forward quickly and Sir John Cuckney and his fellow trustees hope to launch their formal appeal shortly.

Pending the formal establishment of the trust, the Department has opened a holding account to receive contributions in advance of Sir John's appeal and I am pleased to report that £120,000 has already been paid into this account.

Pension Rights

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column *307*, if he will ask the Government Actuary to place in the Library the detailed calculation of his estimate of the cost of full retrospective equalisation of pension rights; and how much of this estimate derives from recalculations of existing benefits in payment and the enhancement of pension payments to existing male occupational pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: A copy of a detailed calculation of the Government Actuary's estimate has been placed in the Library. This was given in response to an inquiry from the European Commission. A copy of the Commission's inquiry has also been placed in the Library.

Disability Working Allowance

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for disability working allowance have been received; how this compares with the anticipated take-up; what is the success rate; and how long it is taking for new claims to be decided.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability working allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Income Entitlement

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will specify the annual income entitlement (supplementary benefit or income support), excluding housing benefit, for *(a)* a single unemployed person aged 24 and *(b)* a man and a woman both aged 34 with two children aged 12 and 11 years respectively for each of the years 1979 to 1989 inclusive, at 1989 prices.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is in the table.

Part of our policy in replacing supplementary benefit was to target benefit on those groups most in need, and we succeeded. Since 1988 we have given extra help, over and above normal upratings, to families with children. The income support rates for single people aged 18 to 24 take account of the fact that the vast majority live as members of someone else's household.

A *Financial year*	*B* *Annual entitlement at April 1989 prices* £	*C* *Annual entitlement at April 1989 prices* £
1979-80	1,542·25	3,802·38
1980-81	1,572·16	4,002·40
1981-82	1,612·82	4,270·16
1982-83	1,654·58	4,379·18
1983-84	1,704·56	4,509·83
1984-85	1,706·86	4,516·65
1985-86	1,709·09	4,523·13
1986-87	1,725·19	4,571·23
1987-88	1,707·39	4,524·02
1988-89	1,398·44	4,820·73
1989-90	1,394·52	4,885·92

Notes:

Col. B—shows for 1979-88 the annual Supplementary Benefit entitlement, at 1989 prices, for a single householder. From April 1988 the figures are the annual entitlement to Income Support, at 1989 prices, for a single unemployed person age 18-24. No additions which might have been payable within Supplementary Benefit or Income Support premiums for special needs have been included.

Col. C—shows for 1979-88 the annual Supplementary Benefit entitlement, at 1989 prices, for a couple (aged 18 or over) with two children aged 11 and 12. From April 1988 the figures are the annual Income Support entitlement, at 1989 prices, for the same family composition. No additions which might have been payable within Supplementary Benefit have been included. The Income Support figures include the family premium which is paid automatically.

The Rossi Index (ie, the Retail Prices Index less housing costs) has been used to revalue at 1989 prices because there is no housing element in the entitlement amount.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The main priority for environmental issues over the next year will be to finalise an environmental strategy for the Department and to ensure that there is an action plan to implement it. In the longer term, the aim will be to ensure that, as far as possible, the Department's activities take environmental consideration fully into account. This will include cutting down our production of carbon dioxide by reducing our energy consumption by 15 per cent. by 1996.

Social Fund

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish his annual report on the social fund; and when he will publish the social fund commissioner's annual report.

Mr. Scott: The Secretary of State's annual report (Cm 1992) has been published today and I have laid it before Parliament. This report records that in 1991-92 more than 1·5 million discretionary payments amounting to £276 million were made from the fund; and that the total paid out from the fund, including the regulated maternity, funeral and cold weather payments was £361 million.

The social fund commissioner's annual report has also been published today and copies placed in the Library.

The findings of research on the social fund which we commissioned from the social policy research unit at the University of York have also been published today. This research—based on two years of fieldwork carried out in 1990 and 1991—provides a considerable amount of information and will require careful study.

The research unit acknowledges that the social fund budget is a small, but important, part of social security spending. It represents around 0·5 per cent. of the total DSS budget, now approaching £70 billion a year. The fund's discretionary budget alone has been increased to £302 million for 1992-93, an increase of 32 per cent. from April 1991.

I am pleased to note that the findings confirm the message of the Secretary of State's annual report that the fund has provided cash assistance for exceptional needs to millions of people; and also recognise the excellent job being performed by social fund officers.

Stadex Industries Pension Fund

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement concerning the Stadex Industries Limited retirement savings plan;

(2) when he expects that members' benefit entitlement can be determined consequent upon continuing investigations into Stadex Industries Limited retirement savings plan;

(3) how many individuals are involved in the Stadex Industries retirement savings plan; and what is his estimate of the arrears under the insurance content concerning the Stadex retirement savings plan;

(4) for how long employee contributions were continuing to be deducted from the salary of members of the Stadex retirement savings plan and placed on deposit in a trustee bank account before members were contracted back into the state earnings-related pension scheme.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not collected by the Department. The Stadex Industries Limited retirement savings plan is a contracted out, salary-related pension scheme first contracted out on 1 June 1988. The Occupational Pensions Board, an independent statutory body, is currently considering the position of the scheme and its ability to meet its guaranteed minimum pension commitment.

Mortgage Payments

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of households receiving income support have no record of being in arrears in their

mortgage interest payments to banks or building societies; what consideration he has given to concerns that the introduction of automatic direct payments would remove from them a responsibility that they have hitherto discharged reliably and could be perceived as a slur on their willingness to pay; and if he will make it possible for people in such circumstances to continue to make their own mortgage interest payments.

Mr. Burt: Information on mortgagees receiving income support who are, or have ever been, in arrears with mortgage payments is not collected.

The new direct payment scheme is part of a package of measures agreed with mortgage lenders, aimed at reducing the number of repossessions. The previous selective scheme did not readily identify all arrears cases and therefore did not provide an adequate reassurance against the risk of repossession for claimants and their families. The new scheme does not suffer from this defect and ensures that benefit provided specifically for mortgage interest payments reaches the lender. There is no question of any such slur on any benefit recipients, the majority of whom discharged their liability towards mortgage lenders faithfully.

We have no plans to revise the new scheme.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the estimated total additional administrative costs associated with introducing automatic direct payments to mortgage lenders of income support in respect of mortgage interest in 1992-93; and what contribution to these additional administrative costs have been made, or are likely to be made by mortgage lenders in 1992-93.

Mr. Burt: The scheme will result in extra administrative costs of about £15 million for each year beginning 1992-93. In addition there were start-up costs of about £2·5 million. Mortgage lenders are expected to contribute £10 million towards these costs.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements are being made to meet the administrative costs of automatic direct payments to mortgage lenders of income support in respect of mortgage interest in 1993-94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: A review of the fees payable by qualifying lenders will take place later this year in consultation with appropriate lender organisations.

Young People

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost of implementing each of the recommendations in the eighth report of the Social Security Advisory Committee regarding young people's benefit entitlements.

Mr. Burt: On the recommendation regarding removing the general exclusion of 16 and 17-year-olds from benefit, information about the cost of restoring entitlement to income support is not available.

On the recommendation that young people under 25 living away from home should be paid the full rate of income support, the information is in the table.

Benefit	*Cost (£ million)*
Income support	80
Community charge benefit	5
Housing benefit	25
Total	110

Source: Modelled at 1992-93 prices and benefit levels using data drawn from the 1987-88-89 Family Expenditure Surveys. People living away from home have been defined as those who are classified in the Family Expenditure Survey as (a) heads of household or (b) not related to the head of household.

Overpayment

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the amount of money which the Government have recovered from overpayments of social security benefits not involving fraud under section 20 of the Supplementary Benefits Act 1976, and as amended by section 53 of the Social Security Act 1986, in each of the years since 1 April 1979, the maximum amount in any individual case claimed in each year, the average amount claimed, and the proportion that the total represents of all claims for overpayment.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available.

Social Fund

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number and percentage of total applications which were refused for *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans for each of the years of the social fund's operation; and if he will provide a breakdown by (i) region and (ii) local DSS office.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 17 June 1992]:* Information for 1988-89 and 1989-90 in respect of local offices is not available. Regional summaries for those years and for 1990-91 are in the tables.

The 1990-91 information for DSS local offices and 1991-92 information for Benefits Agency districts is in the tables.

Region	*Number of applications*	*Number of refusals*	*Percentage*
1988-89			
BUDGETING LOANS			
Wales and South West	103,186	38,938	37
Scotland	182,328	62,785	34
Midlands	130,227	43,188	33
North East	188,241	69,419	36
North West	172,817	62,632	36
London South	69,447	22,233	32
London North	80,062	27,187	33
CRISIS LOANS			
Wales and South West	62,450	4,705	8
Scotland	83,198	8,299	10
Midlands	69,485	6,967	10
North East	79,745	6,083	8
North West	79,519	5,077	6
London South	57,342	7,538	13
London North	64,621	5,981	9
COMMUNITY CARE GRANTS			
Wales and South West	35,640	14,511	40
Scotland	54,959	26,978	49

Region	Number of applications	Number of refusals	Percentage
Midlands	45,907	21,559	47
North East	35,640	26,010	46
North West	56,003	23,906	46
London South	29,176	12,770	44
London North	38,327	18,557	48

Region	Number of applications	Number of refusals	Percentage
1989-90			
BUDGETING LOANS			
Wales and SW	122,268	51,581	42
Scotland	205,029	83,243	41
Midlands	165,181	63,119	38
North East	237,620	94,043	40
North West	194,822	80,518	41
London South	98,238	37,804	38
London North	109,290	44,491	41
CRISIS LOANS			
Wales and SW	81,770	5,835	7
Scotland	106,320	8,969	8
Midlands	83,265	6,146	7
North East	103,977	6,950	7
North West	103,660	5,943	6
London South	81,446	6,333	8
London North	84,374	5,677	7
COMMUNITY CARE GRANTS			
Wales and SW	57,858	29,294	51
Scotland	98,652	54,024	55
Midlands	77,354	41,351	53
North East	94,711	51,693	55
North West	88,102	47,798	54
London South	47,123	23,759	50
London North	60,484	32,409	54

Region	Number of Applications	Number of Refusals	Percentage
BUDGETING LOANS			
1990-91			
Wales and SW	121,461	55,360	46
Scotland	207,146	83,855	40
Midlands	158,457	62,090	39
North East	210,160	88,980	42
North West	179,092	71,740	40
London South	99,660	41,609	42
London North	116,419	48,872	42
CRISIS LOANS			
Wales and SW	78,315	8,328	11
Scotland	101,473	10,467	10
Midlands	72,608	6,317	9
North East	93,662	6,406	7
North West	93,832	6,372	7
London South	78,290	5,795	7
London North	77,750	6,155	8
COMMUNITY CARE GRANTS			
Wales and SW	69,928	39,941	57
Scotland	122,831	78,093	64
Midlands	90,970	56,058	62
North East	111,314	68,196	61
North West	100,896	62,614	62
London South	58,947	34,843	59
London North	74,430	47,428	64

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, columns *311-13*, whether he will give figures calculated on the same basis as tables 2 and 7 of the departmental survey "An Analysis of Voluntarily Unemployed Claimants" published in 1989, showing the proportion of unemployment benefit claims disqualified in each quarter from 1989 to 1991 and the proportion of disqualified claimants receiving income support from May 1980 to November 1991, with an explanation of the difference between these figures and those given in his answer of 25 June.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables. The figures in table 2 of "An Analysis of Voluntary Unemployed Claimants" were limited to disqualifications under section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975, whereas the figure given in table 1 of the answer of 25 June included some disallowances on other grounds. Table 2 of the answer of 25 June differs from table 7 of "An Analysis of Voluntary Unemployed Claimants" in that table 2 contains numbers for all disqualifications and, as footnote 1 explains, some disallowances. Table 7 was based upon the "Half-yearly Analysis of Unemployed Claimants" which is limited to disqualifications on the grounds of misconduct and leaving voluntarily without just cause.

Table 1

Percentage of claims to Unemployment Benefit disqualified by Adjudication Officers under Section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975, from 1989 to 1991.

Quarter	Percentage disqualified by Adjudication Officers
1989	
Q1	8·7
Q2	9·1
Q3	6·4
Q4	8·3
1990	
Q1	6·6
Q2	7·3
Q3	5·4
Q4	5·9
1991	
Q1	4·7
Q2	5·0
Q3	3·8
Q4	4·6

1. Numbers of disqualifications are based on quarter years derived from three calendar months, while numbers of claims are derived from whole weeks.
2. In any particular quarter, a number of disqualifications could relate to a claim made in a previous quarter.

Source: Departmental Statistics.
Sample: 100 per cent.

Table 2

Percentage of unemployed claims disqualified because of misconduct and leaving voluntarily and in receipt of Supplementary Allowance/ Income Support 1980-91.

	Percentage in receipt of Supplementary Allowance/ Income Support
May 1980	42·4
November 1980	44·2
May 1981	—
November 1981	—
February 1982	42·2

	Percentage in receipt of Supplementary Allowance/ Income Support
May 1982	47·1
November 1982	41·9
May 1983	44·8
November 1983	44·2
May 1984	—
November 1984	42·0
May 1985	38·[illegible]
November 1985	42·4
May 1986	46·9
November 1986	45·4
May 1987	58·9
November 1987	56·2
May 1988	51·5
November 1988	57·1
May 1989	65·7
November 1989	64·5
May 1990	68·8
November 1990	66·4
May 1991	72·0
November 1991	72·5

Source: Half yearly Analysis of Unemployed Claimants, Sample Size 5 per cent.

Notes:

1. Figures for May 1981, November 1981 and May 1984 are not available due to industrial action.
2. Income Support replaced Supplementary Allowance from April 1988.

HEALTH

Leeds General Infirmary

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will review the need for the proposed redevelopment of Leeds general infirmary; and if she will make a statement on *(a)* the cost implications and *(b)* the effect on the various hospital trusts in surrounding districts.

Mr. Sackville: I announced on 7 July that the Government have given approval in principle to the proposed redevelopment of the general infirmary at Leeds. In reaching this decision, careful consideration was given to the affordability of the likely capital and revenue costs and consistency with purchasers' strategies for the future health services for Leeds.

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how it is intended to fund the capital cost of the Leeds general infirmary redevelopment; what are the expected capital costs and if she will break these down by financial year; and if she will give the details and timings of capital receipts which will be allocated to fund this development.

Mr. Sackville: The scheme will be funded through the United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS trust's external financing limit. The outturn capital cost is estimated around £88 million. Capital expenditure is likely to be of the order of £15 million per year for five years.

Hip Replacement Operations

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the waiting list for hip replacement operations in the North East Thames region and each of its component district health authority areas for *(a)* up to six months, *(b)* six months to one year, *(c)* one year to 18 months, *(d)* 18 months to two years and *(e)* more than two years on 1 April 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992 and the latest figures available.

Mr. Sackville: Waiting time information is collected centrally by specialty not by procedure. Waiting times for trauma and orthopaedics, which includes hip replacements, are published in the six-monthly publication "Hospital In-patient Waiting Lists", copies of which are available in the Library.

Fostering

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases she is aware of where children from ethnic minorities in care have been removed from white foster parents during the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not collected centrally.

Metabolic Disease

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding is currently allocated to each health region in England towards the provision of services for the detection of inherited metabolic disease; and if she will make it her policy to ensure adequate funding is granted to existing schemes for a two-year period to allow successor arrangements to be fully evaluated.

Mr. Sackville: Services for the detection of inherited metabolic disease are funded out of general allocations to regional health authorities. Such allocations are made on the basis of the size, age and relative health of their resident populations. In turn regional health authorities fund their districts broadly on the same basis. District health authorities are responsible for purchasing health services for their populations including national health service genetic services which are provided by regional genetic centres, the supraregional assay service and in certain NHS trusts and directly managed units.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans her Department has to monitor the incidence of solvent and volatile substance misuse;

(2) what are the Government's targets for the reductions of mortalities and incidence of solvent and volatile substance misuse; and how her Department intends to achieve them.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs is currently looking at the whole area of solvent and volatile substance misuse. We will consider in the light of its recommendations, what further steps need to be taken with the aim of reducing the incidence of and mortalities from solvent misuse. We hope that increased parental awareness of the problem following the Government's recent publicity campaign will help to play a part in reducing incidence.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in her Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Over the coming year, I shall continue to follow-up the commitments expressed in the White Paper Cm 1200 ('This Common Inheritance') and its successor Cm 1655 ('The First Year Report'); a second anniversary White Paper will be published in the autumn. My Department is developing an environmental housekeeping strategy for the management of its accommodation and purchasing and this will be in place by the end of the year. I shall continue to ensure that the policy and work of my Department reflect environmental concerns and their potential impact on the public health.

Census

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when all the population information of the 1991 census in Wales will be published.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 18 June at column *672*. County monitors for Powys, West Glamorgan and Gwent have been published. The timetable for publication for the remaining Welsh counties will be included in the next "Census Newsletter", issue 22, a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

Asthma

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the mortality rates for asthma for each of the last 20 years *(a)* among the whole population and *(b)* among under 16-year-olds; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is shown in the table.

Asthma Deaths, England and Wales, 1972-1991
ICD 493

Persons		*0–14*	*All ages*
1972	Rate	4·4	25·3
	SMR		100·0
1973	Rate	4·7	24·5
	SMR		94·1
1974	Rate	3·7	22·0
	SMR		84·1
1975	Rate	3·3	24·0
	SMR		91·2
1976	Rate	3·5	21·2
	SMR		80·3
1977	Rate	4·8	22·1
	SMR		83·1
1978	Rate	4·0	23·3
	SMR		87·5
1979	Rate	3·5	30·0
	SMR		112·4
1980	Rate	3·9	30·0
	SMR		111·9
1981	Rate	4·8	32·3
	SMR		119·1
1982	Rate	4·4	31·8
	SMR		121·8
1983	Rate	4·3	31·8
	SMR		117·2
1984	Rate	4·1	35·4
	SMR		130·0
1985	Rate	3·4	39·5
	SMR		144·7
1986	Rate	2·8	39·7
	SMR		145·6
1987	Rate	4·2	37·8
	SMR		138·6
1988	Rate	4·0	39·8
	SMR		145·9
1989	Rate	2·6	38·7
	SMR		142·0
1990	Rate	3·9	36·7
	SMR		134·5
1991	Rate	3·3	37·1
	SMR		136·0

Note. Population figures for 1991 not yet available, therefore rates for 1991 have been calculated using 1990 population. Deaths for 1986 onwards exclude neonatal deaths, (aged under 28 days). Populations are in thousands. Death rates are per million populations.
The standard mortality rate shows the number of deaths registered each year as a percentage of those which would have occurred had the age/sex mortality conformed to the year (1972) being taken as the standard. Expected deaths are calculated by sex/age mortality rates for the standard to the sex/age population for the year for which the SMR is being worked.
SMRs have only been calculated for all ages as SMRs require calculations based on the summation of age specific data. Please note that figures are not readily available for under 16 year olds.
In 1979 there was a change in the rules of assignment and therefore data before and after this date are not necessarily comparable.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the criteria by which a medical condition carries exemption from prescription charges for all sufferers, regardless of age.

Dr. Mawhinney: Exemption from prescription charges on medical grounds alone is granted for specified readily identifiable chronic illnesses calling for lifelong medication.

Abortion

Mr. Michael Allison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number of abortions performed in the Yorkshire regional health authority under the Abortion Act 1967 since its implementation; and how many and what proportion of these abortions were performed in an emergency to save the mother's life.

Mr. Sackville: Yorkshire regional health authority (RHA) was constituted on 1 April 1974 and data on this basis are calculated from 1 January 1975 to 30 September 1991 (the latest date for which figures are available). During this period a total of 139,602 abortions have been performed under the Abortion Act 1967 in the Yorkshire RHA. Of these, two (0·001 per cent.) were performed in an emergency "to save the life of the pregnant woman" (ground 5).

NHS Trusts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent on producing and printing trust application forms in each health authority region.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Lord President of the Council what information he holds on the provision of day nurseries and other child care facilities and assistance in the legislative assemblies of European Community member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

CATERING COMMITTEE

Animal Welfare

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee, if the Committee will make it its policy to recommend that the Refreshment Department take animal welfare into account in its food purchasing policy.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: It is understood that the Director of Catering Services, who has formal responsibility for these matters, already takes account of animal welfare in respect of their rearing, capture and slaughter when putting into practice the Department's food-purchasing policy. I shall, nevertheless, arrange for this issue to be considered by the Catering Committee in order that it may be discussed and, if necessary, further guidance given.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) of 2 June, *Official Report*, column *430*, what position the Government have adopted on the Commission's consultation paper on dietary supplement as in respect of the suggestion that vitamin supplements should only be available on prescription; and when he expects the European Community scientific committee on food to complete its consideration.

Mr. Soames: The Commission consultation paper on dietary supplements contains no suggestion that vitamin supplements should be available only on prescription. The Government's general position is that consumers should be able to choose for themselves whether to buy dietary supplements that are safe. The Commission expects the EC scientific committee for food to reach conclusions about acceptable upper levels for vitamins and minerals in the autumn.

Intervention Stores

Mr. Michael: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the commodities held by the European Commission in intervention, the quantity of each in store on the latest date for which information is available, and the percentage of each that is committed to use for emergency food aid.

Mr. Curry: Tables listing the commodities held by the European Community in intervention, and the most recent levels of each such commodity held in store, are deposited in the Library of the House each month.

Information on the percentage of each that is committed to use for emergency food aid cannot be provided within the time available, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as the information requested is available from the European Commission.

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library the written statement of the health and safety at work of those employed by Agricultural Development Advisory Service, as required by the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.

Mr. Gummer: The written statement of the health and safety at work of those employed by MAFF, including ADAS, as required by the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, is contained in section F8 of the MAFF staff manual handbook. I am arranging for copies of the relevant sections to be placed in the Library of the House.

Vitamins

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what figure he has for the value of *(a)* multi-vitamin preparations and *(b)* single vitamins sold over the counter in Britain each year.

Mr. Soames: The value of multi-vitamins and single vitamins sold in 1991, estimated, at retail selling price, was £60 million and £25 million respectively, according to the market research magazine, "Market Intelligence", June 1991.

Long Mynd

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publicise the results of his Department's study into moorland grazing pressure on the Long Mynd, Shropshire, "An Assessment of Heather Utilisation by Sheep on the Long Mynd, 1990"; and if he will make a statement on its findings.

Mr. Curry: This report was produced to aid discussions between the Department, English Nature and the National Trust—as landlords—on the measures to be taken for the conservation of the Long Mynd. All three parties have now received copies of the report which will be of particular value in formulating the proposals for the Shropshire hills environmentally sensitive area on which I shall be seeking views in 1993.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list for the last 12 months, the fact-finding visits the chief executive of the Employment Agency has made; what were his findings; if she will place a copy of his findings in the Library; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what criteria will be used to establish which agencies can provide rehabilitation of a suitable quality for people with disabilities after April 1993; and if she will make a statement;

(2) how funding will be allocated to placing, assessment and counselling teams to enable them to purchase such assessment and rehabilitation services as are needed by people with severe disabilities requiring specialist provision;

(3) what steps she is taking to establish quality standards for providers of rehabilitation training to people with severe visual impairments; and what consultation she is having for this purpose;

(4) what was the average total cost per week for each client attending an employment rehabilitation course at a Government-run employment rehabilitation centre in *(a)* 1990-91 and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred these questions for reply.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in her Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Over the next 12 months we shall continue to follow up commitments in the White Paper Cm 12000 "This Common Inheritance" and its successor Cm 1655 "The First Year Report". We shall also be contributing to a second anniversary White Paper in the autumn.

The Health and Safety Executive has already developed an environmental housekeeping strategy for the management of its accommodation and purchasing. The Employment Department and the Employment Service will have their strategies in place by the end of 1992.

Over the next year and beyond, we shall continue to monitor the impact of the Department's policies and activities on the environment; and to ensure that environmental concerns shape our policies and work wherever possible.

Rehabilitation

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish the list of external organisations providing counselling and rehabilitation services under contract to her Department with an indication of the amount of work carried out by each organisation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if she will publish details, for the nine standard economic regions, of the total numbers of entrants, excluding community programme transfers, to employment training by sex, ethnic origin and disability, for each year since the start of the scheme;

(2) if she will publish the 100 per cent. youth training scheme leavers survey for each training and enterprise council in the north-west, showing the destinations of trainees by ethnic origin, sex and disability and by scheme type, for each year since the start of the scheme;

(3) if she will publish details for each training and enterprise council in the north-west region of the destinations of employment training trainees, by ethnic origin, sex and disability, for each year since the start of the scheme;

(4) if she will publish details of the numbers and percentages of youth training trainees in the north-west who have employed or trainee status, and the breakdown by sex, ethnic origin and disability, for each year in the period 1990-92 inclusive.

Mr. McLoughlin: As the information requested is contained within a number of tables I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice is given to young people for whom suitable youth training places are not available.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Careers Service gives vocational advice and guidance to young people. In addition to the training route, the service encourages young people to explore all the other options and their suitability for them; for example, further education and employment, to enable them to make informed careers decisions. For those young people they identify as having potential eligibility for benefits or allowances, general advice is given such as how and where to make a claim.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment she has made of whether there are enough suitable youth training places available in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department's contracts with TECs call for regular monitoring and review at local level of the numbers of young people covered by the YT guarantee who are seeking a place. This local monitoring is carried out by our officials, training and enterprise councils and other interested parties such as the Careers Service. Following discussion with representatives of TECs and the Careers Service we are putting into place new measures to establish a national system of monitoring in England. We believe that these arrangements safeguard the interests of young people seeking training.

Matters in the rest of the United Kingdom are for my right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list those areas in which the youth training guarantee is being delivered in full.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information on the extent of demand for YT from young people covered by the YT guarantee is available only in the form of estimates which are not sufficiently reliable for publication. The Government remain fully committed to ensuring that the YT guarantee will be met everywhere.

Wages Councils

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will estimate the number of workers covered by the wages councils in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* south

Wales and the south-west and *(c)* north Wales and the north-west; and if she will sub-divide the figures for full-time, part-time and male and female workers.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information as requested is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Wages Councils

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for each existing wages council *(a)* what is the current minimum rate of pay, *(b)* how many employees are covered, *(c)* what is the administrative cost, *(d)* how many establishments are covered, *(e)* how many inspectors are employed, *(f)* how many inspections have taken place and in each of the last five years, *(g)* how many establishments have been contacted other than by visit, *(h)* how many establishments have been found to be paying less than the minimum and *(i)* how many prosecutions have taken place.

Mr. McLoughlin: There is no record kept of the administrative cost for each individual wages council and wages inspectors are not employed for individual wages councils. Other information requested is set out in the following tables:

Table 1
Current wages council minimum hourly rates

Wages councils	*Basic hourly rate* £
Aerated Waters	2·9400
Clothing Manufacturing	2·6375
Boot and Shoe Repairing	2·9100
Button Manufacturing	2·5850
Coffin Furniture and Cerement Making	3·0500
Cotton Waste Reclamation	2·6800
Flax and Hemp	[1]—
Fur	2·7200
General Waste Materials Reclamation	2·5000
Hairdressing Undertaking	2·7800
Hat, Cap and Millinery	2·6667
Lace Finishing	[1]—
Laundry	2·9100
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief and Household Goods and Linen Piece Goods	2·6000
Made-up Textiles	2·5700
Ostrich and Fancy Feather and Artificial Flower	2·6600
Perambulator and Invalid Carriage	3·0400
Retail Bespoke Tailoring	3·1000
Rope Twine and Net	2·6700
Sack and Bag	2·6550
Toy Manufacturing	2·5200
Retail Trades (Non-Food)	3·0650
Retail Food and Allied Trades	3·0800
Licensed Non-Residential Establishment	2·9100
Licensed Residential Establishment and Licensed Restaurant	2·8000
Unlicensed Place of Refreshment	2·9200

[1] Council adjourned indefinitely—the two sides negotiate voluntary agreements.

Table 2
Number of workers covered by wages councils

Wages councils	*Workers covered*
Aerated Waters	5,500
Clothing Manufacturing	14,700
Boot and Shoe Repairing	5,000
Button Manufacturing	1,000
Coffin Furniture and Cerement Making	200
Cotton Waste Reclamation	300
Flax and Hemp	500
Fur	1,500
General Waste Materials Reclamation	13,000
Hairdressing Undertaking	64,000
Hat, Cap and Millinery	4,000
Lace Finishing	900
Laundry	26,000
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief and Household Goods and Linen Piece Goods	2,500
Made-up Textiles	3,000
Ostrich and Fancy Feather and Artificial Flower	500
Perambulator and Invalid Carriage	2,000
Retail Bespoke Tailoring	4,000
Rope Twine and Net	2,500
Sack and Bag	1,000
Toy Manufacturing	11,000
Retail Trades (Non-Food)	745,000
Retail Food and Allied Trades	465,000
Licensed Non-Residential Establishment	492,000
Licensed Residential Establishment and Licensed Restaurant	379,000
Unlicensed Place of Refreshment	96,000

Table 3
Number of establishments covered by wages councils

Wages councils	*Establishments covered*
Aerated Waters	262
Clothing Manufacturing	6,399
Boot and Shoe Repairing	2,993
Button Manufacturing	47
Coffin Furniture and Cerement Making	21
Cotton Waste Reclamation	23
Flax and Hemp	10
Fur	187
General Waste Materials Reclamation	1,419
Hairdressing Undertaking	33,772
Hat, Cap and Millinery	124
Lace Finishing	62
Laundry	1,195
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief and Household Goods and Linen Piece Goods	133
Made-up Textiles	281
Ostrich and Fancy Feather and Artificial Flower	36
Perambulator and Invalid Carriage	30
Retail Bespoke Tailoring	479
Rope Twine and Net	91
Sack and Bag	63
Toy Manufacturing	216
Retail Trades (Non-Food)	116,498
Retail Food and Allied Trades	112,079
Licensed Non-Residential Establishment	68,223
Licensed Residential Establishment and Licensed Restaurant	34,589
Unlicensed Place of Refreshment	18,884

Table 4
Number of inspections 1987 to 1991

Wages councils	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Aerated waters	26	31	22	14	7
Clothing manufacturing	967	603	486	390	402
Boot and shoe repairing	224	245	216	59	335
Button manufacturing	3	7	5	3	2
Coffin furniture and cerement making	2	3	3	4	1
Cotton waste reclamation	5	4	3	0	3

Wages councils	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Flax and hemp	2	0	0	0	0
Fur	21	18	12	4	6
General waste materials reclamation	116	150	100	87	70
Hairdressing	2,200	2,392	2,633	2,281	2,730
Hat, cap and millinery	8	26	11	6	3
Lace finishing	0	0	0	0	0
Laundry	107	125	95	45	74
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	17	12	14	7	10
Made-up textiles	27	32	27	28	8
Ostrich and fancy feather and artificial flower	3	3	6	3	3
Perambulator and invalid carriage	3	2	3	0	3
Retail bespoke tailoring	37	43	40	21	14
Rope, twine and net	7	8	11	12	4
Sack and bag	7	12	6	4	2
Toy manufacturing	20	24	18	16	15
Retail trades (non-food)	8,354	9,649	9,551	8,081	9,542
Retail food and allied trades	7,171	9,860	10,111	9,331	8,278
Licensed non-residential establishments	6,475	5,063	5,310	5,005	5,819
Licensed residential establishments and licensed restaurants	3,213	2,613	2,781	2,910	3,084
Unlicensed place of refreshment	1,509	1,530	2,164	2,369	2,171

Table 5
Establishments checkd other than by visit 1987 to 1991

Wages councils	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Aerated waters	2	10	5	4	1
Clothing manufacturing	84	44	50	31	35
Boot and shoe repairing	121	79	125	12	270
Button manufacturing	0	1	0	0	0
Coffin furniture and cerement making	0	1	0	1	0
Cotton waste reclamation	0	0	0	0	0
Flax and hemp	0	0	0	0	0
Fur	2	0	1	0	0
General waste materials reclamation	20	39	41	33	29
Hairdressing	1,068	738	1,116	928	841
Hat, cap and millinery	0	3	5	1	0
Lace finishing	0	0	0	0	0
Laundry	23	28	29	2	8
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	2	1	0	0	3
Made-up textiles	4	7	3	4	0
Ostrich and fancy feather and artificial flower	0	1	2	0	0
Perambulator and invalid carriage	0	2	0	0	0
Retail bespoke tailoring	4	6	7	4	3
Rope, twine and net	0	2	1	2	0
Sack and bag	0	1	1	0	0
Toy manufacturing	3	1	2	7	0
Retail trades (non-food)	4,650	5,430	5,558	4,116	5,413
Retail food and allied trades	3,651	4,147	3,883	3,953	2,746
Licensed non-residential establishments	2,198	1,560	3,347	2,230	2,705
Licensed residential establishments and licensed restaurants	593	488	899	1,087	1,039
Unlicensed place of refreshment	163	312	1,114	1,290	1,067

Table 6
Number of establishments found to be paying less than the minimum 1987 to 1991

Wages councils	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Aerated waters	2	2	1	0	0
Clothing manufacturing	191	128	111	90	97
Boot and shoe repairing	7	18	11	12	9
Button manufacturing	0	0	1	1	1
Coffin furniture and cerement making	0	0	0	1	0
Cotton waste reclamation	2	0	0	0	0
Flax and hemp	0	0	0	0	0

Wages councils	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Fur	0	2	3	0	1
General waste materials reclamation	5	11	2	3	3
Hairdressing	290	330	319	307	368
Hat, cap and millinery	3	0	0	1	1
Lace finishing	0	0	0	0	0
Laundry	10	20	16	12	19
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	2	4	3	2	2
Made-up textiles	1	2	5	6	1
Ostrich and fancy feather and artificial flower	0	0	0	0	1
Perambulator and invalid carriage	0	0	0	0	1
Retail bespoke tailoring	3	6	3	3	0
Rope, twine and net	0	0	0	0	1
Sack and bag	1	0	0	1	0
Toy manufacturing	1	2	3	2	6
Retail trades (non-food)	854	1,130	1,108	1,101	1,336
Retail food and allied trades	1,399	2,143	2,289	2,078	2,240
Licensed non-residential establishments	843	1,016	847	723	916
Licensed residential establishments and licensed restaurants	516	405	475	458	578
Unlicensed place of refreshment	313	378	331	404	390

Table 7
Number of prosecutions 1987 to 1991
Paying less than the minimum

Wages councils	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Aerated waters	0	0	0	0	0
Clothing manufacturing	0	0	0	0	0
Boot and shoe repairing	0	0	0	0	0
Button manufacturing	0	0	0	0	0
Coffin furniture and cerement making	0	0	0	0	0
Cotton waste reclamation	0	0	0	0	0
Flax and hemp	0	0	0	0	0
Fur	0	0	0	0	0
General waste materials reclamation	0	0	0	0	0
Hairdressing	1	2	0	1	2
Hat, cap and millinery	0	0	0	0	0
Lace finishing	0	0	0	0	0
Laundry	0	0	0	0	0
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	0	0	0	0	0
Made-up textiles	0	0	0	0	0
Ostrich and fancy feather and artificial flower	0	0	0	0	0
Perambulator and invalid carriage	0	0	0	0	0
Retail bespoke tailoring	0	0	0	0	0
Rope, twine and net	0	0	0	0	0
Sack and bag	0	0	0	0	0
Toy manufacturing	0	0	0	0	0
Retail trades (non-food)	1	0	2	0	2
Retail food and allied trades	2	8	5	5	7
Licensed non-residential establishments	0	0	1	0	1
Licensed residential establishments and licensed restaurants	0	0	0	0	2
Unlicensed place of refreshment	0	0	1	1	0

Table 8
Number of prosecutions 1987 to 1991
All

Wages councils	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Aerated waters	0	0	0	0	0
Clothing manufacturing	1	0	0	0	1
Boot and shoe repairing	0	0	0	0	0
Button manufacturing	0	0	0	0	0
Coffin furniture and cerement making	0	0	0	0	0
Cotton waste reclamation	0	0	0	0	0

Wages councils	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Flax and hemp	0	0	0	0	0
Fur	0	0	0	0	0
General waste materials reclamation	0	0	0	0	0
Hairdressing	2	2	0	1	2
Hat, cap and millinery	0	0	0	0	0
Lace finishing	0	0	0	0	0
Laundry	0	0	0	0	0
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	0	0	0	0	0
Made-up textiles	0	0	0	0	0
Ostrich and fancy feather and artificial flower	0	0	0	0	0
Perambulator and invalid carriage	0	0	0	0	0
Retail bespoke tailoring	0	0	0	0	0
Rope, twine and net	0	0	0	0	0
Sack and bag	0	0	0	0	0
Toy manufacturing	0	0	0	0	0
Retail trades (non-food)	1	0	2	0	4
Retail food and allied trades	2	8	6	6	7
Licensed non-residential establishments	0	0	1	1	1
Licensed residential establishments and licensed restaurants	1	0	0	0	2
Unlicensed place of refreshment	1	1	1	1	0

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer of 29 June, *Official Report*, columns *418-26*, when she expects to be in a position to give the corresponding information for 1992-93.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* For the present, the 1992-93 information remains subject to commercial confidentiality. The information will be made available in due course.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer of 29 June, *Official Report*, columns *418-26*, if she will indicate for which training and enterprise councils in England the 1992-93 information is available; and if she will now publish it for each of the relevant training and enterprise councils.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* For the present, the 1992-93 information remains subject to commercial confidentiality. The information will be made available in due course.

ENVIRONMENT

Toxic Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) on 9 June, *Official Report*, column *146*, he will set out the procedures by which the Government will judge whether developing countries are unable to deal safely with toxic wastes prior to giving permission for their import into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: Under the current draft of the waste shipments regulation, developing countries would have to present a duly motivated request on the basis that they did not have and could not acquire the technical capacity and the necessary facilities in order to dispose of the waste in an environmentally sound manner.

Countryside Employment Practice

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in which areas the pilot scheme for the countryside employment programme will take place.

Mr. Maclean: The countryside employment programme is being piloted in three areas. These are: Lincolnshire (east and west Lindsey districts), the Marches (south Herefordshire, Leominster and south Shropshire districts) and the Cotswold (Cotswold and west Oxfordshire districts).

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of money paid out in management agreements relating to sites of special scientific interest in 1991; how many individual agreements are currently in force in England, Scotland and Wales; what is the average payment per agreement, and what are the top 10 highest individual payments.

Mr. Maclean: Management agreements within Wales and Scotland are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland.

I am advised by English Nature that the amount they paid for management agreements under section 15 of the Countryside Act 1968 relating SSSIs in 1991-92 was £5,735,359; those still active at 31 March 1992 total 1,584 (including some awaiting renewal). The average payment is £875 lump sum plus an ongoing annual payment of £2,176.

Details of management agreement payments are confidential to the parties concerned. The 10 highest individual payments are as follows:

£322,983
£109,600
£108,000
£ 79,000
£ 69,134
£ 49,500
£ 48,194
£ 42,004

£ 36,091
£ 36,000

Nature Reserves

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department has paid in grants in total to United Kingdom conservation bodies to assist them to buy land for nature reserves in each year between 1989 and the present time; how many applications for grant aid were *(a)* received in 1991 and *(b)* accepted; and if he will give details of each grant over £10,000.

Mr. Maclean: The following is the information:

Land purchase grants

	£
1989-90	504,269
1990-91	502,958
1991-92[1]	238,632·50
1992-to date[1]	6,420

[1] England only.

English Nature received 42 land purchase grant applications in 1991-92, of these 19 were given grants towards the purchase of land.

Land purchase grants over £10,000 given by English nature in 1991-92

Site	*Applicant*	*SSSI land purchased (hectares)*	*Grant given £*
Hazelwood Marshes Suffolk	Suffolk Wildlife Trust	3·29	21,000
Hoe Hill and Clayford Pits South Humberside	Lincolnshire and South Humberside Trusts for Nature Conservation	24·5	10,000
West Sedgemoor Somerset	RSPB	26	32,000
Irlams Beach Saltings (Hamford Water)	Little Oakley and District Wildflowers Assocation	50	10,000
Bowling Green Marsh Exe Estuary Devon	RSPB	8·1	10,000
Roydon Common Norfolk	Norfolk Naturalists' Trust	81·28	10,000
Fortescue Estate Somerset	Exmoor National Park (Somerset CC)	485·22	20,000
Ham Brook Marshes Kent	Kent Trust for Nature Conservation	29·2	19,000
Lower Raypitts Farm Essex	Essex Wildlife Trust	69·29	20,000
Decon Hill Bedfordshire	The Wildlife Trusts of Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire	25·1	19,000
Lower Wood, Ashwellthorpe Norfolk	Norfolk Naturalists Trust	36	23,750
Ouse Washes Cambridgeshire	RSPB	5·47	10,132·50p
Ouse Washes Cambridgeshire	RSPB	13·11	20,250

Nuclear Contamination

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent decisions have been taken by the European Commission to support research into nuclear contamination in Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine.

Mr. Maclean: I am informed that the Commission of the European Communities entered on 23 June 1992 into an agreement at non-governmental level with institutions in the three republics of the Commonwealth of independent States most closely concerned with the accident six years ago at the Chernobyl nuclear plant: Russia, Byelorussia and Ukraine. The agreement is for collaboration in studying the nature of the radioactive contamination arising from the Chernobyl accident, to broaden the technical skills needed to control such accidents, and to improve emergency management procedures. The collaboration will be between institutes in European Community member states and in Russia, Byelorussia and Ukraine.

Desalination

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to investigate desalination in the United Kingdom on *(a)* a large scale or *(b)* a small scale.

Mr. Maclean: None. The recent discussion paper by the National Rivers Authority, which has a statutory responsibility for water resources, suggests that desalination is unlikely to offer a cost-effective general means of increasing United Kingdom water supplies. In specific limited circumstances water suppliers may find it worth pursuing: I understand that the Council of the Isles of Scilly has recently commissioned a desalination plant.

Landowners (Compensation)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much in total was paid out in compensation to landowners under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, in 1991; how many individual payments were made; and if he will give details of individual payments over £10,000;

(2) how much compensation to landowners under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has been paid in the current year; what is the number of applications still waiting a decision and their location; and what is the amount being asked for in compensation by the landowners concerned.

Mr. Maclean: No payments were made in 1991 by English Nature under the provisions of section 30 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Emissions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each of the EC nations, the targets they have adopted for stabilising or reducing *(a)* carbon dioxide, *(b)* sulphur dioxide, *(c)* nitrogen oxide and *(d)* hydrocarbons/volatile organic compounds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: A number of EC countries have declared targets on different bases and at different times for carbon dioxide emissions. All EC member states have now signed

the United Nations framework convention on climate change. This will commit all developed country parties to take measures aimed at returning emissions of each greenhouse gas, including carbon dioxide, to their 1990 levels by 2000.

The EC Large Combustion Plant Directive (88/609) requires member states to make specified reductions in their annual emissions of sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen from existing plant. The targets vary country by country, but range from 29 per cent. to 70 per cent. reductions in sulphur dioxide emissions by 2003, and from 0 per cent. to 40 per cent. reductions in nitrogen oxides emissions by 1988—in all cases over 1980 emissions. The targets are listed in annex I to the directive, available in the Library of the House.

All EC member states are parties to the convention on long-range transboundary air pollution within the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Seven of the 12—Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands—are all parties to the sulphur protocol to the convention, which requires a reduction of at least 30 per cent. in national annual emissions of sulphur by 1993, from 1980 levels. All member states except Portugal have signed the nitrogen oxides protocol to the convention, which requires national annual emissions to be stabilised at 1987 levels by 1994. All member states except Ireland have also signed the latest protocol to the convention, requiring national emissions of volatile organic compounds, including hydrocarbons, to be reduced by at least 30 per cent. by 1999, in most cases from 1988 levels.

In 1984 the United Kingdom Government adopted the aim of reducing annual sulphur dioxide emissions from all existing sources by 30 per cent. on 1980 levels by the year 2000. We are on target to meet this objective, and more. In 1984 we also set ourselves the ambitious aim of achieving a 30 per cent. reduction from 1980 levels of nitrogen oxides emissions by the end of the 1990s. This has been made even more difficult by the recent growth in road traffic, but it remains an aim for which we strive.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library details of the recipients of any management or compensation payment under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mr. Maclean: No, this information is confidential to the parties concerned.

Home Insulation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the proportion of the existing United Kingdom stock of dwellings that lack *(a)* draught stripping to doors and windows, *(b)* insulation to hot water cylinder, *(c)* roof insulation, *(d)* cavity wall or solid wall insulation, *(e)* floor insulation and *(f)* double glazing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Latest estimates for Great Britain are as follows:

Proportion of households lacking	*Per cent.*
(a) Draught stripping to doors and windows (includes only those households without double glazing)	35·0
(b) Insulation to hot water cylinder	6·0
(c) Roof insulation	11·0
(d) Cavity wall or solid wall insulation	75·0
(e) Floor insulation	n/a
(f) Double glazing	54·0

Recycled Materials

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for the last available year, the amount of *(a)* paper and cardboard, *(b)* ferrous metals, *(c)* glass and *(d)* non-ferrous metals, including aluminium recovered as a percentage of consumption in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) each of the other EC nations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: In 1990 the use of recycled materials as a percentage of consumption in the United Kingdom was as follows:

	Percentage
Glass	21
Paper and board	31
Aluminium[1]	12
Copper	47
Lead[2]	62
Tin[3]	57
Zinc	22
Ferrous metal	46

[1] Excludes aluminium scrap which moves directly from the aluminium metal industry to other industries.
[2] Relates to the actual quantity recovered, not the recycled scrap used in manufacture.
[3] Includes in-house recycling of waste but excludes exports.

Comparable figures for other EC countries are not readily available.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy for the eco-labelling scheme to require a minimum requirement of recycled material content.

Mr. Maclean: Criteria for the award of a European eco-label will be decided by the EC Regulatory Committee, which comprises representatives of the Commission and member states, after consultation with interested groups. The proposal for criteria put to the committee will be based on a full cradle to grave analysis of all the environmental impacts of the product group and will, where appropriate, take account of the potential for requiring a proportion of recycled material.

Eco-Labels

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on a system of bands of fees on the basis of the applicants revenues in order to encourage small companies to apply for the eco-label.

Mr. Maclean: The European Commission is drawing up proposals for indicative fee guidelines as they are required to do by the EC regulation. The draft proposals envisage an application fee, to meet the costs of processing the application, and an annual licence fee for the use of the label which would be related to the annual value of sales in the Community of the product awarded the eco-label.

Consumer Services (Environmental Impact)

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what environmental evaluation is being undertaken of consumer services with high environmental impact, with particular reference to dry cleaning.

Mr. Maclean: My Department is not aware of any environmental evaluation which is being undertaken of consumer services.

In the early stages of development the focus of the European eco-labelling scheme will be on consumer products. Consumer services, such as dry cleaning, may well be covered later once the scheme is established.

Grants, London

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken to assist projects whose grants from the London boroughs grants unit have been stopped; and whether he will consider extending Government financial support to the library at the Institute for Race Relations.

Mr. Robin Squire: The award of grants under the London borough grant scheme is a matter for decision by the London boroughs, all of whom participate in the operation of the scheme. The Government have no plans to provide alternative funding where this has been refused under the London boroughs grant scheme.

Planning Decisions

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what obligations he imposes on those to whom he has delegated responsibility for planning decisions to hear oral evidence.

Mr. Baldry: The procedures to be followed by inspectors holding inquiries are set out in the Town and Country Planning Appeals (Determination by Inspectors) (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1988. The rules give certain parties, such as the local planning authority, the appellant and the owner of the appeal site, a statutory right to appear at the inquiry. Any other persons wishing to appear, for example local residents, may do so at the inspector's discretion.

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against planning decisions by the Worthing borough council have been allowed by him or the planning inspectorate in each of the last five years.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is as follows:

Planning appeals decided: Worthing borough council

Year	*Appeals decided*	*Appeals allowed*	*Percentage allowed Worthing*	*Percentage allowed England*
1987-88	34	14	41·2	37·6
1988-89	56	20	35·7	36·7
1989-90	64	19	29·7	33·4
1990-91	75	22	29·3	33·6
1991-92	50	13	26·0	33·7

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what criteria he delegates decisions on planning appeals to the planning inspectorate.

Mr. Baldry: All planning appeals, except for a few exceptions, are transferred to planning inspectors for decision. However I do have the power to "recover" jurisdiction. Normally this power is only exercised in cases involving large scale development and where issues of more than local importance are likely to be raised. The criteria for recovery are published in the 1986 White Paper "Planning: Appeals, Call-In and Major Public Inquiries" (Cm 43).

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why the planning inspector dealing with the appeal against the granting of planning permission for the Homebase store on land at Littlehampton and Yeomans road, Worthing, failed to take oral evidence from those opposed to the last-minute change of plans put forward by the applicants.

Mr. Baldry: The question of an alternative layout for the proposed development arose towards the end of the four-day public inquiry. As a result it was not possible for the inspector to hear further evidence from all those who had already appeared at the inquiry without an adjournment. This would have prolonged the time before the appeal was determined. However, to ensure that local objectors views about the alternative layout were taken into account, the inspector arranged for them to be given an opportunity to make written representations to him before he made his decision.

Travellers

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects that the consultation paper being compiled by his Department, concerning the problems caused by hippies and new age travellers, will be issued.

Mr. Baldry: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) on 19 June 1992 at column *693*.

Research Animals

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to use the United Kingdom presidency of the EC to press for an end to the import of wild-caught and captive-bred primates throughout the EC for research purposes.

Mr. Maclean: The import of primates into the EC is already controlled under existing regulations governing the wildlife trade. These are conservation measures, intended primarily to ensure that wild populations are not seriously depleted. They are not concerned with the purposes of import, except for endangered species. During our presidency, we shall be giving priority to the negotiation of a new European Community regulation to tighten these controls significantly, but we have no plans to see a general ban on the import of animals for use in research, which is primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet representatives of the Governments of the Philippines and Indonesia to urge them to end their trade in primates for research.

Mr. Maclean: I have no plans to do so. The Government of Indonesia are already well aware of

concern in the European Community about the effects of wildlife exports. This has led to a suspension of imports of Indonesian specimens of many species, including primates, into the EC. We are prepared to take similar action on conservation grounds whenever trade is judged likely to pose a threat to species. The use of primates in research is, however, primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary.

New Housing

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he proposes to determine the provision for new housing to be made in new regional planning guidance for London and the south-east.

Mr. Howard: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of a letter which I have sent to the chairman of SERPLAN—the London and south east regional planning conference. SERPLAN is invited to put forward proposals for the allocation of future provision for new housing between London and the counties of the south east. These proposals should be based on a regional total rate of 57,000 additional dwellings per year, over the period 1991 to 2011. I will take account of SERPLAN's proposals, together with any other views on these matters which are put to my Department, in deciding the regional housing provision to be included in draft new regional planning guidance for the south east. The draft will then be published for consultation in due course.

Coastal Zones

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will publish their response to the Environment Select Committee's second report of Session 1991-92, on coastal zone protection and planning; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are today publishing their response to the Environment Select Committee's report on coastal zone protection and planning. We welcome the Committee's report as a valuable contribution to the debate on the effective management of our coast.

This country has a record of success in protecting the coast. Two thirds of the coastline of England and Wales is undeveloped arable land, woodland, scrub, pasture or natural habitat. The planning system provides a tried mechanism for the effective resolution of conflict on land which faces pressures from a variety of uses.

It is important that we build on these achievements, to tackle the new issues that are emerging on our coast and to ensure an effective response to the challenges of the next century including pressures of economic growth and increased recreation, the impact of global warming, and demands to respond to our growing knowledge and awareness of the value of the coastal environment.

We already have a substantial programme of work underway to achieve this including:

—planning guidance for the coast and a recent policy statement on Heritage coasts;

—guidance on responding to sea level rise, and a commitment to develop a national flood and coastal defence strategy;

—requirements for environmental assessment of a wide range of coastal developments on land and at sea, and new procedures (under the Transport and Works Act 1992) to control many types of development in inshore waters;

—action to reduce coastal pollutants and develop Statutory Water Quality objectives for estuarine and coastal waters;

—a commitment to implement the EC Habitats Directive for marine as well as land-based habitats.

Our response to the Committee's report now proposes:

—support for multi-agency management plans for estuaries and inshore waters, aimed particularly at coastal recreation activities, and at nature conservation, and a review of local authority powers to control water sports and pleasure boats in inshore waters.

—a review of the effectiveness of present regulatory systems controlling construction and development below the low water mark;

The Government will bring forward a discussion paper examining both these issues more fully.

The Government response also includes commitments to maintaining national co-ordination arrangements for coastal policy; reviewing controls over marine aggregates dredging; promoting regional coastal defence strategies; furthering environmentally acceptable coastal defence solutions and developing policies for controlled retreat to create new habitats; and promoting clear agreement on responsibilities for pollution control.

Copies of the Government response are being laid before the House and will be available in the Library.

Social Housing

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing his Department's forecasts for all social housing completions, and the actual number of completions, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: The Department does not prepare forecasts of housebuilding completions. Estimates of actual new housebuilding completions by housing associations and by local authorities are published in "Housing and Construction Statistics". Figures for 1979 are in table 6.1 of the annual publication "Housing and Construction Statistics 1979-1989: Great Britain"; figures for each year from 1980 to 1990 are in the 1980-1990 edition. Provisional estimates for 1991 are shown in table 1.2 of the December quarter 1991 edition (Number 48) of the publication "Housing and Construction Statistics; Part 1". Copies of these publications are in the Library.

County Council Elections

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his intention that the county council elections, in counties included in the first tranche of authorities for review by the Local Government Commission, will take place as scheduled in May 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Secretary of State may not use his powers under the Local Government Act 1992 to postpone elections or order fresh ones until the Commission has finished reviewing an area and he has decided on the changes to local government structure that he will recommend to Parliament. We therefore expect all county council elections to go ahead in May 1993.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current value of land held by each urban development corporation.

Mr. Robin Squire: The value at 31 March 1992 of land held by urban development corporations is set out in the table. Land held for roads and other public utilities has a nil disposal value.

Value of Land held by Urban Development Corporations

	£ million
Black Country	38·786
Bristol	11·492
Central Manchester	3·980
Leeds	12·284
London Docklands	54·392
Merseyside	26·846
Sheffield	15·340
Teesside	64·680
Trafford Park	22·293
Tyne and Wear	30·323

Jet Skis

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the dates on which his Department has received representations from Worthing borough council and the right hon. Member for Worthing regarding providing seaside councils with further byelaw powers to control the use of jet skis in designated areas of the sea; for what reasons he has decided not to take any action; and if he will now give these powers to local authorities.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

We received representations about the provision of additional byelaw-making powers to control jet skis from my right hon. Friend on behalf of Worthing borough council in February 1992. A reply was sent on 2 March 1992. This matter has now been considered further and I refer my right hon. Friend to the Government's response to the second report from the House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment on coastal zone protection and planning (CM 2011), which is published today. This states that the Government intend to issue a discussion paper which will include consideration of "the scope for improving local authority powers to control water sports and pleasure boats in inshore waters, making it easier to implement zoning in different activities which may be incompatible for safety, nature conservation or other reasons, and to control behaviour which causes a public or environmental nuisance" (paragraph 49).

Forests

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC Council of Ministers to establish an international review process for the forest and desertification principles outlined at the Earth summit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have been asked to reply.

On forests I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 6 July at column *17*. On desertification, we expect the UN General Assembly this autumn to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee to elaborate an international convention on desertification. We will be co-ordinating the position of the EC during the General Assembly as part of our presidency responsibilities.

SCOTLAND

Approved Training Organisations

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the standards used to award the status of approved training organisations.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* There are seven functions for each of which aims must be met and a number of criteria satisfied for the award of approved training organisation status. These functions, which are common to both employment training and youth training, are set out:

identification of training needs;
training designed and delivered to national standards;
effective quality management;
recruitment, selection and competence of staff;
equal opportunities policy;
health, safety and suitability of premises and equipment;
financial viability.

The aims and criteria are detailed in a document entitled "Approved Training Organisation" published by the Training Agency, a copy of which is in the House Library.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many approved training organisations there have been in Scotland in each of the last three years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* As at 30 April 1990, 18 training agents and 157 training managers for employment training in Scotland had achieved approved training organisation stage 1. Corresponding information for youth training was not held centrally. In subsequent years, responsibility for monitoring the standards achieved by training providers has rested with local enterprise companies which maintain their own records on the training providers with which they contract.

Salmon

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) whether salmon imported into Britain from Ireland and Norway is subject to routine testing for ivermectin residues; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if testing for ivermectin residues in Scottish produced farmed salmon has been introduced on a routine basis; and what information he has on the residues detected.

Mr. Lang: Samples of farmed salmon will be obtained from retail outlets throughout the United Kingdom in 1992 under the retail animal products survey, as part of the Government's food surveillance programme. Samples will be as representative of the national food supply as possible, and some 10 per cent. of the salmon samples analysed will have been imported from Norway and the Republic of Ireland. These samples will be analysed for residues of ivermectin.

A 12-month programme of residue testing in farmed fish is also being conducted in the United Kingdom in response to a request for information from the EC Commission. This programme includes the analysis of 50 samples of farmed salmon, obtained either directly from fish farms or United Kingdom wholesalers, for ivermectin. These analyses have been completed and ivermectin was not detected in any samples.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what progress has been made in the case of the alleged use of ivermectin for the treatment of sea lice in farmed salmon by *(a)* Glencoe Salmon in June 1991 and *(b)* Wester Ross Salmon in January;

(2) how many cases of the use of ivermectin for the treatment of sea lice in farmed salmonids in Scotland have been reported.

Mr. Lang: A report on the alleged use of ivermectin at Glencoe Salmon Ltd. was made to the procurator fiscal at Fort William, who decided to take no criminal proceedings. A report concerning Wester Ross Salmon has been made to the procurator fiscal at Dornoch.

There is no requirement to report allegations about the use of ivermectin to my Department. Such reports should be made to the appropriate river purification authority or to the veterinary medicines directorate.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the decision to support continuing the minimum import price for Norwegian salmon after 30 May; what measures he plans to introduce to safeguard the future of the Scottish salmon farming industry; and if he will estimate the decrease in production since that decision came into effect.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The minimum import price was introduced last November for a three-month period in response to a specific threat to the European Community market of a surge in supply arising from substantial quantities of frozen salmon stored in Norway. It was subsequently extended for a further three-month period until the end of May. In the light of Norwegian action to dispose of the frozen stocks, it was decided that yet a further extension of the minimum import price could not be justified.

The Government are considering proposals to help stabilise the salmon market in the longer term through the establishment of producer organisations. The production and growth cycle for salmon is such that production will not have changed since the end of May. Rates of harvesting are for individual commercial decision and will be based on many considerations.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department in developing analytical techniques for testing for residues of ivermectin in the flesh of farmed salmon.

Mr. Lang: An analytical method for detection of ivermectin residues in salmon muscle has been developed and validated at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's Torry research station in Aberdeen.

Prisoners

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements are in place for the post-release supervision and support of discharged prisoners with mental illness; what further initiatives he plans to improve these services; what plans he has to ensure the proper co-ordination of service delivery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Psychiatric and social work supervision may, where appropriate, be the subject of conditions in the licences on which life sentence prisoners and some determinate sentence prisoners are released. In addition, community-based psychiatric and social work services are available to all former prisoners as to any other person who requires such services.

"The National Objectives and Standards for Social Work Services in the Criminal Justice System", issued by the Scottish Office in February 1991, identified in paragraphs 108 and 109 the special needs of offenders who are mentally handicapped or disturbed and stressed that it is a vital part of the prison-based social work task to encourage and assist such prisoners to make contact with the relevant helping agencies prior to release. In such situations, the role of the community-based social worker is to facilitate the provision of necessary rehabilitation programmes or accommodation.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his proposals to promote the development of arts for disabled people in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend's responsibilities for the arts exclude the live and performing arts which are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for National Heritage. In relation to museums and galleries, it is for the management of each organisation to consider how its buildings and its collections can be made accessible to disabled people. Such consideration is encouraged by the Scottish Museums Council whose grants to local museums are dependent to a large extent on the provision for disabled people made or planned by the applicants.

The Scottish Film Council has already successfully encouraged the seven regional film theatres which it part-funds to improve access for people with disabilities and is considering how access can be further enhanced.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new initiatives he proposes to enhance the right of disabled people to have free and adequate access to *(a)* health services, *(b)* life-long education, *(c)* suitably adapted housing, *(d)* transport, *(e)* training and employment, *(f)* arts, leisure, recreation and cultural services and *(g)* care in the community.

Mr. Stewart: The Government's policy is to enable people with disabilities to live as independently as possible, in their own homes and in the community, and to be as mobile as possible, so that they can enjoy to the fullest extent all opportunities in education, employment, leisure and recreation. The following initiatives are currently in prospect:

(i) Amendments are being prepared to the Buildings Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1990 to extend the current requirement of access for disabled people to ground floors, to upper floors of all buildings except dwellings and warehouses.

(ii) Electrically powered wheelchairs, which can be used both indoors and outdoors, will begin to be issued in the autumn to disabled people for whom they are appropriate.

(iii) From 1 April 1993 the duty to secure adequate and efficient further education will transfer from education authorities to the Secretary of State. In exercising that duty he will have regard to the position of people over school age with learning difficulties. Boards of management of further education colleges will be given guidance on the exercise of their responsibilities for students with learning difficulties. Regard will also be had to this in funding the colleges.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which disability organisations he has met in the past 12 months to discuss the provision of services to disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has not met any of the disability organisations formally in

the past year, but he did open the Margaret Blackwood housing association development at Uddingston which provides 38 houses and flats, mainly for disabled people. On 20 September, I had the pleasure of opening the Scottish mobility roadshow 1991, which was organised by Disability Scotland. It was the first of its kind in Scotland and the Government contributed £20,000 to its costs.

Scottish Office officials are in regular contact with many of the organisations representing people with disabilities.

Co-operatives

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to encourage the development of industrial and commercial co-operatives in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Renfrew district; what assistance he will make available for such initiatives; what criteria he will use to assess applications for assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: About £200,000 is paid currently from the urban programme to five workers' co-operative development projects in deprived urban areas in Scotland. Four of these are located in Strathclyde, including the Renfrew district co-operative development project with annual running costs of £42,300. Under the new urban programme guidelines issued in February, applications for funding other such projects can still be made.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish Co-operative Development Company to discuss the promotion and development of workers' co-operatives in industry, commerce and public services; when he next plans to meet them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has not met representatives of the Scottish Co-operatives Development Company, but I have agreed to meet them on a mutually convenient date. The company already has close contact with officials in my Department.

Industry

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the impact that the recession has had on industry in Scotland during the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The table shows the index of production and construction—less oil and gas—for Scotland, by quarter, from the first quarter of 1990 to the fourth quarter of 1991. The table also shows, separately, the indices for production industries—standard industrial classification divisions 1 to 4—manufacturing—standard industrial classification divisions 2 to 4—and construction—standard industrial classification division 5.

Index of Production and Construction in Scotland: 1990Q1 to 1991Q4

1985 = 100	*Production and construction (less oil and gas)*	*Production industries*	*Manufacturing*	*Construction*
1990				
Q1	117·0	118·0	121·1	109·8
Q2	115·5	117·5	119·5	104·9
Q3	110·4	111·3	113·5	105·2
Q4	109·7	109·8	110·1	108·2
1991				
Q1	109·0	109·7	109·2	105·5
Q2	109·4	109·8	109·4	107·5
Q3	110·9	111·2	111·9	109·2
Q4	110·6	111·0	110·7	108·7
Percentage change				
1991 on 1990	−2·8	−3·3	−4·5	0·7

Source: Scottish Office Industry Department.

The 1991Q4 figure is the latest available for Scotland; the 1992Q1 figure will be published on 12 August.

The best sources of more up-to-date information on Scottish industry are the business surveys. The April 1992 CBI industrial trends survey reported that, in manufacturing, output had continued to fall in the first four months of 1992, but that the rate of decline had been slower than at any time since the end of 1990. Business confidence had improved marginally over the previous four months. The CBI survey also found that export order books had strengthened considerably since the previous survey in January and that investment in innovation and training was expected to increase over the coming year.

Electricity

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if Scottish Power will be required to submit a full environmental impact assessment statement in support of its plans to create an interconnection of the Scottish and Irish electricity grids.

Mr. Stewart: Yes. Scottish Power is required to submit an environmental assessment for any proposals it may have to erect high-voltage overhead lines.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from conservation and environmental groups in regard to the announcement by Scottish Power of its plans to build an interconnector cable between the Scottish grid in Ayrshire and the Northern Ireland electricity grid in County Antrim; and if he has had any recent discussions with Scottish Power over the need to construct additional overground pylons to service the interconnector.

Mr. Stewart: No application has yet been made to the Secretary of State by Scottish Power in respect of an overhead power line as part of its plans for a link with Northern Ireland. Several representations expressing concern about these plans have been received from a number of groups and individuals. Some preliminary discussions have taken place between Scottish Power and Historic Scotland.

Johnstone West Sports Pavilion

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total estimated capital cost of the development formerly known as the Johnstone west sports pavilion; what was the amount financed by *(a)* urban funding and *(b)* local authority funding; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total estimated capital cost is £396,117. The full cost will be met by the urban programme, involving contributions of 75 per cent. and 25 per cent. from the Scottish Office and Renfrew district council, respectively.

Further Education

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress of the new arrangements for the management of further education colleges; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Good progress is being made in preparing the colleges for incorporation on 1 April 1993. Colleges are responding positively and constructively to this process and we have allocated £2·3 million to assist them. An order was recently made listing the colleges to transfer and setting 1 September 1992 as the beginning of the transitional period. A recurrent funding discussion paper issued in June and a strategy for college management information systems is at an advanced stage. In addition, a wide range of activities, including a seminar programme and the preparation of training materials, is underway.

Housing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will visit the Paisley, South constituency to evaluate the need for investment in public sector housing; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to visit Paisley, South. Renfrew district council's relative housing needs and its plans for tackling these needs were taken fully into account when making decisions about final housing capital allocations for 1992-93. Renfrew's gross final housing revenue account capital allocation for investment in its own housing stock in 1992-93 totals £18·439 million. It is for the council to decide how best to deploy these considerable resources to meet local housing needs. The council should include its plans for future housing investment in its housing capital programme when this is submitted to the Scottish Office Environment Department later this year.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will extend the consultation period on compulsory competitive tendering for housing management in Scotland until the end of the year; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* We have allowed over three months for the receipt of responses to the consultation paper on compulsory competitive tendering for housing management. I consider this to be a reasonable period in which interested parties can respond, although if particular bodies face difficulty in responding by the 18 September deadline they should contact the Scottish Office Environment Department at the address given in the consultation paper to discuss whether a short extension can be granted. Our proposals on CCT for housing management form an integral part of the programme of action set out in the tenants charter for Scotland, designed to improve the quality and efficiency of the housing service available to council tenants.

Deer

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has in relation to his consultation paper on deer legislation in Scotland dated December 1991; and what plans he has to deal with responses to this paper.

Mr. Lang: There were some 80 responses to the consultation on deer legislation in Scotland. These are now receiving careful consideration and follow-up meetings have been held, at official level, with a number of respondents. I shall reach a view on how best to take matters forward once I have completed a full assessment of the many wide-ranging views expressed.

Paisley Pattern Goods

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will commission a feasibility study into the commercial viability of manufacturing paisley pattern goods in the town of Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has no plans to commission a feasibility study into the commercial viability of manufacturing paisley pattern goods in Paisley.

Following earlier representations by the hon. Member on the same subject, I passed the suggestion of a feasibility study on to the local enterprise company. It is for the local enterprise company to decide how to pursue the issue.

Local Authority Members

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to review the payments made to elected members of local authorities; what criteria he will use to evaluate the adequacy of payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The new system of councillors' allowances which was introduced in April 1991 is currently under review. The review will not include travel and subsistence or other allowances payable outside the scheme. My right hon. Friend will continue to review the levels and limits within the scheme on a regular basis.

Town Twinning

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on town twinning between Scottish local authorities and their counterparts in Europe.

Mr. Stewart: It is for individual local authorities to determine what twinning arrangements, if any, they have with their European neighbours.

Ravenscraig

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what new assessments have been made of the social and economic impact of the closure of Ravenscraig on the economy of *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Lanarkshire and *(c)* Motherwell district;

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* Scottish Enterprise and *(b)* other interested parties on the likely social and economic impact of the closure of Ravenscraig.

Mr. Stewart: We would not expect to be aware of all assessments of these matters, some of which could be carried out by a wide range of individuals and organisations with no direct connection with the Government. The economic needs of Lanarkshire were investigated in depth by the Lanarkshire working group last year; and the Scottish Office Industry Department, Scottish Enterprise and the Lanarkshire development agency, in collaboration, continue to keep under review the social and economic impact of the contraction of the steel industry in Lanarkshire. This work has informed the putting in place of a substantial package of measures to promote the economic development of Lanarkshire and continues to inform the process of developing and adding to that package. This process involves discussions with the local authorities in Lanarkshire and a range of other bodies. I and my right hon. Friend have discussed various aspects of this subject with the chairman of Scottish Enterprise and a wide range of other interested parties on various occasions.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what practical assistance he is providing to existing businesses in Lanarkshire which are directly and indirectly dependent on Ravenscraig for employment to assist them in diversifying their activities; and what level of expenditure is involved.

Mr. Stewart: The full range of Government programmes to assist industry in various ways is available to companies in Lanarkshire, which benefits from assisted area status. In addition, businesses in Lanarkshire which need to diversify will benefit from the assistance available from Lanarkshire development agency, which has received substantial additional resources in the current and past years as a result of the Government's commitment to fund additional activity to add impetus to the economic and physical development of Lanarkshire. The precise level of expenditure on assisting the general class of companies which the hon. Member describes will depend substantially on the level of demand for assistance from these companies.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest estimates he has made of the potential costs of reclamation of former steel sites at Ravenscraig; and what proportion of the cost is likely to be met by *(a)* British Steel and *(b)* public expenditure.

Mr. Stewart: Estimates of the potential costs of reclamation are a matter for consideration in the first instance by Scottish Enterprise and the Lanarkshire development agency. I am aware that additional information necessary to the production of any reliable estimate is being obtained in collaboration with British Steel. It is for British Steel to consider the level of expenditure relevant to reclamation which will fall to it. The size of any input from public expenditure will depend partly on that consideration and partly on the form which action in relation to the future use of the sites takes.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with *(a)* British Steel, *(b)* Scottish Enterprise and *(c)* other interested parties on the reclamation of former steel sites at Ravenscraig.

Mr. Stewart: This is a matter for consideration in the first instance by Scottish Enterprise and the Lanarkshire development agency, which are in discussion with British Steel. The Scottish Office is kept in touch with progress.

Hunterston

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress he has made in discussions with British Steel in relation to industrial development at Hunterston.

Mr. Stewart: The Government and Scottish Enterprise continue to investigate the possibility of industrial development at Hunterston in consultation with various interested parties.

Forestry

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the amount of Forestry Commission land, in acres, held in 1980 and the amount sold off in each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The Forestry Commission managed 1,263,400 hectares on 31 March 1980. The amount of land, in hectares, disposed by the Forestry Commission in each year since 1980 is shown below.

Year ending 31 March	*Area disposed (hectares)*
1981	2,240
1982	10,423
1983	12,108
1984	44,570
1985	28,857
1986	16,573
1987	10,956
1988	8,929
1989	7,675
1990	7,851
1991	7,428
[1]1992	6,684

[1] (provisional).
One hectare = 2·471 acres).

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking against infestation by aphids attacking Scottish forests.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* The only species of aphid which is causing significant damage to forests in Scotland is the green spruce aphid—Elatobium abietinum—populations of which increase following mild winters and springs of the kind experienced

in Scotland this year. This aphid feeds on the older needles of spruce trees causing discolouration and loss of needles. In severe infestations, the current year's foliage can also be affected. Although the aphid reduces the rate of growth of the trees it does not cause permanent damage or death.

There is no practical means of controlling the aphid over large areas, although Christmas trees are regularly sprayed against it. The Forestry Commission's research division is seeking to develop strains of spruce which will be more resistant to attack by the aphid.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what public consultation procedures were undertaken, prior to the granting of financial assistance in respect of afforestation in Strath Cuileannach, Sutherland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* Before the Forestry Commission approved the woodland grant scheme application in this case, it consulted the then Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland, the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the Red Deer Commission, the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department and Highland regional council. This involved consideration of an environmental statement provided by the applicants under the terms of the Environmental Assessment (Afforestation) Regulations 1988, which was also advertised in local newspapers for public comment. Planting has only just started and no grants have been paid to date.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to respond to the report from Dr. Tim Hunter on the investment of £2 million of public money in the Forest Farm afforestation scheme in Sutherland; how many long-term jobs he expects to be created as a result of this investment; how many long-term jobs are expected to be lost as a result of this scheme; and whether he will urgently review the criteria governing public investment in private forestry as a result of Dr. Hunter's report.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* I am studying Dr. Hunter's report, which I received last week, and a response will be sent to him soon.

The Forest Farm afforestation scheme is expected to create 10 jobs in the long term. The present owners acquired the land with vacant possession, so the scheme has not, in itself, resulted in any job losses; in the region of 1,500 hectares will continue to be used for sheep grazing which will provide continuing employment for at least one person.

The planting proposals were subject to environmental assessment and involved widespread consultation as described in the answer I have given today to a question from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). I am satisfied that the criteria governing the payment of forestry grant were properly followed in this case and I can see no need to review them.

Fisheries Protection

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment his office has made of the effectiveness of fisheries protection in Scottish waters; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency will shortly publish its first annual report. This will analyse performance and the effectiveness of fisheries enforcement in Scottish waters. A key indicator of the effectiveness of fisheries protection is the number of boardings achieved. The number of boardings of fishing vessels in Scottish waters has increased from 1,406 in 1985-86 to 2,513 in 1991-92.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about performance targets for the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency for 1992-93.

Mr. Lang: For the financial year 1992-93 I have set the following targets:

	Target
Aerial surveillance—percentage of hours flown on task	85
Aerial surveillance—cost per aircraft sighting	£95
Marine surveillance—number of boardings at sea	2,500
Marine surveillance—cost per boarding	£2,600
Sea fisheries inspectorate—cost per log sheet check	£40·71
50 per cent. of cases for prosecution to be reported within six weeks of offence being detected and 90 per cent. within eight weeks.	
Number of cases where court proceedings are taken as percentage of offences reported to prosecuting authorities	75

In order to ensure that the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency uses its resources efficiently, I have set it a target to achieve cash releasing efficiency gains of 6 per cent. over 1991-92.

The chief executive will be directly accountable to me for the achievement of these targets, which will be reported in the agency's annual report.

Ferry Statistics

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of foot passengers and vehicles carried by each of the ferry routes to the Scottish islands for the last five years in full.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is contained in table 10.9 of Scottish transport statistics, No. 12, 1990-91, published by the Government Statistical Service on 12 June, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the ferry fares charged for island and non-island resident passengers and vehicles for those routes which receive deficit funding from his Department.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Deficit subsidy is paid in the case of services operated by Caledonian MacBrayne to eliminate the overall deficit incurred by the company in operating a network of approved services. The subsidy is not related to deficits incurred on specific routes. Information on fares is available from the company. The company does not discriminate between island and non-island residents in its fares structure.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list for each local enterprise company the budget made available by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise for the provision of youth training places in 1991-92 and 1992-93 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1992-93 prices, indicating in both cases the percentage difference;

(2) if he will list for each local enterprise company the budget made available by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise for 1991-92 and 1992-93 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1992-93 prices, indicating in both cases the percentage difference;

(3) if he will list for each local enterprise company the budget made available by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise for the provision of employment training places for 1991-92 and 1992-93 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1992-93 prices, indicating in both cases the percentage difference.

Mr. Stewart: The allocation of resources to local enterprise companies is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have asked the chairmen of these bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list for each local enterprise company the number of training weeks contracted for under youth training *(a)* in 1991-92 and *(b)* in 1992-93 and if he will give the percentage difference;

(2) if he will list for each local enterprise company the number of training weeks contracted for under employment training *(a)* in 1991-92 and *(b)* in 1992-93; and if he will give the percentage difference.

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 3 July, *Official Report*, column *751*, and have asked the chairman of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

Health

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to seek to improve the health of the people of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: We are today publishing "Scotland's Health —A Challenge To Us All". This new policy statement, which updates the policy statement "Health Education in Scotland" published a year ago, announces a range of measures which the Government propose to take in Scotland in relation to smoking and diet, to develop action on accidents, to promote health in schools and at the workplace and otherwise to seek to improve the health of the people of Scotland. I and all my ministerial colleagues in the Scottish Office will be actively involved in pushing these initiatives forward.

Last year, we set targets, and defined priority areas, for seeking to improve health in Scotland, and we also set up the Health Education Board for Scotland, with an increased budget, to lead the health education effort. This further statement builds on those developments.

The Government and the NHS have important roles to play in improving Scotland's health record, and that objective is high on our agenda. But others also have important parts to play, including the local authorities, the voluntary sector, employers, the food industry and the media. Above all, individual members of the public can help to safeguard their own health by adopting healthy lifestyles. This new policy statement, of which a copy is being placed in the Library, provides a framework within which we can all work to ensure that the Scottish people live longer and healthier lives.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to make an announcement about the future of the water and sewerage services in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have not yet decided on the future structure of these services. The consultation paper on local government reform last year indicated that water and sewerage services might best be handled by bodies separate from the proposed new unitary authorities.

The Government have set high standards for the quality of water supply and the reduction of water pollution. To achieve these, very substantial sums will have to be invested to improve the water and sewerage infrastructure.

I have now decided to appoint consultants to advise me on alternative forms of organisation for water and sewerage services in Scotland, including ways in which the private sector might contribute enterprise and investment to this vital public service.

The consultancy will help to assess these issues.

I shall ask the consultants to report quickly. I then intend to consult on proposals for the future of these services in the autumn in parallel with consultations on the reform of local government.

Historic Scotland

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the key performance targets he has set for Historic Scotland for 1992-93.

Sir Hector Monro: The table shows the key performance targets for 1992-93 which I have set for Historic Scotland, with the 1991-92 outturn figures given for comparison.

	1991-92 outturn	*1992-93 target*
Protecting the built heritage		
i. Number of ancient monuments of national importance to be scheduled	307	300
ii. Number of listed building resurvey units to be completed	153	160
iii. Number of historic building repair grants accepted	122	120
iv Conservation of monuments in care	contain maintenance backlog	
Promoting and presenting the built heritage		
i. Number of visitors to monuments in care	2·37m	2·49m
ii Total income	£6·1m	£7·1m

	1991-92 outturn	1992-93 target
Management		
i. Value for money savings on maintenance of monuments in care	—	1·5 per cent.
ii. Exchequer contribution for net current expenditure	below inflation	at or below inflation

Registers of Scotland

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what targets have been set for the Registers of Scotland executive agency for 1992-93.

Mr. Lang: When the agency was launched in April 1990, my predecessor set its performance targets for its first three years. These were announced in a written answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) on 5 April 1990, *Official Report*, column *829*.

The targets are revised annually, and the annual targets for 1992-93, which I have recently approved, are to reduce average turnround times on the agency's four main categories of work as follows:

(i) for recording writs on the sasine register, a reduction to 10 weeks;

(ii) for registration of dealings in the land register, a reduction to 16 weeks;

(iii) for first registrations in the land register, a reduction to 37 weeks; and

(iv) for registration in the land register of transfers of parts of previously registered interests, a reduction to 68 weeks.

The agency was also set a target of achieving a reduction in unit costs of at least 5 per cent. in real terms for each of its main categories of work during 1992-93. In addition, the agency will continue to ensure that its expenditure is covered by fees and other income.

The agency's chief executive, the keeper of the registers, is accountable to me for the achievement of these targets, and the agency's record of performance against its targets is reported in the keeper's annual report.

Scottish National Heritage

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names and emoluments of the members of the north-western regional board of Scottish Natural Heritage.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 26 June 1992]:* It is for Scottish Natural Heritage to appoint the members of its committees. I have asked SNH to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Regional Assistance

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a table of expenditure on regional financial assistance since the 1984 revision of the assisted areas at *(a)* current prices and *(b)* 1984 prices in the travel-to-work areas of Arbroath, Bathgate, Cumnock and Sanquhar, Dumbarton, Dundee, Glasgow, Greenock, Irvine, Kilmarnock, Lanarkshire, Alloa, Ayr, Campbeltown, Dunfermline, Dunoon and Bute, Falkirk, Forres, Girvan, Invergordon/Dingwall, Kirkcaldy, Lochaber and Newton Stewart.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 29 June 1992]:* The available information, which relates to regional selective assistance, regional enterprise grants and revised regional development grant, is given in the tables. Corresponding information on original regional development grant could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Table 1
Gross expenditure on regional financial assistance to industry in Scotland at current prices[1,2]

£ million

	1984-85[3]	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
Travel-to-work-areas								
Alloa	0·5	0·6	0·3	0·6	0·4	0·7	0·4	0·6
Arbroath	0·1	0·4	0·8	0·6	0·7	1·3	1·0	1·2
Ayr	0·2	1·6	2·1	3·1	1·7	1·2	2·9	3·0
Bathgate	1·6	5·1	5·9	5·6	9·7	14·6	18·0	13·2
Campbeltown	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumnock and Sanquhar	0·1	0·3	0·5	1·3	1·1	1·1	0·4	0·3
Dumbarton	0·1	0·6	1·3	0·7	1·3	0·5	0·6	0·8
Dundee	1·4	2·5	5·4	5·3	5·5	4·6	8·6	4·0
Dunfermline	0·1	1·0	1·3	1·4	0·7	1·3	1·7	0·8
Dunoon and Bute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Falkirk	0·3	1·4	0·3	0·5	1·0	3·1	2·1	2·3
Forres	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Girvan	—	—	0·2	0·5	0·4	0·4	0·4	—
Glasgow	5·7	19·1	27·9	29·3	32·4	36·7	31·8	25·0
Greenock	0·3	3·9	1·6	5·2	5·1	3·7	13·1	5·0
Invergordon and Dingwall	0·3	0·3	0·3	—	—	—	—	—
Irvine	1·6	8·3	8·1	9·8	11·6	7·5	7·5	5·5
Kilmarnock	—	0·6	1·3	2·2	1·8	1·8	2·0	0·6
Kirkcaldy	0·9	3·8	4·7	4·6	2·9	2·9	4·2	2·3
Lanarkshire	1·6	5·3	8·0	8·9	9·9	9·3	7·4	7·7
Lochaber	—	—	—	—	0·2	0·2	—	—
Newton Stewart	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Excludes original regional development grant.
[2] Actual cash expenditure incurred.
[3] From 29 November 1984.

Table 2

Gross expenditure on regional financial assistance to industry in Scotland at 1984-85 prices[1,2]

£ million

	1984-85[3]	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Travel-to-work areas								
Alloa	0·5	0·6	0·2	0·5	0·3	0·6	0·3	0·4
Arbroath	0·1	0·4	0·7	0·5	0·5	1·0	0·7	0·8
Ayr	0·2	1·5	2·0	2·7	1·4	0·9	2·0	2·0
Bathgate	1·6	4·9	5·4	4·9	7·8	11·1	12·7	8·7
Campbeltown	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumnock and Sanquhar	0·1	0·3	0·4	1·1	0·9	0·8	0·3	0·2
Dumbarton	0·1	0·6	1·2	0·6	1·0	0·4	0·4	0·5
Dundee	1·4	2·3	5·0	4·6	4·5	3·5	6·1	2·6
Dunfermline	0·1	0·9	1·2	1·2	0·5	1·0	1·2	0·5
Dunoon and Bute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Falkirk	0·3	1·3	0·3	0·4	0·8	2·3	1·5	1·5
Forres	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Girvan	—	—	0·2	0·4	0·3	0·3	0·3	—
Glasgow	5·7	18·1	25·6	25·5	26·3	27·0	22·4	16·4
Greenock	0·3	3·7	1·5	4·5	4·2	2·9	9·2	3·3
Invergordon and Dingwall	0·3	0·3	0·3	—	—	—	—	—
Irvine	1·6	7·9	7·4	8·6	9·4	5·7	5·3	3·6
Kilmarnock	—	0·6	1·2	1·9	1·5	1·3	1·4	0·4
Kirkcaldy	0·9	3·6	4·3	4·0	2·4	2·2	3·0	1·5
Lanarkshire	1·6	5·0	7·3	7·8	8·0	7·1	5·2	5·1
Lochaber	—	—	—	—	0·2	0·2	—	—
Newton Stewart	—	—		—	—	—	—	—

[1] Excludes original regional development grant.
[2] Adjusted by GDP deflator.
[3] From 29 November 1984.

European Community Bathing Standards

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to assist financially the local authorities adjacent to the River Clyde to clean up the foreshore and meet EC bathing standards.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* The aggregate external finance settlement takes full account of district councils' responsibility for clearing litter, including that from areas of foreshore to which the public have access.

Bathing water improvement depends on investment in effluent treatment by sewerage authorities and others. For 1992-93 Strathclyde regional council's capital allocation of £83 million for its water and sewerage programme fully meets its planned expenditure and is more than double the level for 1988-89. In addition, over £17 million has already been offered to the council under the Government's sewerage improvement grant scheme which provides assistance towards approved programmes of works to reduce pollution and improve environmental standards.

Mortgage Defaults

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many former Scottish Special Housing Association tenants, now Scottish Homes tenants, have had their homes repossessed because of mortgage default.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* This information is not held by the Scottish Office.

Free Tuition (Vocational Courses)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what rights a 16 or 17-year-old school leaver has to free tuition on a vocational course in a college of further education.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities recommends fee levels for courses in further education colleges. No fees are charged for under-18s on full-time non-advanced courses. After 1 April 1993, when the colleges are incorporated, it will be a condition of funding that this policy shall continue for courses falling within the Secretary of State's duty for further edcuation.

Woodlands

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what publicity has been given to the community woodland supplement which he introduced in April; and what take-up there has been.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* "The Community Woodland Supplement" was launched by my right hon. Friend in September 1991 and a press release was issued at the same time. Baroness Trumpington, the then Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, also publicised the supplement in January at the launch of the Forestry Commission's "Community Woodland Design Guidelines". Further publicity was given at the forestry expansion conference organised by the Forestry Commission in March, and in speeches by Ministers and by Forestry Commissioners on several other occasions. The supplement has been promoted in the technical press and Forestry Commission staff have publicised it at seminars with local authorities, farmers and landowners. Information about the supplement is included in the applicant's pack for the woodland grant scheme.

The Forestry Commission has received 63 applications for the supplement, of which 10 have so far been approved.

Badgers

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to discuss the problem of badger baiting with the law enforcement authorities;

(2) what plans he has to improve surveillance of cross-border activity in badger baiting;

(3) what evidence he has of badger baiting being practised in the borders; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what powers are currently available in Scotland to prosecute and sentence those convicted of badger baiting; and what plans he has to review the sentences available;

(5) what current resources are devoted to the prevention of badger baiting; and what plans he has to increase the amount of money available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* Badgers receive a level of protection in law which is unique for an unendangered animal. The baiting of any animal, including badgers, is prohibited in Scotland under the Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1912. The maximum penalty for an offence is six months' imprisonment and/or a level 4 fine—currently £1,000, but to be increased to £2,500 on 1 October 1992. It is proposed to increase the maximum fine at the next suitable legislative opportunity to level 5 on the standard scale—currently £2,000, but set to rise to £5,000 on 1 October 1992.

Badgers are also protected under the Badgers Act 1973, as amended by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which makes it an offence to ill-treat, kill, injure, or take—or attempt to kill, injure or take—or to dig for any badger except in certain specified circumstances. The Badgers Act 1991, which amends the 1973 Act and came into force on 25 October 1991, also makes it an offence intentionally or recklessly to damage, destroy or obstruct access to or any entrance of a badger sett; to cause a dog to enter a sett; or to disturb a badger which is in a sett. Such offences apply in Scotland and attract a maximum penalty of a level 5 fine—£5,000 with effect from 1 October 1992. A maximum custodial sentence of six months' imprisonment was introduced for offences under section 1 or 2 of the Badgers Act 1973 by the Criminal Justice Act 1991 on 9 December 1991.

The Badgers (Further Protection) Act 1991, which came into force on 25 September 1991, provides courts with new powers in dealing with the above offences. The courts may order the destruction of other disposal of a dog used in the commission of such offences and disqualify an offender from keeping a dog for such time as it considers fit. A Bill to consolidate badgers legislation is currently before the House of Commons.

Detailed information on the incidence of offences involving cruelty to badgers in Scotland is not separately identifiable within the Scottish Office Home and Health Department's classification of crimes and offences, but I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that badger baiting is widespread in the borders or that cross-border activity has developed. The allocation of police resources for animal protection purposes is a matter for the chief constable to decide in the light of local priorities.

Tree Preservation

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the statutes and regulations governing tree presevation orders in Scotland and when they took effect.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The principal provisions are contained in part IV of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972—C. 52—sections 57 to 60, and in part V, sections 98 and 99. These provisions have been amended in minor detail. This Act came into force on 27 August 1972, but sections 58(5) and 59(1) to (3) came into force on 17 July 1975. The powers of enforcement are extended and amended by section 54 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, which came into force on 26 March 1992.

The relevant regulations are:

The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation Order and Trees in Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Regulations 1975,
SI 1975 No. 1,204 (S.183), which came into operation on 1 September 1975.

The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation Order and Trees in Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1981,
SI 1981 No. 1,385 (S.134), which came into operation on 27 October 1981.

The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation Order and Trees in Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1984,
SI 1984 No. 329 (S.36), which came into operation on 11 April 1984.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the rights available to members of the public who seek to protect trees by means of a tree preservation order.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* Under sections 57 to 60 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972, it is the duty of planning authorities, in the interests of amenity, to make such provision as may to them appear expedient, for the preservation of trees or woodlands in their district.

These powers have been used effectively by local authorities but if the hon. Member has any particular case in mind, I should be happy for him to write to me.

Pupils (Expenditure)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the actual capital expenditure per pupil and per capita for every Scottish region since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The tables provide information about capital expenditure *(a)* per pupil, and *(b)* per head of population on local authority schools. They have been derived from local authority capital expenditure returns, the annual school census of pupil numbers and annual estimates of population.

Capital expenditure per pupil on local authority schools

(£ at out-turn prices)

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Borders	31	60	54	39	44	58	69	57	64	72	109	215
Central	61	52	48	28	22	23	31	53	64	102	118	112
Dumfries and Galloway	56	60	65	82	99	100	105	92	29	75	82	63
Fife	35	39	39	38	28	49	73	80	37	86	106	156
Grampian	79	102	140	103	80	72	103	101	29	44	52	76

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Highland	60	69	86	77	46	23	38	32	73	107	116	92
Lothian	60	69	58	68	52	54	58	36	80	79	117	96
Strathclyde	36	41	53	44	48	50	52	46	54	69	74	66
Tayside	31	25	27	31	23	35	46	34	57	64	70	56
Orkney	44	27	175	353	263	388	370	282	310	327	314	406
Shetland	663	703	800	624	579	436	252	121	131	230	183	211
Western Isles	76	98	225	263	150	165	204	579	712	421	306	447

Capital expenditure per head of population on local authority schools

(£ at out-turn prices)

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Borders	5	11	9	6	7	9	10	9	9	10	16	31
Central	12	10	9	5	4	4	5	9	10	16	18	17
Dumfries and Galloway	11	11	11	14	16	16	17	14	4	11	12	9
Fife	7	7	7	7	5	8	12	13	6	14	17	25
Grampian	15	18	24	18	13	12	16	16	4	7	8	11
Highland	12	14	16	14	8	4	7	6	13	18	19	15
Lothian	10	12	9	11	8	8	8	5	11	11	16	13
Strathclyde	7	8	10	8	8	8	9	7	8	11	11	10
Tayside	6	4	5	5	4	5	7	5	8	9	10	8
Orkney	9	5	31	63	47	65	63	47	51	53	51	66
Shetland	136	139	135	112	107	78	45	21	24	42	33	37
Western Isles	16	21	45	52	29	31	38	103	125	71	52	74

The figures in both tables relate to expenditure on nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.

Schools (Noise)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what sums he has made available, to which regional councils and for which schools, for noise insulation in the last 10 years for which information is available;

(2) if he will request Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools to make an assessment of the current effects on education in the primary schools at Balmullo, Guardbridge and Leuchars of noise nuisance from aircraft operating from RAF Leuchars;

(3) what steps he intends to take to see that Fife regional council complies with the School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967 to 1979 in relation to accoustic conditions and insulation in the primary schools at Balmullo, Guardbridge and Leuchars respectively;

(4) what sanctions are available to him in the event that a regional authority declines to comply with the School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967 to 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* Substantial resources are available to local authorities for capital expenditure on their educational building stock. Authorities are free to determine their own spending priorities within the total resources available to them.

As regards the schools in question, I understand that monitoring of the situation is taking place and I have asked my officials to keep in touch with developments.

My right hon. Friend has powers, after consultation with the authority, to issue a direction under section 19(3) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 requiring that premises be brought into conformity with the appropriate standards or requirements of the regulations.

Community Enterprises

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the contracts of local enterprise companies require them to show that they have developed community enterprises.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* Local enterprise companies' contracts are with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the detailed contents of these contracts, and their interpretation, are operational matters for these two bodies. I have asked the chairmen of the two bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence he has that Scottish Enterprise and local enterprise companies are fulfilling their responsibility to develop community enterprises.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* Scottish Enterprise has no specific statutory responsibility for developing community enterprise; and it is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise whether it chooses to impose any specific contractual responsibilities in relation to community enterprise on local enterprise companies. I do not seek information from Scottish Enterprise, which distinguishes its support for community enterprise from its activities to encourage enterprise in general.

Quarrying

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures are taken to assess the likely environmental impact of quarrying operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* For individual quarrying applications, planning authorities should take account of the likely environmental impact of a particular operation. To assist in this process, we will shortly be issuing for consultation additional guidance covering the assessment and control of quarrying's

environmental effects. Regulations already provide that, in coming to their decisions on planning applications, planning authorities should seek from the applicant a formal environmental assessment if there are likely to be significant environmental effects. The results of the environmental assessment will be an important consideration in the determination of an application. Where an application is granted permission, planning authorities have a statutory duty to review periodically the operation of mining sites, including quarrying. We are currently consulting on possible options for strengthening this review procedure.

More generally, research into the environmental impact of quarrying operations has been commissioned by the Government. A research report entitled "Environmental Effects of Surface Mineral Workings" was published earlier this year and will inform the guidance to be issued.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* The total annual salary—including reduced parliamentary salary—of most Cabinet Ministers is £63,047. The number of civil servants in the Scottish Office whose pay currently exceeds this figure is two.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has prepared a timetable for the introduction and establishment of a register of potentially contaminated land in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* It was originally proposed that the duty for local authorities to compile registers of land which is, or has been, subject to contaminative use would commence in April 1992. The registers would have been available to the public in April 1993. Regulations together with guidance on various aspects of the registers were to have been published in early 1992. In the light of representations received from local authorities, further consideration will be given to the detail of the proposals and further consultation to be undertaken. An announcement on the revised timetable will be made in due course.

Employers and Careers Service Partnerships

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the response from each local education authority in Scotland to the invitation of his Department to them to consider how they might promote partnerships in their areas between employers and the local education authority careers service; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* Seven bids have been received for financial assistance towards the establishment of careers service partnerships. These are currently being evaluated and decisions will be announced shortly. Disclosure of information about bids is a matter for those who submitted them and it would not be appropriate to place copies in the Library.

Water Disconnections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of water disconnections in Scotland in each year since 1979.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* Water supplies to domestic consumers in Scotland may be disconnected only for short-term operational reasons—for example, to undertake repairs, make connections or plumbing alterations. Supplies to non-domestic consumers may also be disconnected for other reasons, including those arising from non-payment of water charges. Information on the number of disconnections is not held centrally.

Cockle Surveys

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish the 1991 Solway cockle survey by the Marine Laboratory, Aberdeen, referred to in the consultation paper on Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Act 1984, "Proposals for the Amendment of the Existing Prohibitions on Fishing in Scottish Inshore Waters"; and if he will indicate how a member of the public can obtain a copy of the cockle survey report.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* A copy of the conclusions of the 1991 Solway cockle survey has been placed in the House of Commons Library. Copies are also available on request from my Department.

A fuller report of the survey will be published later in the year.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 9 July 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Obscene Publications

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Attorney-General if he will take action under section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 to confiscate copies of the book published by Arrow Books of which the hon. Member for Shoreham has given him details.

The Attorney-General: It is the police rather than the Crown prosecution service who initiate proceedings under section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 by the obtaining and execution of a search warrant. The Crown prosecution service would, however, expect to be consulted in advance of such action and would not endorse any such application in respect of the book in question in view of its decision not to institute proceedings under section 2 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

Mr. David Irving

Ms. Glenda Jackson: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration the Director of Public Prosecutions has given to prosecuting Mr. David Irving under the Race Relations Act 1976 over the organisation of revisionist seminars describing the holocaust as a liberal myth.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions is not currently giving consideration to any proceedings against David Irving. Anyone who has evidence giving reasonable grounds to believe that an offence has been committed should report it to the police.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Indonesian Military Personnel

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Indonesian military personnel have recently been awarded Foreign and Commonwealth Office scholarships awards schemes to study at the Royal College of Military Science at Shrivenham, Swindon.

Mr. Goodlad: Two Indonesian military officers are currently at the Royal College of Military Science at Shrivenham on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office scholarships award scheme. One student was at the college last year on the same basis; a further student is expected to attend the college in the next academic year.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will cancel the invitations issued to Mr. Kustanto Widiatmoko, Mr. Akmad Buldan and Mr. Minulyo Suprato to attend the Royal College of Military Science at Shrivenham under his Department's scholarships and awards scheme, in view of Indonesia's human rights record.

Mr. Goodlad: Only one of the three Indonesians named —Mr. Widiatmoko—is to attend a course at the Royal College of Military Science, Shrivenham. The other two are to undertake studies at Nottingham university and at the Cranfield Institute of Technology, Bedford. There are no plans to cancel these scholarships awards. We do not believe that the cancellation of this form of educational assistance would help the human rights situation in Indonesia.

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the first meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in Budapest, between 3 and 6 July.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I welcome the addition of a parliamentary dimension to the CSCE process, and in particular the adoption by the parliamentary assembly of declarations in favour of strengthening CSCE institutions. I agree with the assembly that respect for CSCE values, including parliamentary democracy and human rights, should be translated into every day practice, and that CSCE should seek to prevent and resolve conflicts both within and between states.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the names of each of the organisations and individuals who have sent responses to the White Paper on a national lottery; and if he will make a statement on the timetable for completing his consultation process.

Mr. Mellor: A total of 224 respondents were listed on 6 July, *Official Report*, columns *23-26*, most of whom submitted their comments to the Home Office before 1 June. In addition, the Department of National Heritage has now received seven further communications from organisations and individuals. These are from the Continental On-Line Lottery and Totalisator Advisors; Nairn district council; Northern Arts; the Sports Council for Northern Ireland; the United Kingdom Lottery Company Limited; the Victoria and Albert museum; and the hon. Member. This brings the total to 231. Over the next few months we will continue discussions with key respondents. Legislation will be brought forward in due course.

Press (Self-regulation)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has for reviewing press self-regulation.

Mr. Mellor: When the report of the Committee on Privacy and Related Matters was published in June 1990, the then Home Secretary said that the Government would review the effectiveness of press self-regulation once the new Press Complaints Commission which the committee recommended be established had been in operation for 18 months.

Now that the 18 month period is over, I have decided to ask Sir David Calcutt QC, the Master of Magdalene college Cambridge, who chaired the earlier committee, to undertake an assessment of how self-regulation has worked in practice since his committee reported. His remit will be to assess the effectiveness of non-statutory self regulation by the press since the establishment of the Press Complaints Commission and to give his views on whether the present arrangements for self-regulation should now be modified or put on a statutory basis. I have also asked him to consider whether any further measures may be needed to deal with intrusions into personal privacy by the press, and to make recommendations.

I believe that a further independent analysis based on recent experience of self-regulation will be of great assistance in determining the way forward in this difficult and sensitive area. In view of his chairmanship of the earlier committee, Sir David is uniquely qualified to carry out this task, and I am very grateful to him for agreeing to take it on.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Over the next 12 months, I shall continue to follow up commitments in the White Paper Cm 1200 "This Common Inheritance" and its successor Cm 1655 "The First Year Report". I shall also be contributing to the second anniversary White Paper in the autumn. By the end of 1992 my Department will have developed an environmental housekeeping strategy for the management of its accommodation and purchasing, and over the next year and beyond I shall continue to ensure that environmental concerns shape the policy and work of my Department whenever appropriate.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Marine Theft

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total value of marine theft of United Kingdom vessels stolen in United Kingdom territorial waters for the last five years; and if he will tabulate.

Mr. Jack: The requested information is not collected centrally.

AIDS

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation so that charges of *(a)* indecent assault, *(b)* assault occasioning actual bodily harm and *(c)* procurement of sex with a woman by false pretences, may be brought against a person who is an HIV/AIDS carrier who wilfully infects others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: We have no current plans to introduce such legislation. There are difficulties both of principle and of practice in bringing this type of behaviour within the scope of the criminal law. The issue is, however, being kept under review and we will be taking into account the precedents in other countries before reaching a final view.

Mr. Martin Foran

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will refer to the Court of Appeal the conviction of Martin Foran, presently at Her Majesty's prison, Millers Park, following the receipt of the letter from the Crown prosecution service of 28 May, 11NN 158212 Foran, relating to non-disclosure of evidence during his application for leave to appeal.

Mr. Jack: We are considering, in the light of further representations from solicitors for Mr. Foran, including the letter to them of 28 May from the Crown prosecution service, whether there are any grounds to justify intervention in the case. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as consideration of the representations is complete.

Police, Wales

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of police officers in Wales relieved of duty because of criminal misconduct in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The table gives total numbers of officers suspended from duty pending investigation of a criminal allegation, in respect of each of the four Welsh constabularies in the years in question. The figures in brackets denote the number of officers who were convicted of a criminal offence in those years. Any conviction of an officer who has been suspended from duty may take place in a year subsequent to that of his suspension.

	1989	*1990*	*1991*
Dyfed-Powys	0 (0)	3 (1)	0 (0)
Gwent	6 (0)	3 (1)	4 (1)
North Wales	3 (1)	1 (0)	4 (1)
South Wales	8 (6)	9 (3)	14 (1)
Total	17 (7)	16 (5)	22 (3)

Immigration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current backlog in dealing with referral cases at each of the immigration centres.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of passengers detained overnight under Immigration Act powers during 1991 by nationality.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Passengers[1] detained overnight or longer in 1991, by nationality

Geographical region and nationality[2]	*Number of persons*
All nationalities	8,016
European Community	35

Geographical region and nationality[2]	Number of persons
Belgium	—
Denmark	—
France	10
Germany	2
Greece	—
Italy	2
Luxembourg	—
Netherlands	4
Portugal	13
Spain	4
Other Western Europe	689
Austria	6
Cyprus	42
Finland	12
Malta	7
Norway	3
Sweden	27
Switzerland	8
Turkey	229
Yugoslavia	355
Eastern Europe	198
Bulgaria	28
Czechoslovakia	22
Hungary	27
Poland	48
Romania	55
USSR	18
Americas	1,031
Argentina	24
Barbados	5
Brazil	204
Canada	17
Chile	23
Colombia	297
Cuba	2
Guyana	11
Jamaica	219
Mexico	21
Peru	29
Trinidad and Tobago	16
USA	148
Uruguay	1
Venezuela	14
Africa	2,902
Algeria	232
Egypt	31
Ethiopia	113
Ghana	539
Kenya	50
Libya	27
Mauritius	34
Morocco	138
Nigeria	1,036
Sierra Leone	211
Somalia	190
South Africa	56
Sudan	52
Tanzania	41
Tunisia	19
Uganda	72
Zambia	26
Zimbabwe	35
Indian sub-continent	1,047
Bangladesh	497
India	223
Pakistan	327
Middle East	298
Iran	53
Iraq	81
Israel	71
Jordan	12
Kuwait	3
Lebanon	62
Saudi Arabia	2
Syria	14
Remainder of Asia	521
China	32
Indonesia	6
Japan	26
Malaysia	175
Philippines	31
Singapore	12
Sri Lanka	176
Thailand	12
Hong Kong[3]	51
Australasia	33
Australia	27
New Zealand	6
Others	1,262
British Overseas Citizens	33
Other countries not elsewhere specified	861
Stateless	368

[1] Includes some illegal entrants and deportees.
[2] Or claimed nationality where the nationality is in doubt.
[3] British Dependent Territories citizens and British Nationals (Overseas) only.

Derek Bentley

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 18 May, *Official Report*, column *10*, when he expects to make an announcement or decision on his study of the report submitted to his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the case of Derek Bentley.

Mr. Jack: This report is receiving careful consideration together with other material which has been submitted more recently, including a letter and dossier received on 1 June from solicitors acting for Miss Iris Bentley. My right hon. and learned Friend will decide as soon as possible whether any action on his part would be appropriate.

Victim Support

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much public money has been made available to victim support organisations in the mid-Essex area in each of the last three available years.

Mr. Jack: Home Office funding of local victim support schemes is channelled through the National Association of Victim Support Schemes, and is allocated by the Victim Support local funding panel on which the Home Office has observer status. There is one local victim support scheme in the mid-Essex area, the Chelmsford and Braintree scheme. Home Office funding allocated to that scheme amounted to £14,484 in 1990-91, £15,788 in 1991-92, and is planned to amount to £26,208 in the current financial year.

Deportation Orders

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deportation orders he has signed in each month in 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is as follows:

	Number
January	62
February	49
March	74
April	109
May	77
June	85

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on deporting foreign nationals whose families reside in this country and who have no means of support in their own country.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Deportation will normally be the proper course where a person subject to immigration control overstays a permitted leave, breaches a condition attached to it or engages in serious criminal or other activity against the public interest. Each case is considered on its merits having full regard to all known compassionate circumstances including age, character, domestic circumstances, length of residence in and strength of ties with the United Kingdom. The effect of deportation on a person's family in the United Kingdom and the situation he or she will face on return are factors to be taken into account.

Prison Service

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will publish a statement of the annual objectives of the prison service and of the resources provided for it.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am placing in the Library a copy of the "Statement of Objectives and Resources for HM Prison Service, 1992-93", which is being issued today.

The statement forms the "compact" between Ministers and the Director General of the prison service recommended by Lord Justice Woolf. It sets out the prison service's purpose and goals, the planning assumptions and resources for 1992-93 and the service's objectives, targets and performance indicators.

It was announced in March 1992 that it was intended that the prison service should become an executive agency on 1 April 1993. The framework document and corporate and business plans for the agency will succeed the present statement from 1993-94 onwards.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the substantive reports from the departmental Select Committees in the 1987 Parliament which have not been debated, or referred to on the Order Paper as relevant to a debate.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Office Costs Allowance

Mr. Page: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he intends to publish the Top Salaries Review Body's report on the office costs allowance and the Government's response to it.

Mr. Newton: I have today placed copies of the TSRB's report in the Vote Office.

The TSRB's proposals

The TSRB's wide-ranging report recommends fundamental changes to the level and structure of the OCA. The main recommendations are:

(a) to disaggregate the OCA into separate allowances covering expenditure for different purposes (eg staff, equipment etc) in order to improve accountability;

(b) a separate staff allowance of £33,360 (includng the 4·25 per cent. uprating from 1 April) to enable MPs to employ up to 2 full-time staff rather than 1½ as at present;

(c) a separate allowance of £4,000 for general office expenses;

(d) central procurement of IT equipment, to be introduced as soon as possible;

(e) as an interim measure, a separate one-off initial acquisition grant for IT equipment of £5,000. available to all MPs, but with the general office expenses allowance halved in the year in which the grant is taken;

(f) a separate additional allowance of £2,000 a year for MPs basing their activities in their constituency, provided they occupy only "the basic minimum accommodation at Westminster as defined by the House";

(g) the creation of a Personnel Office, separate from the Fees Office, to advise MPs and their staff on matters including rates of pay and job specifications;

(h) (in the expectation that their Report would not have been implemented in advance of the general election this year) only one quarter of the allowance for 1992-93 should be available to Members between 1 April 1992 and the election.

If implemented in full these recommendations would increase the maximum of the OCA from the 1991-92 figure of £28,986 to between £37,360 for a Member not entitled to the constituency office allowance and not claiming the one-off initial acquisition grant and £42,360 in 1992-93 for a Member claiming both, which would cost up to an additional £8 million in the first year. In percentage terms the increases would range between 23·6 and 40·2 per cent. in addition to a 4·25 per cent. increase due from 1 April 1992 in line with the existing uprating formula.

The Government's Views The TSBR's proposals raise three fundamental issues: compartmentalisation of the OCA; central procurement of IT equipment; creation of a separate Personnel Office.

The key argument for compartmentalisation of the OCA is that it would improve accountability. But almost all MP's expenditure on office, secretarial and research support is disbursed directly by the Fees Office or reimbursed on the basis of invoices submitted. The Government do not consider therefore that disaggregation would significantly improve accountability, but it would reduce MP's flexibility to make most effective use of the OCA. The Government do not therefore support this proposal. It follows that we oppose the creation of a separate constituency office allowance. It would be exceedingly difficult to define an acceptable criterion based on a Member occupying "minimum accommodation at Westminster". It would also be difficult in some areas—for example, portable office equipment—to distinguish between general office expenses and constituency office expenses.

Turning to the provision of IT equipment, we believe that the case for central procurement needs further consideration. It should be possible to negotiate discount arrangements without the need for bulk purchase of equipment by a central procurement authority which

would inevitably base its specification on a generalised requirement rather than specific needs. The Government therefore have strong reservations about this proposal. In of these concerns we also do not favour the introduction of a separate initial acquisition grant pending the introduction of central procurement. We consider that MPs should continue to lease or purchase equipment which best meets their particular requirements from the aggregate OCA. Subject to the views of the House, however, the Government would be content for an invitation to be extended to the Information Committee of the House to consider the TSRB's proposals on equipment provision in the light of planned progress on the study of networking in the House.

The final fundamental issue is the proposal to create a separate Personnel Office. The Government appreciate the reasons underlying the recommendation, but are conscious of the concern of many Members about possible external intervention in the relationships between themselves and their staff. Subject to the views of the House, therefore, the Government do not propose to pursue this proposal.

Against this background, the Government consider that the most sensible course is to retain the OCA as a single sum but increase the maximum level. We accept that there is a case for increasing provision for support staff but taking account of both the TSRB's findings and the public expenditure implications and wider economic considerations we do not believe an increase as high as the TSRB recommends would be appropriate. The Government propose, therefore, that the OCA should be increased to provide for a maximum additional one quarter of a staff member, or equivalent expenditure, per Member. We also accept the TSRB's proposal that provision of £4,000 should be provided for general office expenses, but as part of the aggregate OCA rather than as a separate allowance as the TSRB suggests.

Taken together the Government's proposals would increase the maximum OCA from £28,986 in 1991-92 to £33,190 in 1992-93. This represents a 9·8 per cent. increase, to provide for additional support from members, in addition to a 4·25 per cent. increase from 1 April in line with the existing uprating formula.

Finally, the Government note that at present an MP who joins or leaves the House part way through a year is entitled to claim against the full year's OCA. The TSRB addressed this point in the run-up to the election, but made no longer-term recommendation. The Government propose that from 1 April 1993 eligibility to the OCA will be calculated on a quarterly basis.

Overall, the Government believe this new higher level of OCA, while less than the TSRB recommended, provides a substantial increase which represents a fair balance between the taxpayers' interests and the needs of MPs for sufficient support to enable them to carry out adequately their duties to their constituents. It also provides MPs with continued flexibility in the ways they organise staff and equipment support to meet best their individual requirements.

ACCOMMODATION AND WORKS COMMITTEE

7 Millbank

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what percentage of the floor space of 7 Millbank is to be used for House of Commons purposes; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for not leasing the whole building.

Mr. Ray Powell: In response to the recommendation of the Services Committee that alternative accommodation should be provided for the occupants of St. Stephen's house, which has to be demolished as part of the works for the Jubilee line extension, the Secretary of State for the Environment took a lease on the basement, ground, first and second floors. Based on the figures provided by the landlord's agents, these floors represent some 50 per cent. of the total space available. Following the Parliamentary Corporate Bodies Act 1992, the lease has been transferred to the House authorities. The accommodation will become available during the summer recess.

I understand that, in addition, the Department leased the third floor of 7 Millbank for use by the House of Lords.

It is a matter for the Accommodation and Works Committee to consider against progress on the next phase of the new parliamentary building, whether further space should be taken in 7 Millbank or any of the other available buildings in the area.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Finance Bill

Mr. William Powell: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what extra costs were incurred as a result of the Standing Committee considering the Finance Bill sitting after the House adjourned on 16 June, 23 June and 30 June.

Mr. Beith: The calculation of detailed and meaningful statistics in relation to extra costs incurred as a result of any specific late night sitting is complex and cannot begin until all claims for extra payment are received. However, the Finance Office will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is able to provide this information.

1 Parliament Street

Mr. Renton: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, whether he will make arrangements for a fax machine to be installed at 1 Parliament street for the use of hon. Members with rooms in that building.

Mr. Beith: The provision of facsimile machines for Members was examined by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee to the Services Committee in May 1988. It was resolved that centralised facsimile machine facilities in the House would be inappropriate and that the provision of these machines should be the responsibility of hon. Members. I understand that some 332 hon. Members now have individual facsimile

machines. Any proposal to review these arrangements would have to be considered by the Administration Committee.

Transport Office (Bank Notes)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if the Commission will make it a requirement of the continuation of Thomas Cook Ltd.'s operation of the Transport Office that the company will exchange Scottish and Northern Ireland notes on the same basis as it exchanges Bank of England notes.

Mr. Beith: It has never been the policy of the Transport Office in the House to impose a charge for the exchange of Scottish or Northern Ireland bank notes, or to charge for transactions settled in those notes.

I am advised that within the United Kingdom no charge has been made by Thomas Cook for transactions made in these notes, except at Heathrow and Glasgow airports where, until recently, a commission was charged. That practice was terminated on 1 July.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Guyana

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the environmental projects currently funded by the Overseas Development Administration in Guyana.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The ODA is currently funding two projects in this field. These are:

(a) Research project on the major problems of the regeneration of Greenheart timber. Funded through Imperial College. Cost to the ODA: £200,000 over three years.

(b) Support for the Commonwealth Programme for Sustainable Tropical Forestry. ODA commitment approximately £180,000, to meet the costs of the Phase 1 preparatory work programme, carried out by the Natural Resources Institute.

Malawi

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's position on the loan by the World bank to Malawi for construction of the Malawi V project; and what human rights considerations were taken into account when reaching this decision.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Malawi power V project was approved by the World Bank's executive board on 17 June. The United Kingdom judges all world bank loans on their economic and technical merits, in line with the provision of the bank's article of agreement. The proceedings of the World bank board on individual projects are confidential.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Correspondence

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to reply to the letter dated 21 June from a constituent of the hon. Member for Brent, East, the name and address of whom have been supplied to him; and what is the Government's commitment in the citizens charter about the length of time members of the public should expect to wait for a reply from the Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Secretary of State for the Environment is responsible for the matter on which the hon. Member's constituent wrote to me. The hon. Member's constituent will therefore receive a reply from officials at the Department of the Environment. That is normal practice where a correspondent raises matters with a Minister which do not relate to that Minister's responsibilities.

I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend's officials will reply to the hon. Member's constituent by Friday, 10 July.

The citizens charter calls for all public services to set standards for response times to correspondence. These should be appropriate both to local circumstances and to the needs of their clients.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is on his way to Helsinki to attend the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Top Salaries Review Body

Mr. King: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Top Salaries Review Body report.

The Prime Minister: The Review Body on Top Salaries —TSRB—has submitted to me the report of its fundamental review of the pay of the posts within their remit groups. These comprise about 1,290 members of the judiciary, 660 senior civil servants, and 190 senior officers in the armed forces. The TSRB last carried out a fundamental review in 1985. I am grateful for the work which it has done on this further review.

The recommendations would add 19·7 per cent. to the pay bill for the remit groups, at a cost of £27·6 million. The Government understand the reasons which underlie these recommendations, which relate to senior people whose work it relies upon and greatly values, but believe that on this occasion there are also wider considerations which they must take into account. The rate of increase in average earnings is now at the lowest level for 25 years, and pay settlements in the private sector are running at around 4 per cent. The economy is moving to a low rate of inflation as the essential basis for resumed and sustained growth. Against this background the Government have decided to moderate the proposed increases.

The increase from 1 April this year will therefore be limited to 4 per cent. The main new rates of pay for 1992-93 are set out in the table. A further 3 per cent. will be paid from 1 April 1993 and a final stage of 2·8 per cent. from 1 April 1994, in addition to whatever annual increase may be decided for those years. The total increase will, therefore, be about half of the recommended level.

For those groups which are covered by performance pay arrangements, individual increases will vary within the overall increases in the pay bill. The Government attach importance to strengthening links between pay and performance, in line with the principles of the citizens charter; I have therefore asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and other Ministers the possibility of extending the performance pay system.

The TSRB has also made a number of additional recommendations affecting the judiciary and senior civil servants. The Government are considering the recommendations on regrouping for the judiciary, but have decided to reject the other recommendations affecting the judiciary and the increase in London pay for grade 3 civil servants.

TSRB remit groups: existing and recommended salaries

Group	*Existing Salary (£) (1 December 1991)*	*Plus 4 per cent. 1 April 1992*
Judiciary		
Lord Chief Justice of England	104,750	108,940
Judicial Group 2 (includes Lords of Appeal in Ordinary and Master of the Rolls)	97,000	100,880
Judicial Group 3 (includes Lords Justices of Appeal and President of the Family Division)	93,000	96,720
Judicial Group 4 (includes High Court Judges)	84,250	87,620
Judicial Group 5 Official Referees	73,250	76,180
Judicial Group 6 Presidents of Industrial etc. Tribunals, Judge Advocate General (new appointments)	—	67,564
Circuit judges etc.	61,600	64,064
Judicial Group 7 (includes Chairmen of Industrial Tribunals and Magistrates)	50,500	52,520
Note: The Government is considering the recommendations for regrouping of Senior Circuit Judges etc.		
Senior Civil Service		
Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service	104,750	108,940
Permanent Secretary to the Treasury	98,000	101,920
Grade 1 (Permanent Secretary)	84,250	87,620
Grade 1A (2nd Permanent Secretary)	77,500	80,600
Grade 2 (Deputy Secretary) range minimum	60,100	62,504
range maximum	70,400	73,216
Grade 3 (Under Secretary)		
London range minimum	49,300	51,272
range maximum	57,000	59,280
Elsewhere range minimum	48,000	49,920
range maximum	55,700	57,928
Senior Military		
Admiral of the Fleet Field Marshal Marshal of the RAF	104,750	108,940
Admiral General Air Chief Marshal	84,250	87,620
Vice Admiral Lieutenant-General Air Marshal	60,600	63,024
Rear Admiral Major General Air Vice-Marshal	53,000	55,120

NATIONAL FINANCE

Employment Statistics

13. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the position of the United Kingdom in the league table of growth of employment among the Group of Seven countries in 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Portillo: The Government do not publish forecasts of employment growth.

VAT (Charities)

14. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to require Oxfam and other charity shops to introduce VAT on their operations.

Mr. Nelson: We have no such proposals. Agreement has been reached with other member states that the United Kingdom's existing social VAT zero rates, including those specifically designed to benefit charities and charity shops, can be maintained at least until the end of 1996 without prejudice to their future thereafter.

EC Budget

16. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with his EC counterparts on the EC budget proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend has regular discussions with his EC counterparts on the future financing of the Community, most recently at the ECOFIN Council on 9 June, at which a majority of member states indicated that they found the Commission's proposals excessive.

Housing

18. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the prospects for recovery in the housing market.

Mr. Dorrell: As was said in this year's Financial Statement and Budget Report, any recovery in the housing market during 1992 is likely to be slow.

Unemployment

19. **Ms. Coffey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment the Government have made of the impact on Government revenues of any increase in unemployment.

Mr. Portillo: The projections of revenues in the Financial Statement and Budget Report take account of all relevant factors.

Stamp Duty

20. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning stamp duty.

Mr. Nelson: We have received a number of representations that the temporary increase in the threshold for stamp duty should run for a longer period. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) earlier today.

European Central Bank

21. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the location of the proposed European central bank.

Mr. Lamont: I have nothing to add to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's report on the discussions at Lisbon on 29 June, *Official Report*, column 588.

Manufacturing Output

22. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the level of manufacturing output over the last three years.

Mr. Lamont: Manufacturing output fell by about 6¾ per cent. between 1989 and the first quarter of 1992, following a rise of over 30 per cent. between 1981 and 1989.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

23. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to bring the calculation of the public sector borrowing requirement into line with European practice.

Mr. Portillo: There is no standard European practice nor any internationally-agreed guidelines for the definition of the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the public sector borrowing requirement as a percentage of gross domestic product for each EC country since 1989.

Mr. Nelson: Comparable data for the public sector borrowing requirement in each Community country are not available. The following data are for general Government net borrowing as a percentage of GDP.

General government net borrowing as a percentage of GDP

	1989	*1990*	*1991*
Belgium	6·5	5·3	6·2
Denmark	0·5	1·4	2·0
Germany (West)	−0·2	1·9	3·1
Greece	18·3	19·6	16·5
Spain	2·8	4·0	4·4
France	1·2	1·6	1·7
Ireland	2·2	2·6	2·3
Italy	9·9	11·0	10·2
Luxembourg	−5·5	−5·6	−2·5
Netherlands	5·2	5·3	3·9
Portugal	3·4	5·8	6·4
United Kingdom	−1·2	0·8	2·0

Note A negative number indicates a budget surplus.
Source: European Economy

VAT (Second-hand Goods)

24. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to apply VAT to second-hand goods.

Sir John Cope: The sixth VAT directive requires tax to be charged on the full selling price of all goods and services unless otherwise relieved. Although there is no general relief for second-hand goods, there are special schemes for certain of these goods and works of art, antiques and collectors' items under which tax is charged only on the seller's margin.

The draft EC seventh VAT directive, which requires unanimity for its adoption, proposes a harmonised scheme which will in general extend this relief to other second-hand goods. The Government have taken the representations that they have received fully into account in establishing their negotiating position.

Economic Recovery

25. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the assumptions underlying his oral statement of 22 January 1992, *Official Report*, column 323, that there remain good grounds for believing that the recovery will become fairly established in the course of 1992.

Mr. Lamont: I spelt out the reasons underlying my statement of 22 January 1992 at the time—*Official Report*, column 323. The forces making for recovery are still in place. These include low inflation, reduced interest rates, rising real earnings, improved personal and corporate financial positions, higher consumer and business confidence, and renewed productivity growth. So I continue to believe that growth will become firmly established in the course of 1992.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

26. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for a realignment of currencies within the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

Balance of Payments

27. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the balance of payments.

Mr. Nelson: United Kingdom exports are at record levels.

Taxation, West Midlands

Mr. Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the proportion of income currently paid in tax by average income families in the west midlands.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is not available.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications the Bank of England as now received for compensation under the deposit protection scheme from former depositors of Bank of Credit and Commerce International; if he will list the amount claimed in monetary bands; how many claims are still with the liquidators of BCCI; and what is the current backlog at *(a)* the Bank of England, and *(b)* the liquidators.

Mr. Nelson: By 1 July 1992 the Deposit Protection Board had received some 15,600 claims for compensation under the deposit protection scheme from former depositors of BCCI. The board does not maintain an analysis of these claims by monetary bands. On that date approximately 2,900 of these claims had been settled; another 1,800 were in the process of being settled and further clarification was being sought from depositors on another 500 claims. The remaining claim forms are currently awaiting clearance by the liquidators, once proof of debt forms have been received.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received concerning the Bank of Credit and Commerce International from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public.

Mr. Nelson: My Treasury colleagues and I have received some 17 letters on BCCI from hon. Members this year and some further 50 from members of the public.

Public Sector Undertakings

Mr. Conway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) on 5 June, *Official Report*, column *652*, if he will list all those other concerns or undertakings which operate under public sector management.

Mr. Nelson: Sections four and six of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1991 Autumn Statement"—Cm 1920—give details of the nationalised industries and other public corporations.

VAT (Hoteliers)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has during the EC presidency to call for a study of the avoidance of VAT luxury rates by hoteliers in the EC member states.

Sir John Cope: I have no such plans. It would be for the Commission to propose such a study if it is required.

VAT (Local Government)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those EC member states where local government, or its equivalent, can recoup VAT.

Sir John Cope: Article 4(5) of the EC sixth VAT directive allows member states not to treat local authorities as taxable persons in respect of those activities in which they engage as public authorities.

There are special provisions in United Kingdom law that permit local authorities to reclaim VAT on activities which they perform as public authorities.

I have no information on how other member states implement this provision.

Hospital Volunteer Drivers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reconsider his decision to tax hospital car service volunteer drivers' mileage allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The position in law is that motor mileage allowances paid to individuals, whether employees or volunteer drivers, who use a car on health service business are liable to income tax if, and only if, the allowances exceed the costs of running and maintaining the car for health service driving and so result in a profit.

While I am very much aware of the important and valuable service provided by volunteer drivers, I am not persuaded that there is a case for amending the law to exempt them from tax on any profits on their mileage allowances. But, as the hon. Member may be aware, it has been decided to phase in the arrangements which were introduced last year for collecting tax on these allowances. For the period from 6 October 1991 to 5 April 1993 only one quarter of the profit element will be taxed; for the tax year 1993-94, one half of the profit will be taxed; and for the tax year 1994-95 three quarters of the profit will be taxed. Tax will not be payable on the full amount of the profit element until 1995-96.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the exchange rate.

Mr. Nelson: The Government remain firmly committed to sterling's membership of the ERM and to its moving in due course to the narrow band at the current central rate of DM2·95.

Interest Rates

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on his policy regarding interest rates.

Mr. Nelson: Interest rates will continue to be set to keep sterling within its ERM band and to bear down on inflation.

Investment Management Regulatory Organisation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Prime Minister's oral answer to the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) of 30 June, *Official Report*, column 709, if he will make it his policy that so much of the content of the IMRO report as is to be published under Her Majesty's Government's auspices is published before 16 July.

Mr. Lamont: The Securities and Investment Board—SIB—has today published the summary of conclusions and findings of IMRO's review of its regulation of Maxwell companies—including Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd.—BIM—and London and Bishopsgate

International Investment Management plc—LBI. The SIB is also publishing its assessment of its own and IMRO's performance in this affair and the action both the SIB and IMRO are taking to rectify the shortcomings identified. The SIB's assessment concludes that there were serious deficiencies in the supervision by IMRO of BIM and LBI. I am placing a copy of the SIB's statement in the Library of the House.

The Maxwell affair was wholly exceptional—the vast majority of pension funds have served their members well. Moreover, the IMRO review covers a relatively limited part of the Maxwell story. Under the Financial Services Act, IMRO's role in supervising pension funds was to regulate and authorise pension fund managers. IMRO was not, and is not, responsible for ensuring that pension fund trustees respect their wider obligations under trust law. Moreover, effective regulation must in the final analysis involve the active co-operation of the private sector, including professional advisers, financial institutions and others, all of whom have their own responsibilities.

None the less, in the Government's view the shortcomings identified in the SIB's assessment are of very serious concern. The SIB and IMRO are undertaking a number of actions, detailed in the SIB's assessment, to ensure more effective regulation in future.

IMRO's performance also raises questions about the SIB's monitoring of IMRO and its general oversight of the self-regulatory organisations under the Financial Services Act. I have, therefore, asked Andrew Large, the SIB's new chairman, to conduct his own review of how the SIB carries out its regulatory responsibilities.

I have also discussed with the chairman of the SIB the need to strengthen the implementation in practice of regulatory standards. I am confident that he fully appreciates the urgency and importance of his task and I have asked him to keep me closely in touch with progress on the further work, reviews and improvements that are now in hand.

I have also looked into the recent allegations that IMRO warned the Government that it could not do its job properly because of problems over the relationship between the Financial Services Act regime and trust law. Neither the SIB nor I have found any evidence to substantiate these allegations. IMRO and the SIB made representations to the DTI over a number of years about the legal uncertainty they believed was created by the interaction of the Financial Services Act and trust law. However, there was no suggestion that this uncertainty posed a threat to investor protection. And the SIB's conclusion is that neither legal uncertainties created by the relationship between the Financial Services Act and trust law nor the existence of IMRO's special occupational pensions scheme regime made any material difference to IMRO's regulation of the Maxwell pension fund companies.

No regulator and no system of regulation can guarantee that all fraud will be prevented or identified. But the Government are determined that all the lessons of the Maxwell affair, in its many aspects, must be learned and implemented. I will be assessing in detail over the coming months the effectiveness of the steps already taken by the SIB and IMRO, the additional action now proposed, and the outcome of the SIB's further reviews. I shall then report back to the House.

Pensions

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those EC member states who pay their local government employees, or the equivalent, index linked inflation-proofed pensions.

Mr. Robin Squire: I have been asked to reply.

In the United Kingdom, index linked pensions are available to former local government employees who have contributed to public service pensions schemes. Information is not available on a comparable basis for other EC member states.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

County Courts, Northern Ireland

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether he has any proposal to increase judicial and other county court manpower and improve equipment and county court premises following the increase in the limit of the county court jurisdiction in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has announced his intention to increase the current financial limits on the general civil jurisdiction of the county courts in Northern Ireland. This will initially be achieved by an increase to £10,000—from £5,000—in November 1992, with a further increase to £15,000 in September 1993. In determining the new jurisdictional levels, the Lord Chancellor has given careful consideration to the ability of the county courts to cope with any increased workload resulting from the increase and is satisfied that the county courts have sufficient capacity and resources to cope with the increased volume of business. At the same time, the Lord Chancellor recognises the need to continue to keep the position under review to ensure that the county court system in Northern Ireland is adequately resourced and equipped.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has for a general reform of county court rules in Northern Ireland; and when he expects such a review to be completed.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The regulation of the procedures in the county courts in Northern Ireland is a matter for the County Court Rules Committee established under article 46 of the County Courts (Northern Ireland) Order 1980. The Lord Chancellor is aware, however, that the rules committee intends to carry out a wide ranging review of county court procedure to determine ways in which the current arrangements might be improved.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether he proposes to replace the present periodic county court sittings in Northern Ireland with a system of continuous sitting along the lines current in the Northern Ireland High Court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The present arrangements for periodic sittings of the county court in Northern Ireland have generally worked in a satisfactory manner. The Lord Chancellor is conscious, however, that a system of continuous sittings may have some advantages and will wish to explore alternative methods of entry and listing of

county court actions. Accordingly the Lord Chancellor's officials in Northern Ireland will be examining, in consultation with the County Court Rules Committee and interested parties in Northern Ireland, the possibility of introducing a continuous listings system.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) whether he will introduce automatic discovery and disclosure of medical reports in personal injury actions in the county court in Northern Ireland;

(2) whether he intends to introduce into the county court in Northern Ireland a procedure for summary judgment analogous to order 14 procedure in the High Court in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The revision of county court procedures in Northern Ireland is primarily the responsibility of the rules committee established under article 46 of the County Courts (Northern Ireland) Order 1980. It is understood that further consideration of the present procedures on discovery of documents, exchange of medical and other expert evidence, and procedures for obtaining summary judgment will form part of the rules committee's review referred to in my earlier answer.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many different types of originating process exist in the county court in Northern Ireland; and what proposals there are to reduce the number thereof.

Mr. John M.Taylor: There are currently three basic means of initiating proceedings in the county courts in Northern Ireland; by civil bill, by petition and by notice of application. There are, however, five types of civil bill—ordinary, equity, ejectment, default and summary civil bills. As explained in previous answers, the forms of originating process to be employed in the county courts are determined by the County Court Rules Committee. It may be that some reduction in the number of types of originating process will be effected by the rules committee as a result of the wider review of county court procedures mentioned in the answer to an earlier question.

Appeal Hearings (Compensation)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will introduce a scheme of compensation for legal costs incurred in abortive appeal hearings where the court service or Government Departments are responsible for delays.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department is prepared to consider claims for compensation where loss is sustained through maladministration by court officers in matters for which the Lord Chancellor is responsible.

Where loss is sustained as a result of the actions of one of the parties or of another Government Department it is open to the party who has sustained the loss to apply for an order for costs in cases where it is appropriate to do so.

Mr. Mohammed Khan

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to provide compensation to Mr. Mohammed Khan in respect of abortive costs incurred in an immigration appeal hearing on 20 December 1991.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I regret that I cannot consider payment of compensation in this case as there was no mistake or failing by the immigration appellate authorities.

Public Record Office

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will set out those matters in regard to the Public Record Office for which he will in future answer parliamentary questions by referring the matter to the Keeper, following the establishment of the Public Record Office as an executive agency.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government's policy on answering questions on agency matters was most recently set out in the Government's reply to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's 1991 report on the next steps initiative—Cm 1761—which said:

"In normal circumstances the source of the reply should follow the allocation of responsibilities as between the Secretary of State and the Chief Executive in the Agency's framework document; but in all cases the decision on who will respond rests with the Minister."

The Lord Chancellor will be following this policy with regard to the Public Record Office. Copies of the Public Record Office's framework document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Expert Witnesses

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much notice is given to expert witnesses attending cases at the Crown court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is the responsibility of the prosecution and defence, and not the court, to notify witnesses of the date their attendance is required. The period of notice differs from case to case according to the circumstances of the case. However, those responsible for listing in the Crown court are aware of the difficulties faced by expert witnesses and, wherever possible, seek to give the parties as much notice of trial dates as they are able. Fixed dates for trial are often requested in cases involving expert witnesses, and such requests are acceded to wherever practicable.

ENVIRONMENT

Building Temperatures

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 10 June, *Official Report*, columns *187-88* what publicity there has been for S.I. No. 1013 (1980) to the heating and ventilation industry, owners of non-residential buildings and trades unions; what inspections are carried out to ensure compliance with statutory instrument; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Reference to the statutory maximum legal heating limit of 19 C is included in the EEO's publication "Energy Efficiency in Buildings (Offices)." No inspections are carried out to ensure compliance with SI No. 1013. The Energy Efficiency Office encourages consumers to take cost-effective energy efficiency measures by providing independent and authoritative advice through a range of initiatives and programmes.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all contracts to advise his Department within the last two years let by single tender action; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The following contracts are recorded as having been let to consultants by single tender action in the last two financial years:

Consultant(s)	*Subject of consultancy*
Financial year 1990-91	
Action Resource Centre	Private sector secondments to City Action Teams
Almondhall Computer Staff	Business model: Planning Inspectorate
BDO Binder Hamlyn	Grant Redemption Fund
BIS Applied Systems	North Sea database
Burgess Cyril	Review of HQ scientists and specialist professional and technical officers
Chapman Hendy	Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust
Ekotheipi Electrical Associates Ltd.	Development and production of MK.2 universal motor speed controller
Electoral Reform Society	Hull shadow Housing Action Trust
Ernst and Young	Local authority and housing association management and maintenance grant
Forman L.	Index to office instructions and staff handbook
Geary N. R.	Safety of manufacturing processes
Gibson Dr.	Meadowell Estate
Griffiths K. F.	Housing Topics
Hanlon Computer Systems	Inter-departmental urban database
Hance Dr.	Fate and behaviour of pesticides
Healey and Baker	Disposal of New Town assets
Hull City Council	Housing Action Trust team
Imperial War Museum	Staff inspection of the Royal Armouries
Infologistix	Translation service; software evaluation
ISMa Consultants	Computer risk analysis
Kermon Management Consultants	Network infrastructure project
Kidd Susan	Loose-leaf commercially produced reference works
Kidson Impey	Local authority waste disposal companies
Kings College, London	Design improvement controlled experiment
KPMG Peat Marwick Mclintock	Management accounting systems
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	Analysis of sludge/effluence
Land and Urban Analysis	Employment densities
Linierman Prof.	Performance measures
Logica	Technical assurance: local authority statistics
McHugh, E.	Enterprise and employment
Mindworks	Financial monitoring system
MORI	Barriers against uptake of unleaded petrol
Otitoju, F.	Training of ethnic minority staff
P. A. Consulting	Neighbourhood renewal manual

Consultant(s)	*Subject of consultancy*
PA Consulting System	Security review of INFORM
Peter Peregrinus Ltd.	Register of research
Phillips D.	Air pollution management
PIC Services	Southwark Housing Action Trust
Price Waterhouse	Performance measures
Rechem	Analysis of emission-incinerator
Safe Neighbourhood Unit	Estate Action
Signal UK	Database archiving for Private Office
Softlab	SSADM training: Planning Inspectorate
Tuffin, Ferraby and Taylor	Works and maintenance services
Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board	Certificate of technical competence
Watson Hawksley	Technical audits of water companies (Phase 2)
Financial year 1991-92	
Aspinwall & Co.	Special hazardous wastes
Brennan, Mrs.	Library bibliographies
CICA	Disc general assembly representation
Gibbs Environmental Sciences	Landfill levy
Green Alliance	Comparative study of five national environmental plans
Institute of Waste Management	Review of waste management paper
Knox Associates	Co-disposal in the United Kingdom
KPMG	Small combustion plants directive
London Waste Regulation Authority	Review of waste management paper
McCarthy, Kevin	United Kingdom European Community Presidency Conference
Middlesex	Air pollutants factsheets
National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors	Review of waste management papers
National Economic Development Office	Construction research
Nottingham Polytechnic	Statistical basis for landfill sampling
Offline Computer Services	Computerised record-keeping and report-generating
PA Consulting	Criteria for award of eco-labels to washing machines and dishwashers
Parry, Professor	IPCC working group

The Department's policy is to appoint consultants by single tender where they have unique experience or expertise relevant to the subject matter, or—exceptionally—where there is overriding urgency to let a contract without a tender process.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of reported breaches of tree preservation orders for each year since 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: It is a criminal offence under section 102 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 to contravene a tree preservation order. The number of prosecutions for each year since 1982 are as follows:

	Number
1982	42
1983	54
1984	71
1985	20
1986	56
1987	44
1988	57

	Number
1989	72
1990	55

Statistics are not yet available for the situation post-1990 where similar provisions are contained in section 210 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Local Authorities (Operating Companies)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the operating companies for services provided by each county and district authority, together with the number of directors appointed by each authority, their percentage voting power and the amount of equity retained by each authority in each company.

Mr. Robin Squire: Such information is not held centrally.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households in the United Kingdom qualify for grant aid under the home energy efficiency scheme; how many houses have been improved under the scheme since its inception; and if he will give a breakdown for Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maclean: In order to be eligible for a grant under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES), an applicant or his or her spouse must be in receipt of one of five passportable benefits: housing benefit, income support, family credit, community charge benefit and disability working allowance. In addition, his or her property must meet certain criteria concerning existing levels of insulation and receipt of a grant for similar work under previous schemes. Data on numbers of households eligible are not available.

Since the inception of the scheme on 1 January 1991, 208,055 homes have benefited from HEES grant; of these 155,776 were in England, 39,949 in Scotland and 12,330 in Wales. The scheme does not operate in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses in the network installer area which contains the constituency of Banff and Buchan have been improved under the home energy efficiency scheme since the scheme's inception.

Mr. Maclean: Within the network installer area which contains the hon. Member's constituency, 2,950 homes have benefited from HEES grant since 1 January 1991.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by local authority area the proportions of local authority finance derived from revenue support grant, specific grant, non-domestic rate income and poll tax for 1992-93.

Mr. Redwood: I am arranging for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House, together with the amount of revenue support grant, special grants, and redistributed non-domestic rate income paid per adult to each authority.

Share Lending

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he has received any advice from the Bank of England on the practice of share lending by local authority superannuation funds;

(2) if he will amend the superannuation regulations relating to the pension funds of local authorities in order to clarify the vires of share lending.

Mr. Robin Squire: Share lending is among the issues relating to investments under the local government superannuation scheme which are the subject of regular discussions between my Department, the local authority associations and other interested parties, including the Bank of England.

Public Analyst Laboratories

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make available additional resources to public analyst laboratories to support their accreditation under the national measurement accreditation service—NAMAS—quality control scheme and to assist in the implementation of the in-service training required under NAMAS.

Mr. Maclean: All analytical laboratories should have systems for ensuring the quality of their results. The Government have recognised this by encouraging the setting up of NAMAS. It is not for the Government to subside any additional costs to laboratories of NAMAS accreditation. Such costs should be recovered in charges to their customers who benefit in terms of the quality and the reliability of the analyses carried out for them.

Aggregates

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to revise the structure of the regional aggregates working parties to include representation by elected members of mineral planning authorities and third-party interests.

Mr. Baldry: I will consider membership of the regional aggregates working parties when the present review of mineral planning guidance note 6 is complete.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a summary of the views expressed to his Department on the national aggregates demand forecasts by the regional aggregates working parties in the regional commentaries.

Mr. Baldry: A summary of the views expressed by the regional aggregates working parties will be made available when the revised draft guidelines are published for public consultation.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new national forecasts of aggregates demand have been prepared for his Department since the publication of the document "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales Review of MPG6"; whether they will be circulated to the regional aggregates working parties for comment; whether they will be published for public comment; and whether they will be used in the preparation of a revised mineral planning guidance note 6.

Mr. Baldry: New forecasts of aggregates demand have not yet been finalised by the independent consultants. I shall consider whether they should be circulated when they are available.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations were made to him by the regional aggregates working parties on the environmental implications of the national aggregates demand forecast published by his Department.

Mr. Baldry: The views of the regional aggregates working parties on the environmental implications of the demand forecast were published earlier this year in their regional commentaries. These views will be taken into account by the Department in the preparation of the revised draft guidelines.

Mineral Planning Guidance

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects drafts of mineral planning guidance note 1 and mineral planning guidance note 6 to be published for public comment.

Mr. Baldry: It is hoped that drafts of the revised mineral planning guidance notes 1 and 6 will be published for public consultation by the end of this year.

Council Housing Investment

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has reached conclusions following his recent consultation exercise on the development of the local authority housing investment programme process.

Mr. Howard: On 21 May, my Department launched a major consultation exercise on the further development of the local authority housing investment programme—HIP—process. The proposals which we have put forward build on the measures begun last year by seeking to achieve better value for the money spent through housing capital programmes.

The consultation paper made proposals in four broad areas: on the preparation of housing strategies by local authorities, and the co-ordination at area level of decisions on the initial allocation of Housing Corporation funding with local authorities' housing strategies; on the further development of recent trends in our approach to the allocation of all-purpose housing annual capital guideline—ACG—resources within the HIP process; on the development of the system of forward indications of housing ACGs; and on the further development of recent trends in the approach we have taken to the advance allocation of specified capital grant—SCG—resources for private sector renewal.

During the consultation period, we agreed to a request from the local authority associations that discussions should continue after the formal close of the consultation exercise on the longer-term proposals. We have therefore taken decisions at this stage only on matters relevant to the arrangements for the 1993-94 HIP round.

We have received a total of 211 responses, including material from the four relevant local authority associations, the Institute of Housing, the National Federation of Housing Associations, 161 local authorities and 29 housing associations. Discussions have also taken place with the Housing Corporation.

After considering and taking in to account the representations which have been made, I have decided to invite authorities to prepare comprehensive housing strategies for the 1993-94 HIP round as described in the consultation paper. This will involve authorities in preparing strategies which cover the housing needs and resources of their areas over a three-year period, set in the context of a realistic assessment of priorities and proposals. My Department will issue guidelines to authorities very shortly which will provide further details.

We will carry forward the new arrangements made last year to place emphasis on the efficiency and effectiveness of authorities in our decisions on the allocation of HIP resources. This will help ensure that best value for money is obtained from capital resources for social housing and that there are incentives for authorities to improve their performance as landlords and enablers.

I have also decided to proceed with our proposals to draw together, on to the same timetable for decision making, both the HIP process, which applies to local authorities, and the approved development programme—ADP—process which is used for the allocation of funds through the Housing Corporation to housing associations. The principle of co-ordinating these two funding streams, in the context of a single housing strategy, met with almost universal support; discussions will continue with interested parties on the practical details of implementation.

Last year, Housing Ministers attended a number of successful presentations from local authorities, based on their housing strategies and HIP proposals. These occasions heightened the awareness and involvement of tenants and other local people in the HIP round, and pointed to the scope for partnership between local authorities, the private sector, and the Housing Corporation and housing associations in the provision of social housing. I have decided to continue this initiative during the coming year, and the Minister for Housing and Planning has written today to the leaders of 33 authorities inviting their authorities to give presentations to Housing Ministers during the autumn. A list of the authorities concerned has been placed in the Library and letters have been sent to local Members.

A copy of a commentary paper on the responses to the consultation exercise has been placed in the Libraries of the House. I intend to report back to the House once the remaining decisions have been taken later this year.

Livestock

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to support *(a)* a world watch system on indigenous livestock breeds, *(b)* the strengthening of the animal genetic resources data bank and *(c)* the completion of the system of regional animal gene banks.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have been asked to reply.

As members of the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation and contributors to its regular programme budget, the United Kingdom already supports these three initiatives. Under the budget for 1992-93 which was agreed at the last meeting of the FAO conference in 1991, over $1 million was allocated to the sub-programme on animal genetic resources from which these programmes are funded.

Urban Development Areas

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will listt for each local authority which contains an urban development area the level of *(a)* urban programmes, *(b)* housing investment programmes and *(c)* derelict land grant for each year from 1987-88 at current prices and at 1987-88 prices.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* Details of expenditure at outturn prices by local authority and financial year from 1987-88 onwards are listed in the table. To convert into 1987-88 constant prices, the 1988-89 figures should be multiplied by 0·93261, the 1989-90 ones by 0·87501, 1990-91 by 0·80877 and 1991-92 by 0·75586.

Urban programme expenditure outturn (current prices)

(000)

Authority	*UDC*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Black Country	Sandwell	4,400	5,211	4,689	4,682	4,646
	Walsall	1,560	1,533	1,652	1,925	1,728
	Wolverhampton	5,420	5,062	4,733	5,625	5,148
Bristol	Bristol	1,570	1,494	1,377	1,470	1,590
Central Manchester	Manchester	16,290	20,906	19,312	19,650	19,777
London Docklands	Newham	1,720	2,109	2,690	2,850	2,750
	Southwark	1,830	2,032	2,113	2,025	2,720
	Tower Hamlets	4,470	3,390	3,693	4,464	4,335
Leeds	Leeds	3,990	4,810	4,798	5,333	5,342
Merseyside	Liverpool	16,490	14,435	16,473	17,918	17,940
	Sefton	1,500	1,470	1,412	1,682	1,667
	Wirral	3,610	3,496	3,262	3,582	3,544
Sheffield	Sheffield	5,630	5,519	5,739	6,614	10,932
Teesside	Hartlepool	1,270	1,347	1,721	1,821	1,926
	Langbaurgh	1,340	1,508	1,538	1,979	1,887
	Stockton	1,380	1,125	1,388	1,485	1,638
	Middlesborough	5,290	5,636	5,073	5,170	5,178
Trafford Park	Trafford[1]	—	—	—	—	—
	Salford[2]	—	—	—	—	—
Tyne and Wear	Newcastle	17,600	15,776	17,933	16,503	16,263
	North Tyneside	3,490	3,448	3,286	3,604	3,570
	South Tyneside	4,950	4,489	4,799	5,067	5,023
	Sunderland	4,310	4,735	4,890	5,287	5,257

[1]Not an Urban Programme Area.
[2]Included in the Manchester figure.

Housing investment programme expenditure outturn (current prices)

(£000)

UDC	*Authority*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*[1]1991-92*
Black Country	Sandwell	24,079	41,287	42,058	26,659	21,113
	Walsall	17,551	14,231	30,318	10,184	15,039
	Wolverhampton	13,436	13,717	29,957	18,808	20,347
Bristol	Bristol	22,857	34,971	45,358	33,859	35,150
Central Manchester	Manchester	83,268	93,109	110,426	52,783	53,021
London Docklands	Newham	27,499	28,880	75,826	29,648	34,450
	Southwark	49,816	43,308	101,326	39,493	46,262
	Tower Hamlets	29,150	34,353	121,378	42,558	50,121
Leeds	Leeds	36,933	39,708	41,469	32,419	38,992
Merseyside	Liverpool	64,651	45,151	49,338	55,194	50,578
	Sefton	9,460	8,918	8,907	7,217	8,332
	Wirral	16,184	13,095	18,024	12,945	12,827
Sheffield	Sheffield	55,070	59,067	70,717	66,683	49,211
Teesside	Hartlepool	6,342	5,621	6,397	5,088	6,472
	Langbaurgh	8,115	9,509	8,245	6,769	4,722
	Stockton	12,053	7,420	13,898	7,992	6,158
	Middlesbrough	8,837	12,359	13,228	9,009	11,529
Trafford Park	Trafford	8,721	8,893	12,059	9,213	4,128
	Salford	21,020	24,200	21,075	18,606	16,495

UDC	Authority	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	[1]1991-92
Tyne and Wear	Newcastle	24,915	25,116	23,037	22,209	18,878
	North Tyneside	14,934	9,237	16,361	11,802	11,141
	South Tyneside	13,029	13,819	13,536	6,823	7,174
	Sunderland	16,900	15,059	14,494	17,693	21,826

[1] Local authority estimate.

Derelict land grant outturn (Current prices)

(£000)

UDC	Authority	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
Black Country	Sandwell	2,470	2,063	1,322	1,865	1,024
	Walsall	3,117	3,474	3,779	3,738	4,223
	Wolverhampton	539	826	585	447	1,676
Bristol	Bristol	68	215	—	41	84
Central Manchester	Manchester	423	177	33	—	373
London Docklands	Newham	—	159	441	—	—
	Southwark	—	—	—	—	—
	Tower Hamlets	—	27	55	196	1,371
Leeds	Leeds	126	169	228	850	771
Merseyside	Liverpool	249	560	403	1,747	2,289
	Sefton	341	534	185	606	409
	Wirral	188	559	175	372	351
Sheffield	Sheffield	514	1,078	53	134	636
Teesside	Hartlepool	586	268	81	257	12
	Langbaurgh	319	184	202	244	28
	Stockton	229	262	76	35	155
	Middlesbrough	443	156	12	50	297
Trafford Park	Trafford	45	69	12	7	20
	Salford	5,255	4,292	3,120	564	820
Tyne and Wear	Newcastle	1,181	474	194	105	539
	North Tyneside	723	643	485	774	509
	South Tyneside	1,096	263	299	342	297
	Sunderland	1,336	1,373	1,240	1,404	1,594

Stray Dogs

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the measures taken by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Leeds to control stray dogs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* None.

Housing

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he proposes to determine the provision for new housing to be made in the new regional planning guidance for London and the south east.

Mr. Howard: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of a letter which I have sent to the chairman of SERPLAN, the London and South East regional planning conference. SERPLAN is invited to put forward proposals for the allocation of future provision for new housing between London and the counties of the south east. These proposals should be based on a regional total rate of 57,000 additional dwellings per year, over the period 1991 to 2011. I will take account of SERPLAN's proposals, together with any other views on these matters which are put to my Department, in deciding the regional housing provision to be included in the draft new regional planning guidance for the south east. The draft will then be published for consultation in due course.

Botanical Gardens

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* at 1991 prices the funding provided from Her Majesty's Government to (i) Kew and (ii) Edinburgh botanic gardens; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

The planned grant in aid provision for The Royal Botanic gardens, Kew for 1992-93 is £14·3 million. At 1991-92 prices this is equivalent to £13·6 million.

Responsibility for the Royal Botanic gardens at Edinburgh rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland but I am advised that the planned 1992-93 grant in aid provision for the Edinburgh Garden is £5·4 million. At 1991-92 prices this is equivalent to £5·1 million.

Lead Water Pipes

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for assisting households on low incomes with the costs of replacing lead water supply pipes.

Sir George Young: Further to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) to my then hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on 19 February 1992, *Official Report*, column *201*, following consultation with interested bodies, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales and I have today announced the extension of minor works assistance, under the provisions of part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Local housing authorities are to be given wider scope in providing discretionary assistance to meet the cost of replacing lead pipes used to supply drinking or cooking water to all resident owner-occupiers or tenants on income-related benefits. The new measures which come into force on 1 September 1992 will enable authorities to respond speedily and effectively with discretionary help while targeting resources on those least able to meet the cost of replacement.

SCOTLAND

Fisheries Protection

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what resources in terms of *(a)* personnel, *(b)* expenditure and *(c)* numbers of vessels, have been deployed in the fisheries protection service of Scottish waters for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* The information requested for those fisheries protection vessels directly operated by the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency for the years 1985-86 to 1991-92 is set out in the table. Information for previous years is not readily available in this form.

	Expenditure[1] *£ million*	*Personnel*[2]	*Number of vessels*
1985-86	7·2	117	7
1986-87	6·9	117	7
1987-88	6·9	117	7
1988-89	7·4	92	6
1989-90	7·4	92	6
1990-91	7·6	92	6
1991-92	8·0	92	6

[1] Full costs including capital utilisation charge and superannuation.
[2] Total crewing complement.

In addition, the Scottish Office makes a payment to the Ministry of Defence for fisheries protection services from the Royal Navy. These payments are related to the estimated costs of purchasing the service from the private sector. Payments by the Scottish Office since 1985-86 have been:

	Ministry of Defence £ million
1985-86	2·1
1986-87	1·0
1987-88	1·0
1988-89	1·0
1989-90	1·1
1990-91	1·2
1991-92	1·2

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* Spanish, *(b)* Portuguese, *(c)* French and *(d)* Danish skippers have been (i) charged with and (ii) convicted of offences relating to illegal fishing in Scottish waters in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* the information requested is as follows:

	Spanish	*Portuguese*	*French*	*Danish*
(i) *Skippers charged*				
1982	—	—	—	2
1983	2	—	—	7
1984	5	—	—	—
1985	3	—	—	5
1986	2	—	—	7
1987	7	—	1	5
1988	—	—	—	5
1989	2	—	—	7
1990	—	—	—	1
1991	—	—	2	3
1992 to date	5	1	—	—
	26	1	3	42
(ii) *Skippers convicted*				
1982	—	—	—	2
1983	2	—	—	6
1984	5	—	—	—
1985	3	—	—	5
1986	2	—	—	6
1987	7	—	1	5
1988	—	—	—	5
1989	2	—	—	5
1990	—	—	—	1
1991	—	—	2	3
1992 to date	3	1	—	—
	24	1	3	38

EDUCATION

London School of Economics

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average cost of tuition per year for a student from outside the European Community to attend the London School of Economics; what is the number of such students who attended the LSE last year; and what are the comparable figures for the previous two years.

Mr. Forman: Information about the average cost of tuition fees for overseas students from outside the European Community is not held centrally. The numbers of overseas students from outside the EC who attended the LSE in the last three available years, are as follows:

Non-EC overseas students at the London School of Economics

	1988			1989			1990		
	UG	PG	UG+PG	UG	PG	UG+PG	UG	PG	UG+PG
Full-time	705	735	1,440	764	735	1,499	775	800	1,575
Part-time	1	103	104	59	109	168	74	120	194
Full-time+part-time	706	838	1,544	823	844	1,667	849	920	1,769

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement concerning the possible relocation of the London School of Economics to the county hall building.

Mr. Forman: The disposal of county hall is primarily a matter for the London Residuary Body and for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. I have nothing to add to what my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment said on the matter during the Adjournment debate on 26 June, *Official Report*, columns 555-62.

Full-time Education

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of children are in full-time education in the United Kingdom and each of the other EC states.

Mr. Forth: The available data are shown in tables AA and BB of the Department's publication "Education Statistics for the United Kingdom 1991 edition", copies of which are in the Library.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I have this responsibility in the Department: we will continue to pursue a number of initiatives relevant to environmental matters both during this year and for the rest of the parliamentary Session.

These will include the development of environmental education as a cross-curricular theme in schools, which will be reflected in in-service training.

Professor Toyne's expert committee on environmental education within further and higher education will report in the autumn, and we shall be considering how best its recommendations might be followed up. We shall also foster the development of energy efficiency initiatives in schools and colleges.

The Department's own accommodation and purchasing policies reflect its concern for green issues. A strategy is being prepared and will be in place at the end of the year. The Department continues to monitor the scope for recycling glass, paper and plastics and the reuse of cartridges for machinery replenishment.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Foxes

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has carried out on the impact of predation of farm stock by foxes.

Mr. Curry: None.

Bananas

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to give effect to the Lomé convention provisions requiring bananas from the African, Caribbean and Pacific states to gain access to United Kingdom and EC markets without being severely disadvantaged by banana imports from Latin American producers.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom's current banana market arrangements are designed to ensure preferential access for our traditional suppliers in African, Caribbean and Pacific states. Formal Commission proposals are expected shortly for harmonised EC arrangements to complete the single market, to replace these and other national schemes. The Government are determined to ensure that these new arrangements will fully meet our Lomé convention obligations, while being compatible with a successful conclusion to the GATT Uruguay round negotiations.

Seafish Industry

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the total number of fishermen involved in the United Kingdom seafish industry.

Mr. Curry: In 1990 there were some 17,000 fishermen regularly employed and some 5,000 partially employed.

Fish Licences

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many British fish licences are issued directly to owners in Spain and Holland by his Department.

Mr. Curry: None.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: As the Department's green Minister, I will ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account in all its policies and spending programmes and that the relevant commitments in the Government's White Paper "This Common Inheritance" and subsequent anniversary report are followed up.

Slaughterers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of licensed slaughterers' or knackers' yards in each year since 1987.

Mr. Soames: All abattoirs and knackers' yards currently operate under licences granted by local authorities. With the exception of abattoirs approved for intra-Community trade, records are not maintained centrally on the status of individual premises. However, annual statistics derived from state veterinary service visits produce the following approximate figures for abattoirs in England and Wales:

Year	*Number*
1987	905
1988	855
1989	780
1990	700
1991	640

In the case of knackers' yards, it is estimated that in 1990 there were approximately 120 operating in England and Wales, and that currently there are 107.

Plant Health and Pesticides HQ

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to announce a decision on the choice of site in York for the plant health and pesticides headquarters before 16 July; and what is the scheduled operational date of the new headquarters.

Mr. Gummer: I have nothing to add to the reply given on this matter on 8 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *13*.

Banned Farm Produce

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by location, the number of farms that have been banned by his Department from supplying farm produce from their premises to the public because of the possibility of toxic chemicals entering the food chain; what review he is currently carrying out to safeguard the farmers' livelihood; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: One farm, near Bolsover in Derbyshire, is subject to an order, under part I of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 because it is contaminated with dioxins to an unacceptable degree. Following the placing of restrictions the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service has given free advice to the farmer on his future farming options. The Government policy with regard to compensation which applies in cases of this nature is that it is the polluter who must pay.

Cockles

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Gower on 24 June, Ref. 55919, regarding the treatment processes for cockles, if he will publish the date when he submitted for approval the Torry process to the EC's standing veterinary committee.

Mr. Curry: We have not at present submitted an application to the Standing Veterinary Committee for the approval of any specific heat treatment. We are formulating for early submission an application covering the use of processes which embody the principle of a minimum temperature of 90 deg C maintained for at least 90 seconds, the essential feature of the Torry process.

Mink

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to allow the Mink Keeping Order 1987 to lapse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Mink (Keeping) Order 1987 expires on 31 December 1992. A consultation exercise will take place this summer to seek the views of interested organisations on future arrangements for the secure keeping of mink. Following this, the Government will decide whether to make a new order.

Set-aside

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money was paid in set-aside payments in 1991 and 1992; how many individual payments were made; what was the average size of the payment and the largest payment made; and what were the numbers of payments in each British county.

Mr. Curry: The set-aside scheme year runs from 1 October to 30 September. Payments are normally made in arrears in the last quarter of the calendar year, although for various reasons a small number of payments cannot be made until early in the following year.

Total set-aside payments in respect of England in the set-aside scheme years 1989-90 and 1990-91 are set out in the tables.

Payments in respect of set-aside year

	Made in financial year	
	1 October 1989 to 30 September 1990	*1 October 1990 to 30 September 1991*
	(Made in financial year)	
	(1990-91)	*(1991-92)*
	£	£
Total payments	15,301,906	20,357,861
Average payment per agreement	6,596	6,677
Largest payment per agreement	112,723	114,151

Number of participants eligible for payment

County	*Set-aside scheme year*	
	1 October 1989 to 30 September 1990	*1 October 1990 to 30 September 1991*
Avon	28	45
Bedfordshire	51	77
Berkshire	40	54
Buckinghamshire	108	140
Cambridgeshire	83	120
Cheshire	29	36
Cleveland	5	7
Cornwall	50	66
Cumbria	11	12
Derbyshire	27	37
Devonshire	89	118
Dorset	40	51
Durham	17	26
Essex	115	149
Gloucestershire	74	106
Greater London	8	16
Greater Manchester	7	10
Hampshire	70	92
Hereford/Worcestershire	48	64
Hertfordshire	52	64
Humberside	47	60
Isle of Wight	6	8

County	Set-aside scheme year 1 October 1989 to 30 September 1990	1 October 1990 to 30 September 1991
Kent	117	160
Lancashire	11	14
Leicestershire	38	50
Lincolnshire	72	95
Merseyside	13	14
West Midlands	5	6
Norfolk	115	135
Northamptonshire	76	98
Northumberland	35	39
Nottinghamshire	28	38
Oxfordshire	110	157
Shropshire	22	29
Somerset	39	56
Staffordshire	35	43
Suffolk	151	193
Surrey	44	51
East Sussex	69	91
West Sussex	77	88
Tyne and Wear	10	14
Warwickshire	61	82
Wiltshire	67	98
North Yorkshire	95	110
South Yorkshire	15	16
West Yorkshire	10	14
TOTAL	2,320	3,049

Sensitive Area Payments

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money in total was paid in environmentally sensitive area payments in 1991 and 1992; what was the average payment to recipients; how many recipients there were; and what was the largest payment to a recipient.

Mr. Curry: The total cost of payments under the ESA scheme in England for the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92 was £7,459,000 and £8,005,000 respectively. There were 2,926 agreements in 1990-91 and 3,105 agreements in 1991-92 giving an average payment of £2,549 and £2,578 in each year. The largest single payment was £185,139·82.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled Workers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what plans there are for improving the training of non-specialist staff in her Department, with particular reference to training involving the disability organisations;

(2) what quality standards have been developed for monitoring the use of outside agencies for the assessment, counselling and rehabilitation of disabled workers; which interested organisations have been consulted on this matter; and will such standards be made available to the House.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the percentage unemployed for the United Kingdom, and for each standard region, on the broad and narrow definitions for April 1984, November 1984, April 1990, April 1992 and May 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Economic Activity Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the travel-to-work areas, or smallest area available, concerning the 35 per cent. of United Kingdom population with the lowest economic activity rates according to 1981 census data and for June 1984, June 1990 and the latest available date with the areas with the lowest economic activity rates listed first; and if she will distinguish between the 15 per cent. of population in areas with the lowest economic activity rate and the 20 per cent. of population with the next lowest activity rates.

Mr. McLoughlin: The latest available data on economic activity rates for travel-to-work areas are from the 1981 census of population. These can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Emergency Standby Vessels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to the answer from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport of 30 June, *Official Report*, column *451*, what contingency plans she has developed or is considering for the provision of adequate safeguards for offshore installations should be a substantial proportion of the emergency standby vessels currently under assessment be taken out of service by their owners; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Health and Safety Executive has made it clear to the industry that it is the responsibility of each individual operator to ensure that there is adequate standby vessel cover available at all times to provide the necessary safeguards. The code of practice on standby vessels which was published last July and the deadlines set out in it were prepared in full consultation with the owners and operators of standby vessels; and the HSE considers that the final deadline for necessary improvements is achievable. The HSE is continuing to monitor the situation.

Employment Training

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in each year since employment training started, what has been the cost of ET; what contribution has been made by the European social fund; and what would have been the cost of trainees' entitlement to social security benefits.

Mr. McLoughlin: The table shows the expenditure on ET since it began and estimated expenditure on that part of the trainee allowances equivalent to previous entitlement to social security benefit. The contribution made to employment training by the European social fund in 1989 was £72 million, in 1990 £126 million and in 1991 £157 million.

Employment training

£ million

	Total expenditure	*Estimated benefit equivalent element of trainee allowances*
1988-89[1]	425	117
1989-90	1,107	425
1990-91	1,076	425
1991-92[2]	844	337
1992-93[3]	807	318

[1] ET began in September 1988. Transitional arrangements applied to participants previously on wages on the community programme.
[2] Provisional outturn expenditure.
[3] Planned expenditure.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how European social fund money has been distributed in each year since employment training started to *(a)* ET, *(b)* youth training, *(c)* voluntary organisations, *(d)* local authorities and *(e)* other purposes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Until the end of 1989, individual applications for European social fund support were submitted by a range of organisations which included Government, local authorities and voluntary organisations, for approval in Brussels.

Since 1990, when new regulations took effect, applications have been made to the Department of Employment for approval. The money is paid out to applicants in three tranches. Advance payments of 50 per cent. and a further 30 per cent. are normally available during the life of a project and a final claim of up to the last 20 per cent. is payable after accounts have been scrutinised.

Youth Training

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by how much an employer would have to supplement the minimum youth training allowance to compensate for its loss of value through inflation; and what evidence she has as to the proportion of employers who are paying supplements of these amounts.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* Supplements of £8·54 and £16·02 per week respectively would be needed to restore in real terms the value of the current YT minimum allowances of £29·50 for 16-year-olds and £35·00 for 17-year-olds and over to the levels when they were last changed.

The level of the YT allowance is a minimum level and employers, providers and training and enterprise councils are free to arrange higher levels.

TRANSPORT

Antares

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will outline the circumstances of the loss of the fishing vessel Antares; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The marine accident investigation branch report on the loss of the fishing vessel Antares with the loss of four lives has been published today. The report deals with the collision between the trawler and the Trafalgar class submarine HMS Trenchant in Bute sound, north east of the Isle of Arran, in the early hours of 22 November 1990. The report finds that Antares foundered as a direct result of its net being snagged by Trenchant and that that was caused by a partial breakdown in both the structure and standards of watch keeping on board Trenchant following the completion of a command course exercise. The Ministry of Defence has admitted full liability for the accident.

The report makes eight recommendations which substantially reflect the findings of the Royal Navy's own board of inquiry, and the determination made by the sheriff principal following the fatal accident inquiry. The majority of the report recommendations have already, as a result of similar recommendations from the earlier inquiries, been accepted and implemented either in full or in part. Major changes have been made in submarine operating policy and procedures in order to improve the safety of fishing vessels, in particular the mandatory minimum separation between dived submarines and fishing vessels has been extended to 4,000 yards. Further changes are under consideration by MoD, in consultation with my Department and with the sub-group of its fishing industry safety group which was established specifically to consider submarine and fishing vessel safety issues. As part of this continuing work, the Government will consider any remaining actions which may need to be taken in the light of the MAIB report.

Aeroplane Crashes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of aeroplane crashes in Wales last year; what were the comparable figures for the previous two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The safety data and analysis unit of the Civil Aviation Authority advises me that there were 15 reportable aircarft accidents in Wales in 1991. The comparable figures for 1990 and 1989 were nine and eight respectively.

Low Flying

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to require low-flying aircraft in rural areas to be equipped with silencers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: No.

Speed Traps

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of whether speed measuring cameras would have a greater effect on reducing driving speeds *(a)* if they are covertly placed or *(b)* if they are preceded by warning signs.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Studies are currently being carried out to assess whether the use of area-wide signs to indicate the use of enforcement cameras increases driver compliance with speed limits.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will place warning signs in the areas where new speed measuring cameras are to be placed.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter which my right hon. Friend will consider in the light of the current studies to assess the effectiveness of such signs in increasing driver compliance with speed limits.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what increase in fine income he expects as a result of the new speed measuring cameras.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The income from fines and fixed penalties will depend on factors such as the number of cameras deployed, their effectiveness in reducing speed, the number of suspected offenders and the proportion of them who are tried before a court rather than paying the fixed penalty. It is therefore not possible to give an estimate with any degree of accuracy.

Waterway Safety

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date he published the report by the Maritime Accident Investigation Branch into the Marchioness disaster; on what date he appointed the Hayes inquiry into safety on inland waterways; and on what date he expects to publish the report of the Hayes inquiry.

Mr. Norris: The marine accident investigation branch's final report into the collision between the passenger launch Marchioness and MV Bowbelle was published on 15 August 1991. The report's safety recommendations had previously been published separately on 24 July 1990.

On 20 December 1991, the Secretary of State for Transport appointed Mr. John W. Hayes, LLB, to head an inquiry into river safety. Mr. Hayes' report was published on 7 July 1992.

Road Accidents, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motor vehicle accidents there were in the Chelmsford local authority area in each of the last three available years; and how many deaths and how many personal injuries occurred.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The figures for the years 1989 to 1991 are as follows:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*
(1) Total accidents	832	716	615
(2) Casualties			
(i) Fatal	16	16	18
(ii) Serious	208	166	106
(iii) Slight	947	829	726

M11

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to reject the proposed private sector plans for an extension of the M11 motorway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have decided after careful consideration that the Government cannot support the project by providing the very large sums of public money, of the order of £750 million, which the promoters are seeking.

I am determined to improve the road system on the eastern side of the country to promote the economic prosperity of all the areas which it serves. But I believe that our policy of upgrading the A1 to motorway standard and improving the roads linked to it will achieve this objective more effectively, give better value for money and will be more environmentally acceptable.

The roads programme now includes schemes for upgrading all those sections of A1 which are not already motorway at a cost of almost £1·5 billion. This programme also includes a number of other schemes to improve road links in the east, at a cost of almost a further £1 billion. The northern section of M11 is to be widened and the A604, which connects it to the A1, will also be upgraded to motorway. A45 and A47 are also due to be improved. We have given 100 per cent. grant towards the cost of building the A15 in Humberside, much of it as dual carriageway, most of the A15 between Lincoln and the Humber bridge has been trunked and we are dualling the A46, in recognition of the importance of this regional route. The programme also includes 12 schemes for improving A16 and A17, important routes through Lincolnshire. Hull and the Humber ports are already well served by M62/A63 and M180/M18 respectively: a new route from the Humber bridge to the A1079 trunk road has been built with Government grant aid, and six other improvements are planned for the existing A1079, A1237 and A19 trunk roads north from the Humber Bridge towards the north east.

I recognise the very considerable efforts which the promoters have devoted to this project. They are of course still free to pursue it if they wish as a privately financed one.

M25

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the estimated cost of his plans to widen the M25 Motorway at 1992 prices in respect of *(a)* the new six lanes between the M3 and M4 intersections and *(b)* an additional lane on the rest of its surface sections.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The proposals announced on 25 June for link roads between Junctions 12 and 15 are estimated to cost £144 million. Those announced last September for rapid widening to duel four lanes between junctions 5 and 28 will cost an estimated £625 million.

Rail Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure the use of cost-benefit analysis assessment in the evaluation of rail infrastructure projects.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to an answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) on 3 July 1992, *Official Report*, columns *733-34*.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Over the next year and beyond, I have many environmental priorities. For a start, I am devoting part of the Informal Transport Council on 16 and 17 July to a discussion on the Commission's Green Paper on Transport and the Environment. I shall continue the policy of giving strong emphasis to environmental aspects in the road programme. I shall work towards more

environmentally acceptable standards for road vehicles. This I intend to do in collaboration with the European Community. I also want to see more traffic—both passengers and freight—transferred from road to rail. Our policy for involving the private sector in providing railway services will encourage this. And I shall support action to deal with traffic congestion and pollution in urban areas such as parking controls and other traffic restraint measures as well as encouraging the use of buses and safer cycling.

Air-sea Rescue

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes any changes to the current arrangements for air-sea rescue in Kent, Sussex and Hampshire.

Mr. Norris: There are no current plans for the movement of the Coastguard helicopter from the Solent area. The MoD is responsible for the positioning of military aircraft having regard to agreed DTp/MoD criteria for helicopter civil search and rescue cover around the United Kingdom.

To date, my Department has not been informed by MOD of any proposed changes which would affect such criteria.

British Rail

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what firms are advising him on the privatisation of British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: Samuel Montagu provides merchant bank advice; Coopers and Lybrand advises on the liberalisation of access to the railway network; and Debenham Tewson Chinnocks advises on stations.

Radioactive Substances

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representation the United Kingdom has on the special permanent working party for the transport of radioactive substances set up by the European Commission this year; and what plans he has to review the arrangements for the transport of radioactive materials within, into and from the European Community during his presidency of the European Transport Council.

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom is represented on the special working group on the safe transport of radioactive material, which has been meeting since 1982, by officials from the Department's radioactive materials transport division.

During the United Kingdom Presidency the main work of my Department on the transport of radioactive material worldwide will be continued participation in the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency, with which the Community has close links.

WALES

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his proposals for Tir Cymen.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A countryside stewardship scheme in Wales, to be called Tir Cymen, has been developed by the Countryside Council for Wales and an announcement regarding its introduction will be made shortly.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications he has received for participation in the countryside stewardship programme from farmers in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The countryside stewardship scheme run by the Countryside Commission in England is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. A countryside stewardship scheme in Wales, to be called Tir Cymen, has been developed by the Countryside Council for Wales and an announcement regarding its introduction will be made shortly.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were in employment in each county in *(a)* 1978 and *(b)* 1989; and how many were in employment in Cardiff, Swansea, Camarthen, Llanelli, Newport, Bangor and Wrexham (i) in 1978 and (ii) in 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: Numbers of employees in employment are shown in the following tables:

County	[1] *1978*	*1989*
Clwyd	127,767	139,458
Dyfed	105,438	102,867
Gwent	166,990	155,979
Gwynedd	69,789	76,955
Mid Glamorgan	186,192	164,989
Powys	29,708	40,638
South Glamorgan	168,689	179,009
West Glamorgan	160,762	126,778

Source: NOMIS, Employment Department.
[1] Using approximations to county areas defined as the best-fit of jobcentre areas to each county.

1984 Job Centre TTWAs[1]	*1978*	*1989*
Cardiff	176,317	180,312
Swansea	103,327	90,814
Carmarthen	16,959	17,364
Llanelli	34,767	27,309
Newport	78,591	76,397
Bangor and Caernarfon	24,195	24,545
Wrexham	44,637	48,646

Source: NOMIS, Employment Department.
[1] These areas are used for both years and are defined as the best-fit of jobcentre areas into 1984 travel-to-work areas.

Household Waste

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of household waste is currently recycled by each district council in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally although work is in hand nationally to establish

better data. Data on recycling will also be available from the plans district councils are preparing under section 49 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Road Accident Victims

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish an estimated figure for the total number of working years lost in Wales as a result of road accident fatalities in each of last five years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information allowing such an estimate to be made is not collected centrally.

Toxic Shock Syndrome

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning toxic shock syndrome; and what initiatives he proposes concerning toxic shock syndrome.

Mr. David Hunt: Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a rare but very unpleasant condition which is believed to be caused by toxin-producing strains of the bacterium Staphylococcus Aureus. About 50 per cent. of all cases occur in women during menstruation, but non-menstrual cases occur in association with abscesses, osteomyelitis, wound infections and pneumonia—i.e. any severe infections. It can therefore also affect men, children and non-menstruating women. Management of the condition is a matter for clinical judgment.

Information received from the public health laboratory service suggests that in recent years there have been, on average, one or two deaths a year from TSS associated with tampon use in the United Kingdom. Government action has been focused on cases relating to tampon usage as the prime identifiable cause of TSS.

In 1984 the Department of Trade and Industry and the sanitary protection industry set up a voluntary prior notification scheme for menstrual tampons. This scheme applies to the entire manufactured product, including the instructions for use. Under the scheme, manufacturers submit to the Government any new tampon to which there have been significant changes in the design or materials, and toxicologists from the Department of Health scrutinise them to decide whether they pose a health hazard. The manufacturers' own code of practice also covers manufacturing standard quality assurance.

For the past decade, the instruction leaflet—included in every pack by tampon manufacturers—has contained information on TSS, advice on using the lowest level of absorbency required and on changing tampons frequently. It is likely that these simple precautions minimise the risk of TSS.

At the end of 1990 the industry, in agreement with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Health, made some improvements to the labelling of tampon packages and the instruction leaflets. The principal modifications to pack statements were to add instructions to users to read and retain the leaflet, and clearer advice on absorbency selection. Fuller information on TSS, including what to do if symptoms occur, was also put into the leaflet.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if it is his intention to choose a boundary for the new unitary authority based on Cardiff which to the west and north west follows or falls within the current South Glamorgan boundary.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave him on 6 July 1992.

Flood Damage

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give an estimate of the total cost of damage to agriculture in Wales due to flooding since 1 March; if he has any plans to improve facilities to prevent similar flooding in future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is not held centrally. Measures to improve flood protection in Wales are continually being undertaken where it is economic and technically appropriate to do so.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hectares in Wales are designated as environmentally sensitive areas; what is the number of farmers under this scheme and the total expenditure in 1991 under the scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

ESA	*Designated area (ha)*	*Number of current management agreements*	*Expenditure 1991-92 (£)*
Lleyn peninsula	39,700	411	351,907
Cambrian mountains (including extension)	153,000	422	1,106,936
Total	192,700	833	1,458,843

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to extend further the environmentally sensitive areas scheme in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement I made on 22 June 1992 and decisions about any further expansion of the ESA scheme in Wales will be taken in the light of available resources.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of sites in Wales designated as sites of special scientific interest currently and for the previous two years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is as follows:

Number of sites of special scientific interest

1990—769 (as at 31 March)
1991—816 (as at 31 March)
1992—841 (as at 31 May)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hectares in Wales are designated as sites

of special scientific interest; what is that figure as a percentage of *(a)* farm land in Wales and *(b)* Wales as a whole; what is the percentage change in the number of sites of special scientific interest in hectares from 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is as follows:

	1982	*1992*
Area of Wales covered by SSSI's (hectares)	167,518	200,896
Area of Wales coverd by SSSI's as a percentage of farm land	9·9	11·8
Area of Wales coverd by SSSI's as a percentage of total area	7·9	9·5

The increase in the number of hectares of Wales notified as sites of special scientific interest from 1982 to 1992 is therefore 19·9 per cent.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to increase the number of sites in Wales designated as sites of special scientific interest.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The responsibility for notifying sites of special scientific interest in the Principality rests with the Countryside Council for Wales. However, I understand that it has plans to designate more sites.

Miscarriages

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many miscarriages occurred in 1991 in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Wales attributable to smoking during pregnancies; what were the comparable figures for the previous two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Power Failures

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what contingency plans exist to deal with the provision of electricity in Wales following power failures during violent storms; what plans he has to revise these; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The National Grid Company has contingency plans to restore supplies as quickly as practicable in the event of their loss during violent storms. these plans are regularly tested and reviewed.

In addition, both South Wales Electricity and Manweb are party to a national code of practice which provides for mutual assistance from other regional electricity companies during network problems caused by storms and other emergencies. The code is reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Hospital Treatment

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated impact of the separate classification of tertiary referrals in hospitals as episodes of treatment on the total number of hospital in-patient treatments enumerated in national health service statistics in Wales; on what date tertiary referrals were first separately counted for statistical purposes; and what public announcement was made of the change.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Aggregate information on in-patient treatments in NHS hospitals in Wales continues to be collected as deaths and discharges from hospitals as in previous years.

A letter to district general managers DGM(90)123, announced that from 1 April 1991, data relating to individual patient episodes would record tertiary referrals and cross-specialty referrals separately. These data will be used to supply detailed disaggregated analyses of patients' episodes of care in hospitals relating to specific types of treatment, characteristics of patients, and categories of illness.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with fund-holding general practitioners concerning the introduction of separate accounting for tertiary referrals during hospital treatment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Guidance was issued in January 1991 on the handling of tertiary referrals. No indications have been received that further guidance is necessary. Fundholding general practitioners should specify in their contracts the arrangements for tertiary referrals to ensure that these are only made with their agreement. Where a referral is made without this agreement they are not liable for payment.

Health Authorities (Public Relations)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority concerning its public relations contract with Harrison Cowley; what level of expenditure is planned under this contract; which other health authorities in Wales have such contracts, with which public relations agencies and for what value; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have discussed the public relations arrangements in place in South Glamorgan health authority with its chairman, though he has been congratulated on the professionalism with which his authority presented its waiting times policy to local people.

Responsibility for locally based public relations in the NHS rests firmly with individual district health authorities and family health services authorities. Details of the kind sought are therefore best obtained directly from the authorities themselves.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the discretionary limit for capital expenditure by the Cardiff Bay development corporation without reference to his Department; if he will list each of the projects above that limit submitted for evaluation to his Department in each year since 1987; and if he will give a summary of each evaluation.

Mr. David Hunt: Details of the various financial delegation thresholds for Cardiff Bay development corporation are set out in the following table. I will write

to the hon. Gentleman, shortly, with a list of projects that exceed those thresholds. Details of the evaluation given to each project cannot be summarised without incurring disproportionate cost. A copy of my reply to the hon. Gentleman will be placed in the Library of the House.

Schedule of delegations to Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

	£
Projects (including land acquisition)	
Full delegation threshold	250,000
Partial delegation threshold	3,000,000
Consultancies	
De minimis level (competitive tender not required)	3,000
Single tender level for urgent studies	15,000
Full consultancy delegation threshold	100,000
Administrative expenditure ("Project" items)	
Delegation levels for administrative 'projects' before full project levels are introduced:	
Initial administrative delegation level (prior to approval of full budget)	20,000
Interim administrative delegation level (after approval of full budget)	50,000
Computing or information technology expenditure	
(i) Purchase of computer hardware (capital cost)	50,000
(ii) Bureau services (per annum)	10,000
(iii) Consultancies (per annum)	10,000
Proposals to incur computing expenditure above these levels have to be referred to the Department with full supporting information, including an appraisal of the strategic consideration.	
Works contracts	
De minimis level (competitive tender not required)	3,000
Single tender level for specialist of fixed price purchase	15,000
Value above which contracts must be advertised in the Official Journal (1 million ecu)	710,000
Write-offs and gifts	
Following may be written off/given without prior reference to the Department	
All cash losses, other than overpayments	
Other losses not exceeding	1,000
Gifts not exceeding	500
—up to a total value in any one year of	10,000
Land disposal	
Disposal on terms set out in the Notes for Guidance may be effected without prior reference to the Department providing the area involved does not exceed	5 ha

Employment Action

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to reduce the waiting time for the unemployed interested in applying for employment action programmes; and what special priority schemes approved for employment action he will allocate where length of unemployment qualification periods are shorter than the standard six months.

Mr. David Hunt: There are no proposals to change the general requirement that applicants for employment action should have been unemployed and in receipt of benefit for 26 weeks or more.

School Maintenance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what statistics he has on the total school maintenance backlog for all the counties in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Responsibility for the repair and maintenance of school buildings rests with local education authorities and statistics on the maintenance backlog are not collected centrally.

Cadw

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what targets he has set for Cadw, Welsh Historic Monuments executive agency.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Cadw has been set the following key targets for 1992-93:

(i) To complete 90 per cent. of the approved conservation maintenance programme.

(ii) To promote the preservation of historic buildings and ancient monuments by completing 12 re-survey lists and 60 scheduling entries.

(iii) To resolve 75 per cent. of statutory cases within the target periods (28 days for listed building consent cases, 90 days for scheduled monument consent cases and 120 days for ad hoc listings).

(iv) To resolve 80 per cent. of grant applications within the target periods (18 weeks for Historic Buildings Council cases, six weeks for ancient monument cases and 12 weeks for civic initiatives (heritage) grant scheme cases); and to pay 90 per cent. of certified claims within six weeks of receipt.

(v) To raise Cadw's market share of the number of visitors to the top twenty heritage sites in Wales from 63·7 per cent. in 1991 to 65 per cent. in 1992.

(vi) To increase the average spend per visitor from 163 pence in 1991-92 to 175 pence in 1992-93.

(vii) To operate within allocated programme and running cost budgets.

(viii) To achieve an efficiency saving of 1·5 per cent. on gross running costs.

Full details of Cadw's performance against its targets for 1991-92 are contained in the agency's annual report, which will be published shortly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Multiple Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the total numbers of *(a)* sets of (i) twins, (ii) triplets, (iii) guadruplets, (iv) quintuplets and (v) sextuplets born in Northern Ireland in each year from 1980 to 1991, *(b)* maternities in Northern Ireland in each year and *(c)* multiple births of each type in each year which were conceived as a result of (1) in vitro fertilisation, (2) gamete intra-fallopian transfer and (3) other forms of assisted conception.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Type	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*[1]
(a) Sets of:												
(i) Twins	298	305	306	263	304	272	281	322	287	281	267	315
(ii) Triplets	4	3	2	4	3	3	2	7	1	2	5	6
(iii) Quadruplets	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
(iv) Quintuplets	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
(v) Sextuplets	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Type		1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991[1]
(b) Maternities		28,542	27,229	26,905	27,188	27,547	27,529	27,989	27,694	27,614	25,928	25,338	26,058
(c)[2] IVF	(i) Twins[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	7	5	12	N/K
	(ii) Triplets[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	1	2	N/K
GIFT[4]		—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	—	—	—	—

N/K = Not Known.
[1] Provisional.
[2] Figures are not collated centrally on infertility treatment other than IVF and GIFT.
[3] These figures are the results of IVF by year of conception with IVF having been available in Northern Ireland only since 1987.
[4] GIFT was available in Northern Ireland in only 1986 and 1987.

Ards Hospital

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the total expenditure at Ards hospital in each of the past five years; and how much in each year was for capital projects.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Capital works £	Total £
1986-87	118,753	7,521,157
1987-88	619,148	8,712,289
1988-89	359,464	9,155,789
1989-90	399,852	9,894,402
1990-91	665,474	11,044,410

Hospital Services

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated population within each of the district councils in the areas for which the Eastern Health and Social Services area board provides hospital services; and what were the corresponding figures five years ago.

Mr. Hanley: The most recent information, contained in the mid-year estimates of population, relates to 1990 and is as follows:

District council area	1987	1990
Ards	63,600	65,400
Belfast	303,800	295,100
Castlereagh	57,900	58,100
Down	56,400	57,700
Lisburn	92,900	98,700
North Down	70,700	72,600

Figures for 1991 will be based on data obtained from the 1991 census and will not be available until after publication of the census summary report in the autumn. I shall write to the right hon. Member when the figures are available and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Terrorist Funding

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the amount of money raised by terrorist sympathisers in north America and received in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mates: Although for obvious reasons I cannot be precise, we understand that somewhere between $\$\frac{1}{2}$ million and $1 million is sent to Northern Ireland each year.

Airport Police

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what statutory protection exists for constables of the Northern Ireland Airports Authority from unfair dismissal; what statutory police federation exists to represent them; and what statutory restrictions exist on their entitlement to join a trade union.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* Persons employed in police service, or in any other capacity by virtue of which they have the powers or privileges of a constable are excluded from the unfair dismissal legislation. Accordingly, constables of the Northern Ireland Airports Authority have no statutory protection from unfair dismissal. There are no statutory restrictions on their entitlement to join a trade union and they are represented by the Belfast Airport Police Association rather than a statutory police federation.

HEALTH

Hospitals (Infections)

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients are known to have contracted post-operative infections in *(a)* national health service hospitals and *(b)* private hospitals in each of the last five years; and if she will express those cases as a percentage of the total of patients treated;

(2) what estimates she has of the cost of treating people who have contracted post-operative infections in *(a)* national health service hospitals and *(b)* private hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: The available information on numbers of patients contracting post-operative infections is based on hospital discharge summaries. The 1989-90 estimates show 17,600 patients in national health service hospitals diagnosed as suffering from post-operative infection. The corresponding number in 1985 was 15,540. In both years, this number represented 0·2 per cent. of patients treated in hospital, but information from research studies indicates that this is an underestimate of the total incidence. Data for the intervening years are not available and corresponding information is not held in respect of private hospitals.

Information is not held centrally about the cost of treating patients with post-operative infection.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people are known to have died in each of the past five years due to infections contracted while in hospital;

(2) what measures she intends to take to reduce the number of people who contract infections during their stay in hospital;

(3) if she will list the types of infections which are most frequently contracted during a patient's stay in hospital.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not held centrally on the prevalence and type of hospital-acquired infections. A study in 1980 indicated that urinary infections, wound infections, lower respiratory infections and skin infections were those most frequently acquired.

The information available on deaths relates to those known to be due to post operative infection and is given in the table.

We are very much aware of the importance of preventing hospital-acquired infection to the fullest extent possible. In 1988 we issued to health authorities the guidance produced by the joint Department of Health/ Public Health Laboratory Service hospital infection working group. Authorities were asked to ensure that the recommended arrangements for infection control were in place in all acute hospitals. The Department is updating and expanding this advice. The guidance assists both purchasing authorities and provider units in carrying out their respective responsibilities of ensuring that the proper preventive measures are in place and of determining the quality measures to be specified in contracts. Part of the role of the newly appointed consultants in communicable disease control is to advise their health authorities on these quality measures.

Adequate surveillance is an important aspect of the control of hospital-acquired infection and guidance on methods of surveillance has recently been issued to the national health service.

The Department also welcomes the development by the professions of clinical standards in hospital infection control. The clinical standards advisory group has been undertaking preliminary work with a view to proposing further studies in this area. We are also considering a proposal for research in to the financial costs and other burdens resulting from hospital acquired infection.

Deaths from post operative infections

[1] *England and Wales, 1987-91*

Year	Deaths
1987	11
1988	15
1989	12
1990	7
1991	8

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision, code 998·5 source OPCS death registrations.

Pay Bargaining

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list her Department's discussion documents on the subject of pay bargaining in the private health sector; and if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on pay bargaining in the private health sector.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for the independent sector to set its own pay bargaining procedures.

National Health Service Staff (Transfers)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when she proposes to make regulations under section 49 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 for transfer of staff from health service to local authority employment;

(2) what discussions she has had with staff and staff representatives facing transfer from national health service employment to local government employment in accordance with section 49 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is proposed to make regulations under section 49 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 at the same time as the commencement order bringing part III of the 1990 Act into force is made. Staff representatives will be consulted about the regulations in the normal way.

Dentistry

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate the Government have made of the effect of introducing a prior approval limit on treatment of £200; what percentage of dental treatment would require prior approval at 1992 prices with an immediate introduction of the £200 limit; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is good management to put cost monitoring mechanisms in place for the most expensive treatments. Prior approval does not limit the range of treatments available. At £200, it will only apply to rather less than 3 per cent. of all courses of treatment.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate the Government have made of the loss in net income to dentists from a 7 per cent. reduction in dental treatment fees.

Dr. Mawhinney: Overall, we anticipate that these changes will not only deliver the 8·5 per cent. increase in dentists' target average net income which the review body recommended, but that dentists will on average receive some £5,000 more than this target.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what complaints in each of the last three years she has received about the London ambulance service allegedly being inadequate or at fault in individual cases where it has been called out; and in how many of those cases loss of life was involved.

Mr. Sackville: The London ambulance service—LAS—is responsible for dealing with complaints about the service. It has a formal complaints procedure that ensures that complaints are dealt with in line with the patients charter. A number of complaints have been made about the LAS both to Ministers and direct to the LAS. I can assure the hon. Member that each complaint has been thoroughly investigated. Information on the number of cases that involve loss of life is not collected centrally.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will review the level of emergency ambulance cover for *(a)* Leyton and *(b)* London; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The London ambulance service is managed as a pan-London service. Resources available in individual geographic regions of the service are shared with other regions, as necessary. The LAS is currently reviewing manning levels and shift rosters covering the whole of London. Management information derived from the recently introduced computer-aided dispatch will further improve the ability of managers to match available resources to demands on the service.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason a ceiling budget has been placed on the accident and emergency service of the London ambulance service; and if she will make this particular service demand led.

Mr. Sackville: Like all other ambulance services, the London ambulance service contracts to provide a full 24-hour accident and emergency service. All such services are expected to match income to expenditure, taking account of the demands placed upon them. The level of expenditure for 1992-93 has been agreed, and this includes real growth of £1 million.

Regional Health Authority Chairmen

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will announce the appointment of regional health authority chairmen.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am pleased to announce that I have made two new appointments to chair regional health authorities, as follows:

South West Thames RHA, Professor Marian Hicks
South Western RHA, Ms. Rennie Fritchie

In addition, the chairmen of the following three regional health authorities have been reappointed from 1 August 1992:

North East Thames RHA, Mr. Tim Chessells
Northern RHA, Mr. Peter Carr
Oxford RHA, Dr. Stuart Burgess

I would like to express my appreciation of the contribution to the national health service made by Mr. Charles Stuart at South Western RHA. For personal reasons, Mr. Stuart is relinquishing the regional chairmanship, and I have invited him to become the chairman-designate of the proposed Plymouth hospitals unit which has made a formal application to become an NHS trust operational from 1 April 1993.

Hospices

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much public money has been made available *(a)* nationally in respect of hospice support and *(b)* to the Chelmsford hospice in each of the last three available years.

Mr. Sackville: In each of the last three years the Government have allocated funds to regional health authorities to enable them to increase the support they give to hospices and similar organisations providing care and support for dying people and their families. In each of the last two years, funds have also been allocated to enable hospices to obtain supplies of drugs free of charge. The allocations are shown in the table:

	Hospices (£ million)	*Drugs (£ million)*
1990-91	8·00	—
1991-92	16·96	3·20
1992-93	31·70	5·50

The allocation of funds to individual projects is a matter for local discussion and agreement. The Chelmsford hospice received £54,000 in 1990-91 and £108,000 in 1991-92 from North East Thames regional health authority. The allocation for 1992-93 has yet to be approved by the RHA.

Disabled People

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average number of days' wait for disabled people needing *(a)* artificial limbs and *(b)* wheelchairs from the national health service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not collected centrally.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had been on hospital waiting lists in England in total, and in each specialty, on 1 April 1991 and on 1 April 1992 for *(a)* three months or less, *(b)* six months or less, *(c)* 12 months or less, *(d)* 24 months or less and *(e)* over 24 months.

Mr. Sackville: The information as at 31 March 1991 is given in the table. Figures for 31 March 1992 by specialty are not yet available centrally. For the provisional overall picture at 31 March 1992, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) on 12 May at columns *489-92*. These show that between 31 March 1991 and 31 March 1992 the number waiting over two years fell by 97 per cent. and the total number waiting dropped by 3·5 per cent. or 33,131.

Waiting lists England	*All patients waiting*	*Waiting under 3 months*	*Waiting under 6 months*	*Waiting under 12 months*	*Waiting under 24 months*	*Waiting over 24 months*
31 March 1991						
All cases						
General surgery	206,622	86,220	128,219	169,553	195,645	10,977
Urology	58,541	24,495	36,241	47,135	54,483	4,058
Trauma and Orthopaedics	170,648	56,512	95,079	135,992	161,305	9,343
ENT	121,837	50,670	77,413	104,092	118,046	3,791
Ophthalmology	95,210	34,567	58,125	82,579	93,673	1,537
Oral Surgery	62,176	20,852	34,424	49,371	58,743	3,433
Neurosurgery	3,913	1,651	2,439	3,202	3,724	189
Plastic surgery	53,485	11,424	18,837	28,793	39,907	13,578
Cardiothoracic surgery	9,236	3,664	5,904	7,996	8,937	299

Waiting lists England	All patients waiting	Waiting under 3 months	Waiting under 6 months	Waiting under 12 months	Waiting under 24 months	Waiting over 24 months
Paediatric surgery	6,202	2,872	4,313	5,616	6,109	93
Obstetrics and gynaecology	118,235	58,986	84,190	105,578	115,724	2,511
General medicine	9,832	7,454	8,428	9,111	9,515	317
Cardiology	10,954	5,418	7,750	10,003	10,715	239
Dermatology	1,557	1,100	1,313	1,418	1,514	43
Thoracic medicine	589	348	438	536	576	13
Medical oncology	199	176	180	185	193	6
Neurology	2,709	1,697	2,166	2,443	2,578	131
Rheumatology	2,426	1,484	1,921	2,231	2,352	74
Geriatric medicine	461	369	413	434	449	12
Mental illness	830	357	513	647	705	125
Radiotherapy	652	636	645	649	652	0
General practice	742	427	555	657	740	2
Other	11,187	7,468	9,196	10,261	10,905	282
Total	948,243	378,847	578,702	778,482	897,190	51,053

Dentists' Pay

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the fundamental review of the dental remuneration system will be carried forward.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am pleased to announce that Sir Kenneth Bloomfield has accepted an invitation from the United Kingdom Health Ministers to review the system of dental remuneration.

The text of my invitation to Sir Kenneth is set out as follows:

"I am writing on behalf of the UK Health Ministers to confirm my invitation to you to review the system of dental remuneration, and if possible to report before the end of the year.

The terms of reference are:

""To conduct a fundamental review of the existing system of remuneration of general dental practitioners and to identify options for change""

There are a number of important points which you will need to bear in mind.

First, the review should consider the system of remuneration. The level of remuneration for general dental practitioners are a matter for recommendation by the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' remuneration.

Second, the aim of the review should be to identify options for remunerating general dental practitioners which would provide a proper framework of financial control; would be fair to dentists and the public and as simple as practicable; and would therefore contribute positively to the development of the NHS dental service.

Third, I am looking to you to identify a number of options for change, rather than a single recommendation, though I would be happy for you to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each of them.

You will of course need to consult a number of interests in the course of the review. To assist you in this, I suggest that we establish a panel of advisers, drawn from the Government departments concerned, the NHS and the dental profession.

The Government attaches great importance to your review and looks forward to receiving your advice in due course."

NHS Statistics

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from what date tertiary and cross-specialty referrals in hospitals were recorded as separate episodes of treatment in national health service statistics on out-patient and in-patient hospital activity; what the estimated impact of such a change has been on time-series comparisons of hospital activity prior to and since the change in recording methods; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Hospital activity has been measured in terms of finished consultant episodes since April 1987. The move to this sytem from the previous system, which recorded discharges and deaths, was designed to monitor more accurately the volume of work carried out by each consultant in each specialty. Data continued to be collected on the old basis of discharges and deaths until 1988-89. Comparisons of in-patient cases over time should not be affected as figures for 1988-89 are available on both basis. The change had no effect on the number of out-patient consultations.

HIV

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the reasons for the divergences between her Department's forecasts of the numbers estimated to be infected by the HIV-1 virus and the actual numbers so infected; and for what reasons she has decided to allocate financial resources on the basis of estimated rather than actual numbers.

Mr. Sackville: Overall the forecasts contained in the 1990 Day report "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome in England and Wales to end 1993" have not proved significantly different from the actual numbers diagnosed to date, after these have been adjusted for reporting delays.

Financial allocations made each year to the national health service for the treatment and care of people with HIV/AIDS are based on the numbers actually reported to the communicable disease surveillance centre for each regional health authority and not on the basis of estimates. Other non-treatment allocations including funds for prevention initiatives are made on a population basis, using Office of Population Censuses and Surveys data.

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the different degrees of threat from the HIV virus to *(a)* heterosexuals and *(b)* homosexuals.

Mr. Sackville: HIV, the virus which causes AIDS, is primarily a sexually transmitted disease. In the United Kingdom, homosexual and bisexual men still account for the greatest number of reports of both HIV and AIDS. The number of reports of those infected heterosexually is much smaller, but reported cases are growing faster in this group than in any other.

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will show from her departmental statistics, the incidence of HIV-1 virus among *(a)* homosexuals and *(b)* heterosexuals.

Mr. Sackville: Up to March 1992, 16,013 HIV infected adults, whose sexual orientation is known, had been reported to the Public Health Laboratory Service's communicable disease surveillance centre and the communicable disease (Scotland) unit. Of these, 10,569 —66 per cent.—are recorded as homosexual or bisexual men and 5,444—34 per cent.—as heterosexual men and women.

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy in respect of weighting the transfer of social security funding to local authorities with effect from next April, to take account of the concentration of private care and nursing homes in certain geographical areas.

Mr. Yeo: We are currently discussing with the local authority associations a number of options for the distribution of community care finance from next April.

OPCS, Birkdale

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will enter into negotiations to rent car parking space from Birkdale cricket club for the staff of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys at Birkdale, Southport.

Mr. Sackville: Officials of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys at Southport have already met representatives of Birkdale cricket club and members of Sefton council and are in correspondence with the council. They are currently considering whether renting 50 car parking spaces from the club would be a cost-effective way of alleviating the problem of on-street parking.

Consultants

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will now make it her policy to publish the names of national health consultants who receive distinction awards.

Dr. Mawhinney: The names of award holders remain confidential and there are no plans for national publication. Since 1980 any consultant eligible for an award has had access to the regional list of current award holders which is held by the regional director of public health, and since 1990 this list has also been held by district directors of public health.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he proposes to announce an extension of the multi-fibre arrangment on its existing terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The terms of the interim agreement to bridge the gap between the expiry of the multi-fibre arrangment on 31 December 1992 and the implementation of a replacement GATT agreement are due to be negotiated between importing and exporting countries later this year.

Recycling

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the report by his Department's business and environmental group about creating markets for recycled products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: Under commission from the environment unit in my Department, Warren Spring Laboratory undertook a study "Market Barriers to Materials Reclamation and Recycling". Warren Spring Laboratory published this report in September 1991.

Timeshare

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what response he has made to the representations of the hon. Member for Macclesfield about the activities and operations of Club Riviera Sales Ltd., Club Riviera Management (U.K.) Ltd., and Club Riviera plc., companies involved in timeshare properties.

Mr. Leigh: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms has recently responded. Moreover, the Director General of Fair Trading has stated that he is minded to revoke the consumer credit licences of Club Riviera Sales Ltd.

Insolvency

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the level of insolvencies and liquidations in the first quarter of 1992.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Information on insolvencies is regularly published by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry, in "Business Briefing". Insolvency figures for the first quarter of 1992 were published on 8 May 1992.

EC Industry Council

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the discussions which took place in the EC Industry Council on 17 June.

Mr. Sainsbury: I attended the Industry Council meeting on 17 June. The Council reached political agreement on aid to be provided by Germany to the east German shipbuilding industry. The Council also adopted resolutions on the textiles and clothing and vehicles industries and on small and medium sized enterprises and agreed conclusions on the aircraft industry. The Commission gave presentations on industry and the environment, maritime industries, the mining industry and future financing of the European Coal and Steel Community. The Council held a first discussion on a Commission proposal to allow a derogation for the Dutch and Danish steel industries from national carbon taxes.

Privatisation

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what rules have been laid down for current employees of British Coal and British Rail to engage in discussions with third parties with a view to management buy-outs in the course of the privatisations of British Coal and British Rail.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for British Coal and British Rail.

Abu Dhabi

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the amount by value of imports and exports to and from Abu Dhabi for each year since 1980.

Mr. Needham: Details of trade with Abu Dhabi are regularly published in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", which is available in the Library of the House.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the financial consequences to the British economy of United Nations sanctions against Libya.

Mr. Needham: The adoption of the UN arms embargo under Security Council resolution 748 had no financial consequences for exports of military goods to Libya as trade in military goods to Libya has been subject to an EC embargo since 1986.

It is too early to put a figure on the losses that have arisen due to the embargo on the export of aircraft and aircraft components to Libya. The United Kingdom's total exports to Libya were worth £255·7 million in 1991 —10·7 per cent. of total Libyan imports. Only a small proportion—£16·3 million, or approximately 6 per cent. —fall within the scope of current sanctions.

Credit Facilities

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to ensure that customers for credit facilities are no longer blacklisted solely because they share the same address as someone else, unconnected with them, who has a bad debt record.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 29 June 1992]:* No, this was a matter recently considered by the Data Protection Tribunal. The tribunal ruled that from 31 July 1993, credit reference agencies, which provide details of individuals' credit status to lenders, should no longer provide information on people other than the credit applicant except people who are reasonably believed to have been living as members of the same family as the applicant in a single household. Where agencies are aware that individuals sharing the same address have no financial connection with the applicant, they may not provide information about those individuals.

Pyramid Selling

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce legislation *(a)* to make it a requirement that the promoter of a pyramid scheme is clearly stated in any advertisement for the scheme and *(b)* to ensure that estimates of earnings from legal pyramid schemes are verified independently; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* The Pyramid Selling Schemes Regulations 1989 already ensure that potential participants are given full information about a scheme before they make any commitment. The required information includes the name and address of the promoter.

The regulations also require a promoter to have evidence if he refers to a specified financial benefit or a financial benefit being greater than or not less than a specified sum. It would be for the courts to decide whether the evidence was acceptable.

I have no plans for further legislation.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what regulations exist whereby participants in companies licensed as legal pyramid selling schemes have their incomes restricted by the number of people recruited; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* No such regulations exist. Pyramid selling and similar trading schemes are not licensed.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what are the criteria whereby firms are licensed under the term "legal pyramid selling scheme"; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the number of companies in the United Kingdom licensed under the term "legal pyramid selling schemes"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* There are no licensing arrangements for pyramid selling or similar trading schemes.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce legislation that would require promoters of legal pyramid selling schemes not to take payment from participants in such a scheme unless they hold an appropriate insurance policy indemnifying them against the possibility that members or participants in the scheme choose to exercise their rights of resignation or refund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* I have no such plans.

Ms. Joan Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of companies failing to comply with current legislation relating to pyramid selling regulations under the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Mr. Leigh: Each case receives individual consideration. There have, as yet, been no prosecutions under the Pyramid Selling Schemes Regulations (1989), but in view of public concern the effectiveness and appropriateness of the regulations are kept under review.

"No Credit?"

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many copies of the booklet "No Credit?" have been published since March 1991 and at what cost; how many copies have been distributed and through which avenues;

and what contributions towards the costs of publication and distribution have been obtained from the four credit agencies listed on its centre pages.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* A total of 550,000 copies of the booklet "No Credit?" have been printed at a cost of £21,708. A total of 397,000 copies have been distributed through local authority trading standards offices, main libraries and citizens advice bureaux. A total of 20,000 and 3,500 copies respectively have been distributed free of charge by the credit reference agencies CCN Systems Ltd. and Credit Data and Marketing Services. There has been no contribution to costs of publication by the four main credit reference agencies.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many civil servants in his Department are paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* As at 30 June 1992 there were eight civil servants in the Department of Trade and Industry paid at a rate exceeding that of a Cabinet Minister.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pension Rights

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons it was decided not to allow females who retired prior to 1988 to confer pension rights on their spouses in the event of their death; and if he will now introduce provisions to provide pension rights for widows whose sponses retired pre-1988.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no statutory prohibition on occupational pension schemes providing in their rules for survivor's benefits to widows or widowers irrespective of their date of death or age at date of death. On 6 April 1988 it became a condition for a scheme to be used for contracting out of the state earnings-related pension scheme that it provided guaranteed minimum pensions to widowers in circumstances analogous to those required for widow's pensions.

Leeds Benefit Offices

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has yet received a report from the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, into his fact-finding tour of Leeds benefit offices; if a copy of the report will be placed in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: We do not receive formal reports of the field visits made by Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. Mr. Bichard will write to the hon. Member about his recent visit to Leeds and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on what dates and in which parts of Banff and Buchan the cold weather payments section was triggered during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payment on each occasion;

(2) on what dates cold weather payments were made in Banff and Buchan; and what was the period taken for payments to be made once the system had been triggered.

Mr. Scott: Information is not collected in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the Library.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in Banff and Buchan have qualified, or do qualify, for payments under the cold weather payments scheme since its inception in 1991.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Income Support

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the extra cost in 1992-93 of extending payments to working income support claimants by way of mortgage interest outgoings to those working between 16 and 24 qualifying hours.

Mr. Burt: The cost of continuing to pay income support to people working between 16 and 24 hours a week when the remunerative work rule changed from April 1992 has been estimated to be £30 million in the first year. It is not possible to estimate with any degree of confidence how much income support in respect of mortgage interest is included in that figure.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 2 June, *Official Report*, column *483*, how many single people aged 18 to 24 years were receiving income support at the 18 to 24 years rate in May 1990; and what is the estimated number who were then living away from home, as defined in his answer.

Mr. Burt: In May 1990 the number of single people aged 18 to 24 receiving income support at the 18 to 24-year-old rate was 423,000[1]. There is no comparable figure for the number of these who were living away from home. However, as I stated in my reply of 2 June at column *483*, it is estimated that in 1992-93 180,000[2] 18 to 24-year-olds, who receive the 18 to 24 income support personal allowance, are living away from home.

Note: "Living away from home" includes people classified by the FES as the head of the household, plus all those living in the household of a person who is a non-relative.

Source: [1] Income Support Annual Statistical Inquiry, May 1990.

[2] Modelled using data from the 1987-89 Family Expenditure Survey.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce legislation to require the trustee boards of occupational pension schemes to contain at least 50 per cent. employee and pensioner representatives chosen by the employees and pensioners themselves.

Miss Widecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 8 June that he had set up an independent committee to review the framework of law

and regulation within which occupational pension schemes operate under the chairmansip of Professor Goode of Oxford university. As the terms of reference include a consideration of the accountability and roles of trustees, it would be premature for the Government to consider any changes until the recommendations of the review committee have been assessed.

Patients' Benefits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce legislation to simplify the method by which patients are able to claim benefits whilst receiving respite and rotational care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: We have no plans to do so. People receiving respite care are entitled to claim the higher income support limit appropriate to those in residential care or nursing homes.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in each regional and islands authority area in Scotland are in receipt of payments from the independent living fund; and what is the total amount paid from the fund in each of the said areas.

Mr. Scott: The information as at 8 May 1992, the last date for which it is available, is in the table.

Area	*Number of clients*	*Total amount of weekly payments* £
Highland	37	3,092
Grampian	73	8,281
Tayside	56	4,288
Fife	93	7,946
Lothian	252	27,577
Central	52	4,607
Borders	25	2,403
Strathclyde	1,655	153,518
Dumfries and Galloway	23	2,600
Orkneys	2	137
Shetlands	4	567
Western Isles	38	2,264
TOTALS	2,310	217,280

Social Fund

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many grants and awards have been refused to applicants as a result of the £4,000 underpayment of social fund moneys to the North Tees district social fund which was a product of a computer error; and if he will instruct social fund officers to reconsider these refusals in the light of these budget errors.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mortgage Payments

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the interest on accrued mortage interest arrears over the first 16 weeks of an income support claim will continue to be met by his Department after 25 May.

Mr. Burt: Yes. Help with the interest on arrears of interest accrued as a result of the 50 per cent. restriction on income support mortgage interest payments during the first 16 weeks of claims from people under age 60 has been available since the restriction was introduced. We have no plans to change this.

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the transaction costs payable by building societies to his Department as a consequence of the new regulations introduced to allow direct payment of income support mortgage interest costs from his Department to the building mortgage interest costs from his Department to the building societies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) on 8 July.

Household Incomes

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he plans to publish the results of the households below average income analysis for 1989 before 16 July.

Mr. Burt: Yes.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 10 July 1992

EDUCATION

Access Funds

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total amount of access funds available to *(a)* universities, polytechnics and institutions of higher education and *(b)* institutions of further education, for each academic year since the inception of the scheme; and what will be available for the 1992-93 academic year.

Mr. Patten: Details of the access funds made available for higher and further education institutions in England since the inception of the scheme in 1990-91 are as follows:

	Academic year 1990-91 £ million	*Academic year 1991-92 £ million*
(a) Universities, polytechnics and colleges of higher education	18·1	18·7
(b) Colleges of further education	4·2	4·31
TOTAL	22·3	23·01

Details for 1992-93 will be announced shortly.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the access funds made available to institutions of further and higher education.

Mr. Patten: The present access funds will meet their purpose if properly targeted to genuinely needy students.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students have applied for assistance from access funds during academic years 1990-91 and 1991-92; how many were successful; what was the average amount of assistance per individual given as *(a)* grant and *(b)* repayable loan; and what were the main criteria used.

Mr. Patten: The information is not available in the form requested. For the academic year 1991-92, the information will not be available until later in the year.

Information so far available in respect of academic year 1990-91 is that approximately 70,000 higher education students, or 12 per cent. of all eligible students, received a payment from either the HE or postgraduate access funds; more than 15,500 students, or 18 per cent. of all eligible students, received a payment from the FE access funds; payments averaged just under £200 for undergraduates and about £600 for postgraduates; the average payment for FE students was just over £225.

The purpose of the funds is to provide financial help to students who face real financial difficulties, for whatever reason. Institutions are free to devise their own criteria provided they are consistent with these requirements and are in line with the general guidance and conditions by the funding councils and, in the case of FE funds, the Department.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Forman: The information is as follows:

Non-departmental public body	*Audit arrangements*	*Method of tendering contract*	*Duration*
Executive			
Business and Technical Education Council	Private firm: Binder Hamlyn	Renewal subject to AGM review	1 year
Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges	Private firms; Internal audit: Ernst & Young External audit: Knox Kropper	Competitive tender	No set period
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research	Private firm: Buzzacott & Co.	Competitive tender	1 year
Council for National Academic Awards[1]	Private firm: Price Waterhouse	Not tendered	Continuous
Education Assets Board	NAO[2]		
Further Education Unit	Private firm: Chantrey Vellocott	Renewal subject ot AGM review	1 year
National Council for Educational Technology	Private firm: Kidsons Impey	Renewal subject to AGM review	1 year
Higher Education Funding Council (England)	NAO		
National Curriculum Council	NAO		
National Youth Association	Private firm: Peat Marwick McLintock	Currently not tendered —from 1993 competitve tender	3 years

Non-departmental public body	Audit arrangements	Method of tendering contract	Duration
Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council	NAO		
School Examinations and Assessment Council	NAO		
Teaching as a Career Unit	Private firm: Saffery Champness	Not tendered	1 year
University Funding Council	NAO		
Advisory[3]			
Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education			
Open University Visiting Committee[4]			
Visiting Committee for Cranfield Institute of Technology[4]			
Visiting Committee for the Royal College of Art[4]			

[1] CNAA will cease to function from March 1993.
[2] NAO—National Audit Office.
[3] Advisory Bodies are subject to the audit arrangements of the Department.
[4] Bodies will cease to function following final report in July.

EMPLOYMENT

Wages Councils

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will list the numbers of people employed in each industry covered by a wages council in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1979 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: Statistical returns of the number of workers in establishments within the scope of the wages councils are not collected but periodic estimates are made. The results of exercises conducted for the years closest to those specified are shown in the tables. The figures for 1987 exclude young people under 21 years of age for whom the councils are not empowered to fix minimum rates.

Wages Council	1973 (All workers)
Aerated waters (E and W)	20,000
Aerated waters (Scotland)	2,500
Boot and floor polish	1,250
Boot and shop repairing	12,500
Brush and broom	8,000
Button manufacturing	4,000
Coffin furniture and cerement making	550
Corset	13,000
Cotton waste reclamation	1,000
Dressmaking and women's light clothing (E and W)	125,000
Dressmaking and women's light clothing (Scotland)	10,000
Flax and hemp	4,000
Fur	8,500
General waste materials reclamation	26,000
Hair, bass and fibre	500
Haidressing undertakings	140,000
Hat, cap and millinery (Great Britain)	7,000
Hollow-ware	1,500
Industrial and staff canteen undertakings	218,000
Keg and drum	5,600
Lace finishing	1,500
Laundry	86,000
Licensed non-residential establishment	340,000
Licensed residential establishment and licensed restaurant	390,000
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	6,500
Made-up textiles	5,500
Milk distributive (E and W)	75,000
Milk distributive (Scotland)	22,000
Ostrich and fancy feather and artificial flower	750
Paper box	35,000
Perambulator and invalid carriage	5,000
Pin, hook and eye and snap fastener	1,500
Ready-made and wholesale bespoke tailoring	115,000
Retail bespoke tailoring (E and W)	7,000
Retail bespoke tailoring (Scotland)	500
Retail bookselling and stationery trades	25,000
Retail bread and flour confectionery trade (E and W)	54,000
Retail bread and flour confectionery trade (Scotland)	10,000
Retail drapery, outfitting and footwear trades	440,000
Retail food trades (E and W)	293,000
Retail food trades (Scotland)	36,500
Retail furnishing and allied trades	200,000
Retail newsagency, tobacco and confectionery trades (E and W)	84,000
Retail newsagency, tobacco and confectionery trades (Scotland)	13,000
Road haulage	220,000
Rope, twine and net	7,000
Rubber proofed garment making industry	1,000
Sack and bag	3,000
Shirtmaking	43,000
Stamped or pressed metal wares	20,000
Toy manufacturing	40,000
Unlicensed place of refreshment	160,000
Wholesale mantle and costume	60,000

Wages councils	1979 (All workers)	1987 (excluding under 21s)
Aerated waters	14,900	5,500
Boot and shoe repairing	7,900	5,000
Button manufacturing	3,300	1,000
Clothing manufacture[1]	294,500	147,000
Coffin furniture and cerement making	500	200
Cotton waste reclamation	400	300

Wages councils	*1979 (All workers)*	*1987 (excluding under 21s)*
Fur	5,100	1,500
Flax and hemp	2,300	500
General waste materials reclamation	20,200	13,000
Hairdressing undertaking	128,600	64,000
Hat, cap and millinery	7,800	4,000
Lace finishing	700	900
Laundry	39,200	26,000
Licensed non-residential establishment	470,000	492,000
Licensed residential establishment and licensed restaurant	530,000	379,000
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	5,600	2,500
Made-up textiles	6,500	3,000
Ostrich and fancy feather and artificial flower	1,500	500
Perambulator and invalid carriage	2,100	2,000
Retail bespoke tailoring	5,000	4,000
Retail food and allied trades	522,800	465,000
Retail trades (non-food)	563,700	745,000
Rope twine and net	4,000	2,500
Sack and bag	1,800	1,000
Toy manufacturing	23,300	11,000
Unlicensed place of refreshment	121,900	96,000

[1] In 1979 there were seven councils covering the clothing manufacturing trade.

Youth Training

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will increase youth training allowances; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no plans to increase minimum YT allowances. I believe that the current minimum allowances are sufficient to meet the normal requirements of trainees living in the parental home. Trainees who live independently may apply for income support if they consider their income is insufficient to meet their needs. Employers benefit considerably from Government expenditure on YT and are strongly encouraged to supplement trainee incomes wherever possible.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by her Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The non-departmental bodies currently sponsored by the Department of Employment are set out in the tables, with the information requested on their audit arrangements.

Executive Bodies

The following executive bodies are audited by the National Audit Office:

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.
Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members.
Equal Opportunities Commission.
Wages councils.
Health and Safety Commission.
Health and Safety Executive.

The following executive bodies are audited by private accountants:

National Council for Vocational Qualifications.
Currently audited by Coopers and Lybrand, Deloitte. The appointment is made by the NCVQ Council which reviews the contract annually. Renewal is not subject to formal competitive tendering.

Remploy Limited.
Currently audited by KPMG Peat, Marwick McLintock. Competitive tendering is used to appoint the auditors and the contract is normally for a duration of five years.

Industry Training Boards.
The Engineering Construction Industry Training Board and the Road Transport Industry Training Board are both currently audited by Touche Ross and Co. The Construction Industry Training Board is currently audited by BDO Binder Hamlyn. These are long-standing arrangements, not subject to competitive tendering.

Advisory Bodies and Tribunals etc.

Any costs incurred by the following non-executive bodies are included in departmental expenditure which is audited by the National Audit Office.

Civil Service Arbitration Tribunal.
National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities.
National Training Task Force.
Race Relations Employment Advisory Group.
Women's National Commission.
Committees for the Employment of People with Disabilities.
Employment and Training Advisory Committee for the Resettlement of Ex-Regulars (ETAC).
Sheltered Employment Consultative Group.
Central Arbitration Committee.
Employment Appeal Tribunal.
Industrial tribunals.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: As the green Minister, with a close personal interest in environmental matters, my priorities both for this year and for the duration of this Parliament are that the Department shall continue and intensify its efforts to improve energy efficiency; that the work already begun to maintain and, where appropriate, upgrade the historic buildings on our estate shall be sustained; that the design of new court buildings shall take full account of environmental concerns; and, in the procurement of goods and services, all reasonable steps shall be taken to use recycled and renewable resources.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Eastern and Central Europe

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Education of 3 July, *Official Report*, column *714*, if some of the know-how funds could be made available to the scouting movement in those countries of eastern and central Europe, and any

other comparable youth organisation, which were proscribed, or prevented from participating in the international organisation during the period of communist rule and which now wish to rebuild or establish their domestic organisation and rebuild international links.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Limited funds are available to help rebuild the capacity of voluntary organisations in eastern and central Europe through the charity know-how scheme. A number of grants have already been made to help the development of youth organisations in the region, including scouting groups in Hungary and Slovakia. Applications for youth exchanges can only be considered in so far as they are directly linked to the development of specific voluntary organisations based in central and eastern Europe.

Guyana

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide details of Her Majesty's Government's bilateral and multilateral support for development in Guyana.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:]* We have made it clear to the Guyana Government that no new pledges of capital aid or technical co-operation commitments will be made until free and fair elections have been held and a government with sound economic policies is in place. Bilateral aid commitments already made in support of Guyana's economic reform programme have been fulfilled. The main contributions have been:

£13·7 million of programme aid in support of the balance of payments.

a $10·5 million (£6·135 million) short-term loan to assist payment of arrears to the international financial institutions.

technical co-operation running at about £1·5 million a year.

a grant of about £3·4 million to meet payments due to British companies for development projects.

In addition, we have waived about £6 million and deferred about £3 million of aid debt payments, and rescheduled official commercial debts on concessional terms.

We have supported Guyana's economic reform programme in the relevant multilateral fora. Britain contributes resources to the main multilateral agencies assisting Guyana, but there are no internationally agreed data on multilateral aid received by individual countries and attributable to donor countries.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Secretary of State (Salary)

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the gross salary of the Secretary of State in his Department or its predecessor for each of the years from 1979 to 1989, inclusive, at 1989 prices.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Year	*Secretary of State salary* £	*Parliamentary salary* £	*Total gross salary* £	*Total gross salaries in 1989 prices*
1979	19,650	5,265	24,915	55,614
1980	23,500	6,930	30,430	59,902
1981	27,825	8,130	35,955	59,925
1982	28,950	8,460	37,410	55,753
1983	29,367	9,543	38,910	53,374
1984	30,304	10,626	40,930	53,714
1985	31,271	11,709	42,980	53,658
1986	32,208	12,792	45,000	53,003
1987	33,145	13,875	47,020	53,130
1988	34,157	16,911	51,068	51,068
1989	34,479	18,148	52,627	52,627

Source: H M Treasury

Turner Village Hospital

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that income support payments made towards the cost of residential care provided by the Ling Trust in Essex for former residents of Turner Village mental handicap hospital were made in accordance with regulations allowing such payments to be made only in circumstances where the care provider is independent of a health authority.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Household Incomes

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will be publishing the latest households-below-average-income figures.

Mr. Burt: The next edition of "Households Below Average Income", covering the period 1979 to 1988-89, will be published on 15 July.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department sponsors the following non-departmental public bodies:

Independent Tribunal Service
Central Adjudication Services
Occupational Pensions Board
Attendance Allowance Board
Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions
Industrial Injuries Advisory Council
Social Security Advisory Council
War Pensions Committees

None of these produces separate accounts. Their expenditure is recorded in the Department's administrative vote and audited by the National Audit Office.

PRIME MINISTER

International Agreements

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all the international agreements, other than the United Nations target for overseas aid, which Her Majesty's Government agreed to in 1974 but have not yet met; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

It is the practice of the Government to comply with all legally binding obligations under international agreements. There is no international agreement which we concluded in 1974 which we are not implementing, or have not implemented.

G7 Summit

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what proportion of the discussion time at the Group of Seven summit in Munich was devoted to environmental matters.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

The environment was one of a number of issues discussed at the G7 summit.

Food Aid

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister what fresh initiatives he intends to promote during the period of the British Presidency of the EC in regard to the use of grain and other foodstuffs stored by the EC as emergency food aid for third world countries.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* The primary aim of emergency food aid must be to reach those who need it as quickly and effectively as possible. European food surpluses, being for the most part perishable, or otherwise not well suited to the purpose, are used only on a modest scale for famine relief. Emergency food aid is generally purchased from open market surpluses or from regions closer to areas in need. Third country purchases also help to encourage regional trade, ensure that food purchased is closely in line with local needs and avoid distortion of local markets. The Government will encourage the Commission to continue to provide food aid in the most efficient way possible, taking full account of local needs.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister if he plans to convene any meetings in Wales to discuss the principle of subsidiarity during his presidency of the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* The conclusions of the meeting of the European Council held at Lisbon on 26 and 27 June invited the Commission and the Council

"to undertake urgent work on the procedural and practical steps"

to implement the principle of subsidiarity. Both institutions will report to the European Council in Edinburgh. The British presidency will take forward this work.

Wales will host an informal meeting of the Council of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers on 12 and 13 October. No agenda has been set for that meeting.

NATIONAL FINANCE

North Sea Oil and Gas

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies involved in oil and gas production in the North sea have sought relief for reimbursement expenditure under abandonment guarantees as provided for under section 106 of part III of the Finance Act 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

Inheritance Tax (Exemptions)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each county of or region in England, Scotland and Wales the number of landowners and estates, where there are five or more such cases, that have benefited under the tax procedures by which tax liability is reduced on condition that there is an undertaking to manage and protect the land from development and allow reasonable public access.

Mr. Dorrell: As I explained in my reply to the hon. Member on 30 June, at columns *469-70*, a detailed breakdown by county or region for conditional exemptions from inheritance tax of land and buildings is not readily available.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 7 July, if he will now take steps to collect figures for Scotland and Wales on the area of land where there is exemption from inheritance tax for access purposes.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes. I will write to the hon. Member with this information when it is available and place a copy in the Library.

Civil List

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes have taken place in the frequency of reports to the House on the civil list and the requirement for the House to approve the civil list with the cessation of annual voted supplements under the Civil List Act 1975.

Mr. Lamont: The Civil List Act 1972 enables the royal trustees to report from time to time on relevant matters. In their October 1990 report—HC 629—the royal trustees indicated that they accepted the logic of the views of the 1971 Select Committee on the Civil List that 10 years was an appropriate period over which to operate. For the record, reports were made by the royal trustees in January 1975, December 1983 and October 1990.

Judge Margaret Jackson

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the treatment at Heathrow airport of Judge Margaret Jackson by customs officials.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* Ms. Margaret Jackson was questioned and searched by customs at Heathrow Airport on Thursday 11 June. She had arrived at around 10.15 am on a flight which is considered by Customs to be in the high-risk category for drug smuggling. After initial questioning, Customs officers decided to carry out a search. Ms. Jackson was offered the

opportunity to see a senior officer and her rights under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 were explained. The search was authorised by the senior officer and carried out by a female officer in accordance with the standard procedures. This search, and a subsequent urine test, proved negative. Ms. Jackson was released at 12.02 pm. Throughout her detention Ms. Jackson was made aware of her legal rights and she was offered access to an on-call duty solicitor.

WALES

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his financial memorandum on the updating of the costs of the proposed Cardiff bay barrage, if he will specify which sewer diversion works have already been paid for by Welsh Water and in the course of construction of the Butetown link section of the South Glamorgan county council's peripheral distributor road.

Mr. David Hunt: The sewers removed from the table of related expenditure in the note on the comparison of costs provided for the members of Standing Committee F on the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill are as follows:

i. The Cogan outfall proposals

These are now within the programme of Welsh Water Plc for diversion by 1994.

ii. Pierhead combined sewers north of James street

The main diversion works, including the Harrowby Street Pumping Station, have been constructed by South Glamorgan County Council as part of the Peripheral Distributor Road scheme. The diversion of flows south of the Peripheral Distributor Road remains within the estimate.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the most up-to-date estimate available to him of the cost of *(a)* the remedial drainage works and *(b)* basement waterproofing works to compensate for the effects of the Cardiff bay barrage arising from paragraph 7 of the Roy Stoner report published in January and costed on an outturn basis, using the same hypothesis on the timing of start and finish of construction as in his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, column *340*.

Mr. David Hunt: The £440,000 for remedial drainage works mentioned in Mr. Stoner's report would have an outturn cost of £496,000. As Mr. Stoner observed, it can be argued that since the areas involved are inadequately drained at the moment, the whole charge concerned with land drainage should not fall upon the barrage project.

The cost of remedial works to property based on Hydrotechnica's most likely scenario would be £14·43 million at 1991-92 prices, which would become £17·47 million on an outturn basis. This figure was included in the £167·4 million given in my answer of 26 June. The outturn figure would be increased by a further £11·18 million if Hydrotechnica's "extreme case" of groundwater levels were to arise. However, as Mr. Stoner commented in his report,

"generally one would expect that the levels experienced in practice would be lower".

Speed Limits

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce provisions to enable local highway authorities to provide speed limits in areas where they deem these to be necessary on county roads irrespective of the volume of traffic or number of pedestrians crossing the road; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Following consultation, a review is being conducted into the criteria used for setting speed limits. The new criteria will be more flexible and will allow greater weight to be given to local factors. Revised guidelines will be issued to local highway authorities.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent by each district council in Wales for the collection of the poll tax, for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information available is given in the table:

Local authority expenditure on community charge collection[1]

	£ thousand	
	1991-92 estimated outturn[2]	*1992-93 budgets*
Alyn and Deeside	633	685
Colwyn	316	360
Delyn	346	427
Glyndwr	342	365
Rhuddlan	413	399
Wrexham Maelor	1,044	899
Carmarthen	484	423
Ceredigion	503	566
Dinefwr	269	294
Llanelli	435	446
Preseli Pembrokeshire	327	288
South Pembrokeshire	294	292
Blaenau Gwent	436	481
Islwyn	792	722
Monmouth	420	396
Newport	987	988
Torfaen	540	431
Aberconwy	427	407
Arfon	528	535
Dwyfor	376	378
Meirionnydd	497	419
Ynys Mon	567	604
Cynon Valley	622	656
Merthyr Tydfil	375	446
Ogwr	844	576
Rhondda	717	678
Rhymney Valley	1,079	1,122
Taff Ely	804	822
Brecknock	358	364
Montgomeryshire	535	536
Radnorshire	244	229
Cardiff	2,157	2,829
Vale of Glamorgan	906	928
Port Talbot	493	498
Lliw Valley	636	595
Neath	772	707
Swansea	1,369	1,524
TOTAL WALES	22,887	23,315

[1] Net current expenditure, as recorded by local authoritiese on form RA9293.

[2] Includes the cost of re-billing following the £140 reduction announced in the 1991 Budget.

Road Accident Victims

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many road accident victims suffering from *(a)* fractures to the upper limbs, *(b)* head injuries, *(c)* fractures to the

lower limbs and *(d)* whiplash injuries in Wales were still reporting problems one year after the accident: and if he will give a breakdown according to age category.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is not available centrally.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the average length of hospital stay for patients suffering *(a)* fractures to the upper limbs, *(b)* fractures to the lower limbs and *(c)* whiplash injuries resulting from road accidents in Wales; and if he will give a break-down of the figures according to age category.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information given in the table is taken from hospital activity analysis, relating to patients treated in Welsh NHS hospitals during 1990.

Average length of stay (in days) by age and principal diagnosis

Age at discharge	*Fracture to upper limb (ICD9 810-819)*	*Fracture to lower limb (ICD 820-829)*	*Whiplash (ICD 847.0)*
0-14	7·5	15·2	—[1]
15-24	4·6	14·7	1·9
25-44	11·3	20·9	3·4
45-64	11·7	21·5	2·5
65-74	16·0	33·0	2·0
75+	18·8	26·4	—[1]
All ages	9·3	19·2	2·7

[1] No cases recorded.

The information is based on cases recorded as road traffic accident victims. These may be understated as not all hospitals provide full details relating to discharges and deaths.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were admitted to casualty departments in hospitals in Wales in each health authority area last year; and how many of such admissions had resulted from road accidents in each instance.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information is given in the table:

	Attendances at accident and emergency out-patient departments, 1990-91		*Road traffic accident victims attending accident and emergency departments as percentage of total new attendances at accident and emergency departments, 1990*[1]
	New patients	*Total attendances*	*Percentage*
Clwyd	92,608	128,479	2·8
East Dyfed	56,939	78,812	2·3
Gwent	108,712	133,794	2·1
Gwynedd	49,097	60,293	2·9
Mid Glamorgan	145,524	212,666	1·6
Powys	26,768	41,910	n.a.
South Glamorgan	85,213	97,100	2·5
West Glamorgan	102,402	132,844	[2]2·8
Pembrokeshire	25,586	37,708	n.a.

[1] Data provided by directors of public health medicine for annual review purposes.
[2] April 1990-March 1991.
n.a. = not available.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* car accidents affecting (i) car occupants, (ii) pedestrians,, (iii) pedal cyclists and (iv) motorcyclists involved in road accidents in Wales in each of the last five years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The table gives the numbers of fatalities and all casualties for the requested groups. Information on the number of car accidents affecting different road user groups cannot be derived.

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	[1]*1991*
Fatalities:					
Car occupants[2]	101	80	110	119	109
Pedestrians	69	76	76	86	73
Pedal cyclists	10	10	10	6	9
Motor cyclists[3]	36	41	28	23	19
Others	4	19	7	10	17
All fatalities	220	226	231	244	227
All casualties:					
Car occupants[2]	7,908	8,830	9,552	10,182	9,526
Pedestrians	2,536	2,725	2,696	2,721	2,501
Pedal cyclists	842	805	945	873	784
Motor cyclists[3]	1,867	1,683	1,728	1,471	1,172
Others	1,130	1,118	1,241	1,181	1,082
All	14,283	15,161	16,162	16,428	15,065

[1] Provisional.
[2] Includes users of invalid tricycles, three-wheelers and purpose-built taxis.
[3] Includes users of scooters, mopeds and motor cycle combinations.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish an estimated figure for the economic cost of injury accidents on Welsh roads during each of the last five years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Economic costs of injury road accidents are not calculated separately for Wales.

Estimates derived from Department of Transport average costs applied to Welsh accident figures are given in the table:

Estimated cost of injury road accidents[1]

	£ million
1987	230
1988	240
1989	240
1990	250
1991	220

[1] At June 1990 prices.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospital beds are allocated per day on average in each health authority area, for victims of road accidents.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Hospital beds are not allocated specifically for victims of road accidents. Such patients are treated in beds allocated to the specialty appropriate to each case.

Pembrokeshire Health Authority (Salaries)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the annual salary range of the general manager of Pembrokeshire health authority for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92, the personnel director of Pembrokeshire health authority for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92, the finance director of Pembrokeshire health authority for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92; and whether those salaries and fringe benefit packages included a car purchase or lease scheme.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: From 1 January 1990 salaries for district general managers have been set within three band ranges. The appropriate band range for the Pembrokeshire general manager post has been:

Inclusive of Performance Pay

	Minimum—Maximum	
1 January 1990—31 August 1990	£35,000	£50,750
1 September 1990—31 August 1991	£37,980	£55,060
1 September 1991—to date	£40,260	£58,370

The two senior managers referred to have received flat rate salaries on a point on the senior managers pay spine. The spine ranges have been:

	Minimum—Maximum	
1 January 1989—31 August 1990	£12,560	£39,170
1 September 1990—31 August 1991	£13,560	£42,290
1 September 1991—to date	£14,380	£44,850

Senior managers may also receive performance pay up to a maximum of 20 per cent. of salary.

These salaries do not include other non-pay elements. Entitlements to a Crown car or car purchase loan would be a matter for the employing authority having regard to the application of general Whitley council rules.

Unitary Authority, Vale of Glamorgan

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to preserve the present Vale of Glamorgan district authority as a unitary authority, including Penarth, and to expand the vale to the west by adding Wick, Southerndown, Ogmore and Porthcawl.

Mr. David Hunt: The statement I made to the House of Commons on 3 March 1992 included a proposal for an authority for the Vale of Glamorgan. I am at present consulting on that and other proposals and am well aware of my hon. Friend's strong representations on this issue; those consultations include further consideration of boundaries for the new authorities.

Cataract Treatment Centres

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of patients treated at *(a)* the cataract treatment centre at Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor and *(b)* the cataract treatment centre at Bridgend general hospital his Department requires to be resident in Gwynedd and Mid-Glamorgan respectively.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: For 1992-93 it is proposed that 50 per cent. of patients treated at the ophthalmic treatment centre, Ysbyty Gwynedd and just over 9 per cent. of patients at the eye treatment centre, Bridgend general hospital will be from the centres' host district.

A494

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the widening of the A494 at Aston Hill, Queensferry, Clwyd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department is currently undertaking a public consultation exercise in respect of an improvement for the section of the A494 between the River Dee and Ewloe which traverses Aston hill; 331 representations have been received to date.

Queensferry Bypass

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what grounds he bases his proposals for widening the Queensferry bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Based on current and projected traffic flow data additional carriageway capacity is needed along the section of the A494 from the River Dee to Ewloe which includes the section known as the Queensferry bypass, to avoid serious congestion and a deterioration in road safety. The proposal to improve the section of road is currently the subject of a public consultation exercise.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he expects to arrange for the publication of the annual report and account of the Welsh Development Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Later this year.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. David Hunt: The non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Welsh Office are set out in "Public Bodies 1991", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The Comptroller and Auditor General audits the accounts of all but two of the executive non-departmental public bodies on that list.

The Cardiff Bay development corporation's accounts are audited by Ernst and Young whose appointment is for up to five years. Housing for Wales auditors are KPMG Peat Marwick whose appointment is for up to three years. Both appointments followed open competition.

DEFENCE

Liquid Crystal Display

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's current policy on liquid crystal display; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The Ministry of Defence funds a research programme by the Defence Research Agency into liquid crystal displays to ensure that the DRA remains at the forefront of this fast developing technology and, consequently, is able to provide expert advice to the MOD on the development and procurement of relevant equipment.

Electro-magnetic Propulsion

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's current policy on electro-magnetic propulsion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The Ministry of Defence funds a research programme by the Defence Research Agency into aspects of electro-magnetic propulsion with the aim of assessing the applicability of this technology to military requirements.

Defence Research Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list for the last 12 months, the fact-finding visits the chief executive of the Defence Research Agency has made; what were his findings; if he will place a copy of his findings in the Library; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will list by grade his Department's current staffing levels at the Defence Research Agency.

Mr. Aitken: These are matters for the Defence Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of the DRA to write to the hon. Member.

Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list for the last 12 months, the titles of scientific papers published by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment;

(2) if he will list for the last 12 months, the fact-finding visits the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has made; what were his findings; if he will place a copy of his findings in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: These are matters for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of the CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: During the next year my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, will oversee actions arising from the Department's environmental review and the work necessary to meet the requirements of the Montreal protocol and EC regulation 594/91 on ozone-depleting substances. Over the next year and beyond, work will continue to ensure defence activities are undertaken in a manner consistent with the Government's overall environmental policy as outlined in "This Common Inheritance", Cm 1200, that they comply with United Kingdom environmental legislation and that environmental considerations are fully integrated into defence activities, policies and forward planning. I also refer the hon. Member to paragraphs 342 to 348 inclusive of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992".

Menwith Hill

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, column *360*, what British Telecom service has replaced the cables laid between Menwith Hill and the British Telecom relay station at Hunterstones tower.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The service previously carried on cables between Menwith Hill station and Hunterstones tower is provided by communications leased exclusively for defence purposes. None of these involves a direct link, on cable or otherwise, between Menwith Hill station and Hunterstones tower.

Russian Aircraft Technology

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has from within NATO on whether Germany has engaged in negotiations with Russia for the purchase of Russian aircraft fighter technology by way of direct financial payment, debt reduction or otherwise.

Mr. Aitken: None.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Aitken: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member shortly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Renewable Energy

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what encouragement is being given to small Northern Ireland based non-fossil fuel generators of electricity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: A study is currently being undertaken into the potential for the development of renewable energy resources in Northern Ireland. The study's findings are due to be published later this year, following which the Department of Economic Development plans to introduce measures to encourage such generation.

Fair Employment

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made during the past 12 months to correct the under employment of Protestants within the staff of the Fair Employment Commission.

Mr. Atkins: In the 12 months to 1 January 1992 the commission received 1,389 job applications, of which 57 per cent. were from members of the Protestant community; and appointed 17 staff, of whom nine were Protestant.

In the 12 months to 1 January 1991 the commission received 492 job applications, of which 47 per cent. were from members of the Protestant community; and appointed nine staff, of whom four were Protestant.

The commission's equal opportunity policy provides for outreach measures including positive encouragement to Protestants to apply in job advertisements.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made to correct the under-employment of Protestants in the Bank of Ireland since it was first investigated by the Fair Employment Agency; when the Fair Employment Commission updated the position in this company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: At the time of the investigation by the Fair Employment Agency in 1985, 222 employees—42·1 per cent.—of the Bank of Ireland were Protestant and 305—57·9 per cent.—were Roman Catholic. In January 1991, 277—44·2 per cent.—were Protestant and 350—55·8 per cent.—were Roman Catholic.

The bank is required by law to undertake a review of its employment composition and practices by 6 February 1993. If the review shows that members of one community are not enjoying fair participation, the bank must engage in affirmative action.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made to correct the under-employment of Protestants in the Allied Irish Banks Ltd. since it was first investigated by the Fair Employment Agency: when the Fair Employment Commission updated the position in this company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: At the time of the investigation by the Fair Employment Agency in 1985, 164 employees—28·1 per cent.—of the Allied Irish Banks plc were Protestant and 420—71·9 per cent.—were Roman Catholic. In January 1991, 232—31·7 per cent.—were Protestant and 501—68·3 per cent.—were Roman Catholic.

The bank is required by law to undertake a review of its employment composition and practices by 6 February 1993. If the review shows that members of one community are not enjoying fair participation, the bank must engage in affirmative action.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made to correct the under-employment of Protestants by Post Office Counters Ltd. since it was first investigated by the Fair Employment Agency; when the Fair Employment Commission updated the position in this company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Fair Employment Agency began an investigation in 1987 into the Post Office in Northern Ireland. The investigation covered the three businesses within the Post Office Corporation—Royal Mail, Royal Mail Parcelforce and Post Office Counters Ltd. In 1987, 1,764 employees—53·3 per cent.—were Protestant and 1,545—46·7 per cent.—were Roman Catholic. In January 1991, 1,837—51·6 per cent.—were Protestant and 1,721—48·4 per cent.—Roman Catholic.

The Post Office is required by law to undertake a review of its employment composition and practices by 1 January 1993. If the review shows that members of one community are not enjoying fair participation, the Post Office must engage in affirmative action.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made to correct the under-employment of Protestants by Derry city council since it was first investigated by the Fair Employment Agency; when the Fair Employment Commission updated the position within this local authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Derry city council invited the Fair Employment Agency to conduct an investigation of its employment composition and practices. In March 1986, 166 of its employees—30·5 per cent.—were Protestant and 378—69·5 per cent.—Roman Catholic. In January 1991, 167—31·3 per cent.—were Protestant and 366—68·7 per cent.—Roman Catholic.

The council is required by law to undertake a review of its employment composition and practices by 1 January 1993. If the review shows that members of one community are not enjoying fair participation, the council must engage in affirmative action.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made to correct the under-employment of Protestants by Down district council since it was first investigated by the Fair Employment Agency; when the Fair Employment Commission updated the position within this local authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Down district council was not subject to a formal investigation by the Fair Employment Agency.

The council is required by law to undertake a review of its employment composition and practices by 1 January 1993. If the review shows that members of one community are not enjoying fair participation, the council must engage in affirmative action.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made to correct the under-employment of Protestants by Newry and Mourne district council since it was first investigated by the Fair Employment Agency; when the Fair Employment Commission updated the position within this local authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: When the Fair Employment Agency began its investigation in October 1986, 50 employees—11·7 per cent.—of Newry and Mourne district council were Protestant and 378—88·3 per cent.—were Roman Catholic. In January 1991, 29—9·5 per cent.—were Protestant and 276—90·5 per cent.—Roman Catholic.

The council is required by law to undertake a review of its employment composition and practices by 1 January 1993. If the review shows that members of one community are not enjoying fair participation, the council must engage in affirmative action.

Social Security Agency

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Social Security Agency's targets for 1992-93 will be published.

Mr. Hanley: The targets are included in the agency's 1992-93 business plan which was published today and a copy of which has been placed in the Library. The targets present a demanding challenge for the agency and fully support the next steps principles. They are as follows:

1. *Benefit clearance times*[1]

Social fund crisis loans—applications cleared on the day the need arises.

Social fund community care grants—applications cleared on average in seven days.

Income support new claims—claims cleared on average in four days.

Sickness and invalidity benefit claims—65 per cent. of claims cleared in 12 days and 95 per cent. in 30 days.[2]

Child benefit—65 per cent. of claims in 10 days and 95 per cent. in 30 days.[2]

Family credit—60 per cent. of claims in 13 days and 95 per cent. in 45 days.[2]

Disability living allowance—60 per cent of claims in 30 days and 95 per cent in 55 days.[2]

Disability working allowance (claims from people starting work)—95 per cent. of claims in five days.[2]

Retirement pension—65 per cent. of claims in 20 days and 95 per cent. of claims in 60 days.[2]

Unemployment benefit—applications cleared on average in 8 days.[3]

2. *Benefit accuracy*

Income support—pay the correct amount in 99 per cent. of cases.

Incapacity benefits[4]—to pay the correct amount in 98 per cent. of cases.

Family credit—to pay the correct amount in 96 per cent. of cases.

Disability living allowance—to pay the correct amount in 96 per cent. of cases.

Disability working allowance—to pay the correct amount in 95 per cent. of cases.

Pensions—to pay the correct amount in 99 per cent. of cases.

3. *Customer satisfaction*

90 per cent. of customers to regard the agency's service as satisfactory or better.

4. *Resource management*

To manage the agency's resources to deliver its Business Plan within a total budget of £121 million of which £111·4 million relates to departmental running costs (DRC).

Achieve new efficiency savings worth at least 2·5 per cent. of DRC.

The budget of £121 million is net of these savings.

Keep to a gross allocation for social fund loans and grants of £25 million.

5. *Financial recovery*

Recovery of social fund loans—£13·62 million.

Recovery of income support overpayments—£1 million.

Benefit savings from detection and prevention of fraud—£10·4 million.

Increase number of national insurance contribution surveys of employers by 15 per cent. to 5,000.

Notes:

[1] Clearance times normally cover the period from date of receipt of the claim in the agency to the formal decision by the adjudication officer or equivalent. Notification of the result is normally issued by the following day. All days refer to working days.

[2] These targets are expressed in the format x per cent. in y days based on the time taken to clear individual cases, thus giving a better indication of the spread of service than a simple average.

[3] The target for clearing unemployment benefit claims has been set at eight days. This is slightly higher than last year's target of seven days. The main reason for this is that over the next 18 months offices will be converting to new computer systems. Sound experience on introducing major new systems in both the public and private sectors is that during conversion there is a period of temporary disruption while records are being transferred from clerical systems and staff are being trained and becoming proficient in the new ways of working. Whilst eight days remains a very challenging target which will require considerable commitment to achieve, performance will be continually monitored in a determined effort to improve upon this.

[4] Incapacity benefits is an overall term used to cover sickness benefit, invalidity benefit, severe disablement benefit and maternity allowance.

Local Government Boundaries

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has completed his consideration of the final recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commission in respect of local government district and ward boundaries in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Yes. An order under section 50(4) of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972 giving effect to the commissioner's recommendations without modification, was made on 6 July 1992. A copy of the commissioner's report and final recommendations is available in the Library.

Customs Clearance

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* customs clearance staff work and *(b)* customs clearance firms operate in Northern Ireland; how many are based in each parliamentary constituency; and what is the estimated annual turnover generated by the customs clearance industry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Information from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise indicates that there are 75 businesses in Northern Ireland which provide customs clearance services. However, many of these businesses also have other activities and it is not possible to determine, from the available information, the staff numbers or turnover attributable solely to customs clearance work. The distribution of the 75 businesses by parliamentary constituency is as follows:

Customs clearance agents in Northern Ireland by parliamentary constituency

	Number
Belfast, North	15
Belfast, East	3
Belfast, West	9
South Antrim	12
Lagan Valley	1
East Antrim	3
North Antrim	1
Foyle	7
South Down	6
Newry and Armagh	13
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	5
Total	75

HEALTH

Dentistry

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to settle the dispute with dentists practising in the national health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to a private notice question from the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 6 July at columns 21-25.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide a breakdown by health region of the annual running cost of salaried dentists operating within the national health service; and if she will provide a breakdown by health region of the annual cost to the national health service of dental treatment.

Dr. Mawhinney: For the year ending March 1991 the annual cost of general dental services and the running costs of national health service salaried dentists in each health region are shown in the table.

Region	*Cost of GDS* £000	*Cost of salaried dentists* £000
Northern	41,935	8·056
Yorkshire	53,209	25·585
Trent	63,435	30·599
East Anglia	27,323	23·741
North West Thames	52,538	58·355
North East Thames	54,304	524·161
South East Thames	53,390	238·918
South West Thames	43,265	41·071
Wessex	38,703	29·340
Oxford	32,455	8·178
South Western	49,675	71·389
West Midlands	67,381	124·706
Mersey	36,987	115·541
North Western	63,567	56·105
ENGLAND	678,167	1,355·745

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advisory criteria her Department issues to family health service authorities in England by which cross-infection rates in dental surgeries are measured in both absolute and relative terms.

Dr. Mawhinney: Family health services authorities may arrange for the inspection of dental surgeries which includes consideration of cross-infection control. The Department has not issued guidance on measurement of cross-infection rates.

Tampon-related Illness

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received about the incidence of toxic shock syndrome and other tampon-related illnesses; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: In recent months, we have received a number of letters about toxic shock syndrome. TSS is a rare condition which sadly proves fatal in one or two cases each year. The Government are fully committed to reducing the risk of TSS associated with tampon use to the absolute minimum.

Psychologists

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified clinical psychologists are employed by the NHS to work in *(a)* adult mental health services, *(b)* services for the elderly, *(c)* services to children and adolescents, *(d)* services to people with physical disability and *(e)* services to people with learning difficulty; and how many unfilled vacancies there are in each of these areas of work.

Mr. Yeo: A total of 2,089 whole-time equivalent clinical psychologists were employed in the national health service in England as at 30 September 1991. Information about the numbers employed within particular areas of work and the number of unfilled vacancies is not collected centrally.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many clinical psychologists are employed by local authorities to work in *(a)* adult mental health services, *(b)* services for the elderly, *(c)* services to children and adolescents, *(d)* services to people with physical disability and *(e)* services to people with learning difficulty; and what information she has on the number of unfilled vacancies in each of these areas of work.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested is not held centrally.

Elderly People

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set up a royal commission to consider how the physical and mental well-being of the elderly could be met by statutory and voluntary organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo No.

Disabled People

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards there will be for the physically disabled who may choose to have residential care but who may be designated by a local authority as suitable for care in the community.

Mr. Yeo: From April 1993 local authorities will be responsible for assessing with people their need for community care and arranging packages of care. Whether these services should be in the form of residential or

non-residential care will depend on the outcome of the assessment. Both assessments and subsequent care plans should take full account of people's preferences.

Continuing Care Beds

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received on the provision of continuing care beds within the national health service; when she expects to reach a decision about these; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: A number of representations have been received. The points raised will be taken fully into account in setting priorities for the health service and in monitoring health authorities' continuing provision of services for elderly people.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by her Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to pages 33-37 of "Public Bodies 1991", HMSO, 1991, a copy of which is available in the Library. Since publication, additional non-departmental public bodies have been established as follows:

Youth Treatment Centre Advisory Group
Medical Manpower Standing Advisory Committee
The London Enquiry
Steering Committee on Pharmacy Postgraduate Education
Aids Action Group
National Disability Information Project Steering Group

The Department no longer sponsors the following bodies:

Independent Scientific Committee on Smoking and Health
National Development Team for People with Learning Disabilities

Of the Department's nine executive bodies, eight produce auditable accounts of which six are audited by the National Audit Office. The English National Board is audited by the Audit Commission, and the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting is audited by private accountants Lawrence and Co. of Baird house, 15-17 St. Cross street, London EC1N 8UN. Lawrence and Co. was appointed after a tendering exercise undertaken by the body itself and the contract is of open-ended duration, subject to satisfactory performance.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Wolds Prison

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has about recent disturbances at Her Majesty's prison, Wolds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my replies to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on 6 July, at column *38*, and the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 8 July, at column *199*.

Rave Parties

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the statutory provisions that relate to the holding of rave parties in rural areas; whether he has any plans to revise the existing legislation; and whether he has any plans to introduce further measures to control such events.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Provisions of the London Government Act 1963, the Private Places of Entertainment (Licensing) Act 1967 or the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, all as amended by the Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act 1990 may, depending on the circumstances of each case, require the licensing of places used for such events. Other, more general, provisions of the criminal and civil law may also apply in particular cases. We have no present plans to amend these provisions or to introduce any new legislation to control events of this kind, but we keep the matter under review.

Trespassing

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We shall be further considering whether any changes need to be made to the public order law in consultation with other government departments and chief officers of police.

Metropolitan Police (Accidents)

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *553*, in what form information is held on accidents involving Metropolitan police.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Accident records are held by local police stations. The accident claims branch record claims made either against or by the Metropolitan police. The driver training branch keep a record of qualified police drivers: this includes a record of all accidents which a driver has been found to be liable for. Statistics, other than the total of accidents and the number of accidents in which Metropolitan police officers were found to be to blame which are published in the commissioner's annual report, are not collected centrally.

Stonehenge

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost to *(a)* the taxpayer and *(b)* the community charge payer or ratepayer of policing the Stonehenge area during the period of the summer solstice in each of the last 10 years; and what percentage of the total cost was accounted for by police overtime pay.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand from the chief constable of Wiltshire that the additional cost of policing the Stonehenge area during the period of the summer solstice was as follows:

Year	*Additional cost £*
1985	811,413
1986	526,060
1987	268,400
1988	383,500
1989	520,500
1990	288,000
1991	277,000
1992	[1]242,450

[1] Estimate.

Details of the costs of overtime are not available. It is not possible to assign particular aspects of expenditure to the source of funding.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Details of non-departmental public bodies, including audit information, are published annually by HMSO in "Public Bodies"—ISBN 0-11-430064-X. Audit arrangements in respect of those executive bodies listed whose accounts are neither audited by nor accessible to the National Audit Office are as follows:

	Auditors
Alcohol Education and Research Council	Saffrey Champness
Fire Service Examinations Board	Touche Ross
Fire Service Research and Training Trust	Vale and West of Reading
Horserace Betting Levy Board	KPMG Peat Marwick
Horserace Totalisator Board	Stoy Hayward

Methods of appointment vary, including annual tender and nomination by local authority associations, as does duration.

Crime, Halifax

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will be replying to the hon. Member for Halifax about a meeting to discuss the increase in crime in Halifax and the urban crime fund.

Mr. Jack: A reply is being sent to the hon. Member today.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* husbands, *(b)* wives and *(c)* dependent children have been refused (i) extension of stay and (ii) settlement in the United Kingdom on the grounds that the Secretary of State is not satisfied that they can be maintained and accommodated without recourse to public funds, in each quarter since January 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* The available information relating to after entry cases is given in the table. Information on dependent children is not readily available.

Refusals[1] on grounds of maintenance and accommodation, of after-entry applications by husbands and wives

Number of persons

	Refusals to grant probationary year on grounds of:			*Refusals of settlement after probationary yaer[2]*
	Accommodation	*Maintenance*	*Maintenance and Accommodation*	
1990				
Quarter 1				
Husbands	1	—	—	3
Wives	—	—	1	4
Quarter 2				
Husbands	3	1	2	8
Wives	—	1	—	8
Quarter 3				
Husbands	3	1	1	8
Wives	—	1	—	5
Quarter 4				
Husbands	1	—	—	7
Wives	1	1	—	1
1991				
Quarter 1				
Husbands	—	3	—	7
Wives	—	—	—	7
Quarter 2				
Husbands	—	—	—	11
Wives	3	—	—	12
Quarter 3				
Husbands	—	1	3	6
Wives	3	1	1	8
Quarter 4				
Husbands	—	—	—	8
Wives	1	—	—	5
1992				
Quarter 1				
Husbands	1	—	—	8
Wives	1	1	1	12

[1] Excluding dependants.
[2] Refusal of settlement after probationary year on general considerations, including recourse to public funds.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Waldegrave: All the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department are audited by the National Audit Office. They are:

Civil Service Appeal Board
Agricultural and Food Research Council
Economic and Social Research Council
Medical Research Council
Natural Environment Research Council
Science and Engineering Research Council

TRANSPORT

Trains

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will request the Health and Safety Executive to obtain and publish a report on the responsibilities, training and employment and rules for train crews, with particular reference to safety, before further legislation relating to changes in the operation of railways is introduced.

Mr. Freeman: We are asking the Health and Safety Commission to arrange for a study of the safety implications of the Government's proposals for the privatisation of British Rail and to make detailed recommendations. This study will look at all safety-related issues, including the training and certification of train crews.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the approximate proportion of passenger train miles in the last available year where receipts were equal to, or exceeded, the costs that can be ascribed to the total transport service to the passengers.

Mr. Freeman: In 1991-92 receipts excluding grant exceeded operating costs only for InterCity among British Rail's three passenger businesses. InterCity was responsible for 22 per cent. of British Rail's total loaded passenger train miles.

Railway Costs

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the approximate proportion of railway costs ascribable to the provision, maintenance and operation of the track and associated stationary features, and those relating to the cost of moving and crewing rolling stock and its associated costs.

Mr. Freeman: A breakdown of rail business expenditure last year is provided in note 3 to British Rail's annual report and accounts for 1991-92, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. Expenditure on track, signalling, telecommunications, terminals and operations control amounted to 44 per cent. of the total; train provision, operation, maintenance and catering to 39; and other expenditure to 17 per cent.

M25

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the estimated cost of his Department's proposal for new feeder roads between the M3 junction and the M4 junction of the M25.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The estimated cost of the proposed improvement between junction 12 (M3) and 15 (M4) of the M25 is £144 million at 1992 prices.

Bus Project

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make resources available to the boroughs concerned in the south and west London bus priority demonstration project.

Mr. Norris: I am pleased to announce the allocation of £300,000 of supplementary credit approvals in 1992-93 for the first stage of the south and west London bus priority demonstration project.

Air Travel Trust Fund

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action the Government are taking to address the depletion of the air travel trust fund revealed in the ATT annual report and accounts.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government intend to legislate, when parliamentary time allows, to allow the Air Travel Trust fund to be replenished.

In the meantime, I have laid a minute informing Parliament of my proposal to grant a guarantee to enable the fund to borrow to meet its obligations.

Harbour Authorities

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those harbour authorities where a direction has been given under the provisions of section 22 of the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990.

Mr. Norris: The harbours affected by directions issued to harbour authorities under section 22 of the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990 are listed:

Scotland
Aberdeen
Ardrossan*
Cairnryan
Invergordon*
Leith (Edinburgh)
Lerwick
Scrabster
Stranraer

Northern Ireland
Belfast
Larne

Wales
Cardiff
Fishguard
Holyhead
Pembroke Dock
Swansea

England
Brighton
Dartmouth
Dover
Felixstowe

Fleetwood
Folkestone
Harwich, Parkeston Quay
Heysham
Kingston upon Hull
Liverpool
London
Newhaven
North Shields
Plymouth
Poole
Portsmouth
Ramsgate
Sheerness
Southampton
Tilbury
Torquay*
Weymouth

*= although directions have been served they are at present dormant as no relevant passenger services operate from these harbours.

In addition, the following harbours have been the subject of directions given to harbour authorities under section 22 of the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990 but are now no longer covered as the direction has been revoked by a further direction given under section 22, as permitted under section 46.

Scotland
Lochboisdale
Oban
Stornoway
Ullapool
England
Grimsby

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those bodies of constables empowered under section 22(3) of the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990 to search or enter a private dwelling.

Mr. Norris: Constables empowered to search or enter a private dwelling under section 22(3), as qualified by sections 22(4) and (5), of the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990, are, in the case of England, Scotland or Wales, those from constabularies which are maintained by a police authority or an authority which has entered into an agreement with the Police Complaints Authority under section 96(1) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; and, in the case of Northern Ireland, those from constabularies which are maintained by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland or an authority which has entered into an agreement with the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland under article 16 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Order 1987.

Such powers exist only where there are extant directions, issued by the Secretary of State under section 22(1) to the harbour authority, for searching to be carried out.

Airports

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive a progress report from the working group, chaired by his Department, which is taking forward the Civil Aviation Authority's advice on runway capacity in the south-east.

Mr. Norris: The working group is making useful progress and will publish next year its advice on future runway capacity. Its timetable is demanding and it has no plans to prepare an interim report.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I would refer the hon. Member to my answer of 15 June concerning the purchasing, energy use and waste management policies of the Departments for which I am responsible.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

The Attorney-General: The Departments for which I am responsible do not sponsor any non-departmental public bodies.

Trades Union Congress

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 6 July, if he will publish in the *Official Report* the letter of 14 February sent by the secretary of the Law Commission to the TUC and the subsequent reply.

The Attorney-General: With the consent of the senders, I have caused copies of each of the letters to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information he has regarding awards made for arts projects in *(a)* Blaenau Gwent and *(b)* Wales by the business sponsorship incentive scheme in 1992.

Mr. Key: To date, 27 awards have been made to arts organisations in Wales in 1992, representing a total of £180,356 in Government money. Of these, two awards have gone to arts projects in Blaenau Gwent. The garden festival, Wales has won an award of £13,000 to match sponsorship by Optrex and Trecco Bay leisure park. The second award of £2,000 is to South Wales Potters for a ceramic display at the garden festival, sponsored by Bath Potters Supplies and Work Shop Gallery.

Royal Watercolour Society

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with the Royal Watercolour Society concerning the renovation of its collection of work by British artists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor I have had any discussions with the Royal Watercolour Society, because none have been requested. As a watercolour enthusiast I would be happy to meet them.

Football

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he is ready to announce the conclusions of his reconsideration of the all-seating requirements at Football League clubs.

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to all those who have so promptly let me have their views following my announcement on 4 June that I was reconsidering certain aspects of the all-seating requirements. I have been struck by the consistency of the views which have emerged.

I said on 4 June that I was not prepared to review either the principle of or the timetable for all-seating at first division grounds in the Football League, the new premier league. This view has been confirmed by the responses I have received and I have decided furthermore, in the light of consultation, to continue our existing policy for all-seating for clubs in the present second division. Many of these clubs have recently played in the higher division. All of them should aspire to do so. I have no doubt that they will want to prepare themselves to put those aspirations into practice by pressing ahead vigorously with an all-seating policy.

Having considered the submissions made to me, I can confirm that I am prepared to allow some standing accommodation to be retained at grounds in the third and fourth divisions provided terracing is safe. Clubs in these divisions should not see this as an easy option. They will need to ensure that such accommodation fully accords with the high standards of safety which all spectators have a right to expect. Clubs moving from the third to the second division will continue to have three seasons to convert to all-seater.

I continue to expect that the vast majority of clubs throughout the league will see as their ultimate goal the achievement of substantially seated grounds as part of their commitment to the principles of improved spectator safety and comfort defined by Lord Taylor.

Note

References in the answer to divisions are to the present divisional structure of the Football League.

Upon the introduction of the premier league on 15 August, the present second division will become the first division and the current third and fourth divisions, divisions two and three.

Festivals

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much money was provided by the Arts Council for the Sheffield festival 1991 and the Sheffield festival 1992; what guidance has been given by his Department to the Arts Council concerning continuity of funding and encouragement for the development of festivals aimed at both entertainment and urban regeneration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Yorkshire Arts provided £14,500 in 1991 and its successor body, the Yorkshire and Humberside regional arts board, £10,750 in 1992. The very helpful contribution which the festival makes to urban regeneration was taken into account in these funding awards.

Decisions on funding allocations to arts organisations are taken at arm's length from the Government by the Arts Council and the regional arts boards. It is not for my Department to give specific guidance in this area.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Tibet

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it remains his policy to support resolution 1723 of the UN General Assembly 16th session relating to the demand for the cessation of practices which deprive the Tibetan people of their fundamental human rights and freedom, including their rights to self-determination.

Mr. Goodlad: The resolution called for the cessation of practices which deprived the Tibetans of their human rights, including their right to self-determination. Her Majesty's Government believe that all peoples have the right to self-determination, but that this right can be expressed in several different ways. In voting for this resolution, Her Majesty's Government, as was made clear at the time in the explanation of vote, was expressing its concern about the sufferings of the Tibetan people, as expressed in the preamble to the resolution.

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to Iraq following the refusal of entry to the United Nations Special Commission team to the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Security Council issued a presidential statement on 6 July reminding the Iraqis of their obligations under Security Council resolutions 687 and 707 to allow inspection teams immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access to all areas they wish to inspect. An envoy from the special commission is in Baghdad and in touch with Iraqi authorities.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Saudi Government regarding the conditions in which refugees from Iraq are being held.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We regularly discuss Iraq-related issues with the Saudi Arabian authorities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs did so on 2 July with the Saudi Foreign Minister. I understand that the Saudis are investing considerable resources in constructing a new camp to house Iraqi refugees in much improved conditions. This is welcome.

European Court

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions the European Court of Human Rights has considered cases related to United Kingdom taxation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European Court of Human Rights has not considered any cases related to United Kingdom taxation.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Goodlad: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office currently sponsors 11 executive non-departmental public bodies and one tribunal. The bodies and their auditors are:

British Council	National Audit Office
Commonwealth Institute	National Audit Office
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	National Audit Office
Crown Agents Holding and Realisation Board	National Audit Office
GB-China Centre	Sayers Butterworth
British Association for Central and Eastern Europe	B. M. May
Crown Agents	Price Waterhouse
Commonwealth Development Corporation	KPMG Peat Marwick
Commonwealth Scholarship Commission	Knox Cropper
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	To be appointed
Britain Russia Centre	Gain Jackson Scott

The auditors for Crown Agents and the Commonwealth Development Corporation are appointed annually by the Secretary of State. A review of audit arrangements involving competitive tendering by leading firms of auditors is normally undertaken every six years.

Audit of the administrative costs of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission is carried out by Knox Cropper as part of the annual audit of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. The council of the ACU appoints its auditors annually following an assessment of their performance in the previous year.

The GB-China Centre, Britain Russia Centre and British Association for Central and Eastern Europe also appoint their auditors annually following an assessment of their performance in the previous year.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy, a new NDPB, has yet to appoint auditors; it has obtained estimates from three recommended firms of chartered accountants.

Baltic States

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when visa-issuing facilities will be available at the British posts in Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A final decision has not yet been taken on establishing entry clearance sections at these posts. We are currently reviewing the situation in the light of the availability of suitable accommodation.

The hon. Member will recall from the answer I gave to his question of 19 June that nationals of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania travelling on national passports do not require visas for visits to the United Kingdom.

South Africa (Companies)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for reassessment of the EC's code of conduct for companies with interests in South Africa during the British presidency of the EC.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* Her Majesty's Government continue to believe that the code of conduct fulfills an important function and to encourage companies to comply with its terms. In political co-operation, under the previous presidency, officials began discussion of possible changes to the code's reporting procedures.

ENVIRONMENT

Peat Bogs and Heathlands

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to improve the protection of lowland peat bogs and heathlands.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 7 July, *Official Report*, column *158*.

Both habitat types are covered by annex I of the EC habitats directive. The means of implementing the directive and the scientific criteria for selecting sites are under consideration.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of household waste is currently recycled by each district council in England.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the recycling activities of individual local authorities is not held centrally at present. Work is in hand to establish better data, including a national review of waste statistics on which we are working with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and the recycling plans which are now being prepared by every waste collection authority in the country as a result of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Local Government Ombudsman

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the councils which have refused to implement the recommendations of the local government ombudsman from 1991 to date; and what action he intends to take to ensure the recommendations are carried out.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information for the year ending 31 March 1992 will be published in the 1991-92 annual report of the Commission for Local Administration. The citizens charter makes clear the Government's intention to consider making the ombudsman's recommendations legally enforceable if such a step should become necessary.

Sewerage

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make connection to adopted sewers compulsory for households in areas with *(a)* sensitive aquifiers and *(b)* pollution of streams and waterways.

Mr. Maclean: None. Septic tanks or cesspits can provide satisfactory drainage if they are properly designed and operated. For isolated properties, the provision of a public sewer might be prohibitively expensive. The National Rivers Authority has powers which it can use to control and prevent pollution from domestic drainage.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he has made of the refusal of households to connect to first-time sewage schemes.

Mr. Maclean: A local authority would normally not requisition a first-time sewerage scheme unless the majority of householders in the relevant area had indicated that they wished to connect to public sewers. The Department's experience of grant-aiding schemes in rural areas shows that very small schemes usually have a 100 per cent. connection rate. Larger schemes serving whole villages have a lower connection rate because some of the properties will have an adequate septic tank or cesspit which the household can continue to use without problems. Some householders who do not connect when a mains system is first installed may do so later.

Housing Defects

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *128*, who undertook the efficiency scrutiny report into the housing defects scheme of assistance; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Baldry: The efficiency scrutiny report of the housing defects scheme of assistance was undertaken by Mrs. Susan Deville, an official in the Department. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Tillingdown Farm, Caterham

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent planning inquiry appeal, under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, in regard to land use at Tillingdown farm, Caterham.

Mr. Baldry: In a decision issued on 22 June, on an appeal under section 174(2)(b) and (c) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, a planning inspector corrected and upheld Surrey county council's enforcement notice requiring the use of land at Tillingdown farm, Caterham, for the deposit of waste materials to cease. It is open to the appellant to seek the leave of the High court, in accordance with the amended provisions of section 289 of the 1990 Act, to appeal to the court, on a point of law, against the inspector's decision.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent applications have been received from Amersham International to dispose of low-activity radioactive waste under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960, at sites near Amersham other than those currently covered by licences under the Act.

Mr. Maclean: No such applications have been received.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the current number of staff employed by, or seconded to, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee; and whether any posts have yet to be filled.

Mr. Maclean: There are currently 53·5 permanent staff on secondment to the committee from the country councils. A further 1·5 permanent posts are filled by fixed-term appointments and four permanent posts vacant. In addition, there are 37 fixed term appointments to undertake work on projects with a limited timetable. The formal staff complement for the JNCC is currently under review.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what role the Joint Nature Conservation Committee will play in advising the Government on the legislation and procedural changes which will be required in order that the United Kingdom can meet its obligations under the new EC directive on the conservation of wildlife and habitats.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are involving the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the country councils closely in the consideration of the measures necessary to implement the habitats directive. The JNCC's particular responsibility will be to ensure that the scientific response to the directive's requirements is consistent across the United Kingdom.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the functions and responsibilities of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Mr. Maclean: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee was established under section 128(4) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to discharge the functions set out in section 133 of the Act. These include the provision of advice on nature conservation for great Britain as a whole or outside Great Britain, the establishment of standards for common monitoring and research and the commissioning of research.

Hostel Deficit Grant

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain from the Housing Corporation a report of its assessment as to whether the use of hostel deficit grant by the Ling Trust in Essex to purchase district health authority staff time in respect of the care of former residents of Turner Village mental handicap hospital is in accordance with the regulations governing the provision of such grants.

Mr. Baldry: The Housing Corporation has received a claim for hostel deficit grant in respect of nine schemes managed by the Ling Trust, including accommodation for former residents of Turner Village hospital. The claim is being considered and no grant has been paid.

Hostel deficit grant is payable in respect of deficits incurred by registered housing associations in the housing

management of hostels. Welfare costs, such as the cost of care staff, are not eligible for grant and associations need to look to other agencies, such as local health or social services authorities or charities, to support such expenditure.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses in the network installer area including Glasgow, Central constituency have been improved under the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Maclean: Within the network installer area which contains the hon. Member's constituency, 1,018 homes have benefited from HEES grant since 1 January 1991.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on which counties the Local Government Commission will consider; in what order and on what time scale.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. and learned Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) on 3 June, *Official Report*, columns *545-46*.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the terms of reference of the Local Government Commission; and what guidance he has given as to the optimum size of a new unitary authority.

Mr. Robin Squire: The terms of reference of the Local Government Commission are set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992.

The size of authorities is covered in paragraph 10 of our revised policy guidance which was placed in the Library on 3 June. My right hon. and learned Friend intends to direct the commission to have regard to this guidance shortly.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Local Government Commission was established; and if he will list the names, qualifications and previous experience of its members.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Local Government Commission was formally established on 1 July. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and Inner Cities, announced the names of the members we have appointed to the commission on 15 June, *Official Report*, column *397*, and 3 July, *Official Report*, column *719*. Further details about these members are available from my Department's press notice, a copy of which I have placed in the Library.

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to appoint an equal number of women and men members to the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the answers my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and Inner Cities gave to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), on 15 June, *Official Report*, column *397*, and to my hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), on 3 July, *Official Report*, column *719*.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of capital allowances claimed for investment in enterprise zones.

Mr. Redwood: The total cost of capital allowances for all enterprise zones in Britain, estimated from eligible private sector investment in construction in the zones as at 31 March 1990, was £600 million in 1989-90 prices.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his intention that any local authority whose boundary is coterminous with that of a shire county will be able to apply for unitary authority status when the position of that shire county is considered by the boundary commission.

Mr. Robin Squire The Local Government Commission's priority is to examine the structure of local government in the shire counties, as directed by the Secretary of State. Where the commission judges it necessary to make recommendations concerning localities bordering on an area under review, it should ask the Secretary of State to vary his direction requiring the review to be conducted.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Howard: The Comptroller and Auditor General, who is head of the National Audit Office, has statutory responsibility for auditing the accounts of the Audit Commission, the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council for England—English Nature—and the Rural Development Commission. The external auditors of the other executive NDPBs sponsored by the Department are:

Executive NDPB	*External Auditor*
British Board of Agrément	BDO Binder Hamlyn
Commission for the New Towns	Ernst and Young
Housing action trusts:	
North Hull	Kidsons Impey
Waltham Forest	Pannell, Kerr Forster
Housing Corporation	Coopers and Lybrand
Letchworth Garden City Corporation	Ernst and Young
Local Government Commission	not yet appointed
London Pensions Fund Authority	District Audit Service of the Audit Commission
London residuary body	District Audit Service of the Audit Commission

Executive NDPB	*External Auditor*
National Rivers Authority	Coopers and Lybrand
Urban development corporations:	
Black Country	Touche Ross and Co.
Bristol	Touche Ross and Co.
Central Manchester	Touche Ross and Co.
Leeds	Kidsons Impey
London Docklands	Ernst and Young
Merseyside	Price Waterhouse
Sheffield	Price Waterhouse
Teesside	Price Waterhouse
Trafford Park	Price Waterhouse
Tyne and Wear	Coopers and Lybrand

These appointments are made annually and are renewed subject to satisfactory performance. Formal reviews, involving competitive tendering, are held at least every six years.

Maintenance Work, Calderdale

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has decided to take against Calderdale metropolitan borough council following the issue of notices under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988 in relation to its decision to assign vehicle maintenance and ground maintenance work to its direct service organisation.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. and learned Friend has given careful consideration to the response which Calderdale metropolitan borough council has made to the notices served on 19 May 1992, and has today given a direction under section 14 of the Local Government Act 1988 in respect of vehicle maintenance work. The direction requires the council to re-tender the contract and to seek the Secretary of State's consent before awarding the work to its direct service organisation.

The Secretary of State has decided not to give a direction in respect of the ground maintenance work.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the number of jobs created in each urban development corporation area, including information to March 1992; and if he will include a column of figures indicating the net and percentage increase or decrease of jobs relative for March 1991.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 20 May 1992]:* Estimates of employment in urban development areas are derived from surveys commissioned periodically by urban development corporations. Seven UDCs have undertaken such surveys recently and, in a number of UDCs, the estimate of the number of net permanent jobs created to March 1991 has been revised in consequence.

The information requested is as follows:

	Permanent jobs			
Urban development area	*Net gain to March 1991 (Revised figures)*	*Net gain to March 1992 (Estimated)*	*Estimated net increase (Decrease)*	*Estimated percentage change*
Black Country	[1]2,600	3,000	400	15
Bristol	4,500	4,483	(17)	0
Central Manchester	950	750	(200)	(21)
Leeds	[1]5,862	3,875	(1,987)	(34)
London Docklands	26,000	[1]26,000	0	0
Merseyside	4,000	2,000	(2,000)	(50)
Sheffield	5,862	5,902	40	1
Teesside	4,446	6,025	1,579	36
Trafford Park	2,557	[2]8,231	5,674	222
Tyne and Wear	4,785	9,237	4,452	93
TOTALS	61,562	69,503	7,941	13

Notes:
[1] No revised estimate made.
[2] May include jobs created in earlier years.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to provide a substantive reply to the question of 20 May from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside regarding the number of jobs created in each urban development corporation to March.

Mr. Redwood: I have answered this question today.

SCOTLAND

Drug Surveillance

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the number of police working on drug surveillance in each police force.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* The number of officers dedicated to drugs duties is as follows:

	Number
Central Scotland	4
Dumfries and Galloway	2
Fife	4
Grampian	11
Lothian and Borders	24
Northern	5
Strathclyde	34
Tayside	12
TOTAL	96

In addition, there are 40 officers in the drugs wings of the Scottish crime squad engaged in drugs inquiries.

Police

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet police authorities to discuss manning levels in Scottish police forces.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so. Manpower in each force is primarily the responsibility of the police authority concerned. If an authority decides to change the establishment level it has authorised, it requires my right hon. Friend's consent to the proposed change.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to give the police extra resources to deal with increasing drug problems in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* Police authorities determine the resources allocated to their forces and it is for chief constables to decide how the resources available to them should be deployed. The authorities receive police grant at 51 per cent. of their net expenditure. In addition, in the financial years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93, three extra officers have been added each year to the strength of the Scottish crime squad for drugs-related inquiries.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Strathclyde on the number of police involved in the recent drug operation in Linwood, Renfrewshire, where seven people were charged with drug-related offences.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* No. This is an operational matter which is entirely the responsibility of the chief constable.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* armed robberies and *(b)* crimes involving weapons have taken place during the last five years in K division and X division of Strathclyde police.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* The available information is given in the table.

Number of robberies and crimes and offences involving the alleged use of firearms recorded in divisions K and X of Strathclyde police 1987 to 1991

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
K division, Strathclyde police					
(a) Robberies involving the alleged use of a firearm	11	1	12	23	57
(b) Crimes and offences involving the alleged use of a firearm[1]	76	43	54	123	159
X division, Strathclyde police					
(a) Robberies involving the alleged use of a firearm	0	0	3	4	7
(b) Crimes and offences involving the alleged use of a firearm[1]	20	12	20	22	34

[1] These figures include robberies involving the alleged use of a firearm shown separately in *(a)* above.

Drug-related Crimes

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many drug-related crimes have been committed in Scotland in the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* Information collected centrally on crimes recorded by the police is not held in a form which shows whether or not the crime was drug related. Information on the number of drugs offences, which includes importation, production, supply and possession of drugs, recorded by the police in the last five years is contained in the statistical bulletin "Recorded crime in Scotland 1991" which was published on 22 May 1992 and a copy of which is in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Departmental Select Committees

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects to provide a substantive reply to the question from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West on 22 May concerning reports from departmental Select Committees.

Mr. Newton: I replied to the hon. Member on Thursday 9 July.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef Premium

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will press for the introduction of a higher rate of premium for cattle stocked at 0·5 or 1·0 livestock units per hectare within the less favoured areas as a complementary measure to the £29 per cow which will be paid to all beef cows stocked 1·5 livestock units per hectare as agreed in the recent common agricultural policy reforms.

Mr. Curry: The Council has now reached agreement on the CAP reform package. For beef, the requirements on stocking densities make a valuable contribution to our environmental objectives. It would not be possible or desirable to reopen the CAP reform package to amend these stocking rate provisions.

Set-aside

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to use the United Kingdom Presidency to widen the choice available to farmers required to join rotational set-aside in order to receive compensation aids for cereals so that farmers who have already set aside land under the farm woodland premium scheme or countryside stewardship are also eligible.

Mr. Curry: We have already successfully negotiated arrangements under which we will be able to have non-rotational as well as rotational set-aside. This will increase the range of management options open to farmers under the new arable regime. Under the set-aside, land must normally be taken out of agricultural production in contrast to countryside stewardship which encouraged continued agricultural production in a way that enhances the environment.

Very few farmers have yet planted land with trees under the farm woodland premium scheme. We are exploring with the EC Commission the scope for set-aside land that has been planted with trees under the old farm woodland scheme or land that will be entered into the farm woodland premium scheme to count towards a farmers set-aside obligation under the new arable scheme. However, it would not be right to allow any element of double payment on that land.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a copy of his study of the evaluation of set-aside conducted by the university of Reading.

Mr. Gummer: In accordance with my usual policy, I gave an undertaking to publish this report. This will be fulfilled once the final report is ready, and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Badgers

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if field tests monitoring further destruction of badgers are currently being carried out by or on behalf of his Department.

Mr. Soames: The greatest cause of destruction of live badgers, apart from disease, is road accidents, which some estimates indicate are responsible for as many as 47,500 badger deaths per year. The field tests undertaken by Ministry staff are concerned with the development of better methods of dealing with the problem of tuberculosis.

Fishing, Tendring

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to resolve the dispute brought to his attention by the chairman of the Tendring district sports council concerning anglers and inshore fishermen within the Tendring district; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: A meeting was held on 25 June involving all those concerned, and I understand that a satisfactory solution was found. I welcome this as constructive discussions are the best route to resolve such problems.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Curry: The non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department are listed in the table. The National Audit Office audits the royal botanic gardens, Kew, in accordance with paragraph 39(6) of schedule 1 to the National Heritage Act 1983. The firms of private accountants who audit the other non-departmental public bodies which are subject to audit are shown next to them.

Non-departmental public body	*Audited by*
Agricultural Training Board	Touche Ross
Apple and Pear Research Council	Day, Smith & Hunter
Food from Britain	Touche Ross
Home Grown Cereals Authority	KPMG Peat Marwick
Horticultural Development Council	Barter & Durgan
Horticultural Research International	Robson Rhodes
Meat and Livestock Commission	Coopers & Lybrand
Sea Fish Industry Authority	Coopers & Lybrand
Wine Standards Board of the Vinters' Company	Coulthards Mackenzie

I understand that the auditors were appointed after competitive tendering. The duration of the contract is not normally stated in the contract, but performance is monitored annually and a formal review is undertaken within six years.

Food Surplus Scheme

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the invitation to organisations to participate in the 1992 surplus food scheme in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I announced to the House on 26 February that the surplus food scheme would be continued and invited applications from eligible organisations interested in taking part in the distribution.

A very large number of applications was received by the closing date of 10 April and of these I, together with the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland, have been able to designate 1,367 organisations. There are approximately 3,700 tonnes of butter and 3,000 tonnes of beef available to be distributed to the most needy citizens.

Once again, we have designated more organisations than in the previous years in order to ensure that the food is distributed to as many needy people at possible. But, as the quantities are limited, it will be necessary to place restrictions on the amount of produce available to organisations to ensure a wide coverage of distribution. We have therefore restricted the maximum amount of produce to be allocated to organisations to some 1 kg of packaged butter or tinned beef per individual recipient.

Priority in allocating this food is being given to organisations providing prepared meals to the homeless and destitute, who will be allocated twice that amount.

In addition, in order to receive an allocation, the smallest organisations will be asked to co-operate with others to keep the processing and distribution costs to a minimum.

I am placing a list of the organisations designated in the Libraries and officials will now be writing to all the organisations that applied.

Molluscs

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish the classification of shellfish harvesting areas which is required under EC directive 91/492 laying down the health conditions for the production and placing on the market of live bivalve molluscs.

Mr. Gummer: Officials from the Department have today circulated a preliminary version of the classification to interested parties for comment. I have placed a copy of the consultation letter and classification in the Library of the House.

All areas where bivalve mulluscs such as oysters, mussels and cockles are harvested are to be classified according to the bacterial contamination present in the mollusc flesh as required by EC directive 91/492/EEC.

The classification will provide an indication of whether the product can be placed on the market for human consumption or how it must be treated, either by purification, relaying or heat treatment.

The preliminary classification has been based on samples of bivalve molluscs taken by local authority environmental health officers from 75 known harvesting areas. Sample testing has been undertaken by public health laboratories and the results classified by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's fish disease laboratory in Weymouth.

Food Premises

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what statistical information for 1991 on inspection of food premises required by the EC Commission under directive 89/397 is available.

Mr. Gummer: The United Kingdom figures for food premises inspections during 1991 have been forwarded to the European Community Commission as required by directive 89/397. They are based on returns received from local authorities. A copy of the return has been placed in the Library of the House together with extracts covering England, Wales, Scotland and Northen Ireland respectively. Returns from individual authorities are available for inspection at my Department; copies can be provided for a small charge to cover expenses.

Sherwood Forest

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to revive Sherwood forest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The name Sherwood forest is famous throughout the world and the forest is one of Britain's best-known tourist destinations. Little remains, however, of the ancient Sherwood forest, and what survives is subject to intense public pressure.

The Government believe that the time is now right for a programme of work to improve, and perhaps recreate, the Sherwood forest of old. This would enhance the appearance of an area of historic importance, provide an alternative use for agricultural land in a nitrate sensitive area and create valuable leisure attraction for the east midlands.

I have therefore asked the Forestry Commission to redesign its existing forest areas. This will quickly achieve a considerable visual improvement and restore some of the original heathland. The long-term aim will be to reconstruct and revive areas of mixed woodland of a type native to Sherwood.

Informal discussions have been held with the local authorities, and other parties, and I am pleased to announce that there is enthusiastic support for the initiative. The proposals I am setting out will draw on the report of a feasibility study "Bringing Back the Sherwood Green" undertaken in 1988 by the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, the Conservation Foundation and David Bellamy Associates. The Nottinghamshire county structure plan of 1988 also referred to the development of Sherwood forest. A community forest to the south-east of the Sherwood area has recently been launched.

As a first step, the Forestry Commission will undertake a number of improvements to its 4,000 hectare landholding. These will diversify the mixture of species and ages of existing woodlands and take advantage of the scope for a degree of heathland restoration. Regeneration of the oak and birch woodlands will be encouraged by careful management and particular attention will be paid to forest areas adjacent to public roads. The commission will also encourage better management of existing woodland and further new planting by private landowners and tenants through the woodland grant scheme. More public access to the forest will be encouraged where it fits in with landowners' objectives.

To assist in taking these ideas forward, the Forestry Commission will set up a steering group, to include respresentatives of the local authorities, the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, forestry, landowning and farming interests, and others.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Paper Back Campaign

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the Paper Back Campaign of the British Paper and Board Industry Federation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has received various representations about the Paper Back Campaign, as a result of which officials have had discussions with representatives of the British Paper and Board Industry Federation and others in the waste paper industry; further meetings are planned.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to make available new investment funds to Cumbria under the assisted areas scheme.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Government will consider the needs and circumstances of all areas, including Cumbria, before making decisions later this year under the current review of the assisted areas.

LASCAR

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many meetings of the LASCAR—large-scale commercial reprocessing plant safeguards—group on nuclear safeguards have been held since June 1990; what issues have been discussed and decided; what United Kingdom representation there has been at LASCAR meetings; which interim reports on LASCAR meetings have been published; and when the final report of the LASCAR group will be made public.

Mr. Eggar: Eight meetings of the LASCAR group on large-scale reprocessing plant safeguards have been held since June 1990. Typically one representative from DTI and two from industry have attended for the United Kingdom.

The issues and conclusions of LASCAR are described in the "Report of the LASCAR Forum". In addition, a paper describing aspects of LASCAR's work was published in July 1990, at the Institute of Nuclear Materials management conference. Copies of both papers are available in the Library of the House.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to order an investigation into the accuracy of the results obtained from the radiation monitor film badges used by the work force at British Nuclear Fuel's Sellafield plant over the past 20 years, following BNFL's recent announcement that significant under-recording has taken place.

Mr. Eggar: BNFL has not made any announcement suggesting under-recording of radiation dose assessments by film badges over the past 20 years. An expert review of historical radiation dose assessed by film badges was initiated by BNFL as a result of the litigation process into allegations of Sellafield being responsible for two cases of childhood leukaemia in the vicinity of the plant. These cases are currently before the courts. The indications from BNFL's expert review are that there are no compelling reasons to adjust the recorded doses from gamma radiation. I therefore see no need to carry out a further investigation of the type requested.

Parcelforce

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he plans to privatise the Post Office's Parcelforce business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* The Government's policy towards the Post Office remains as set out in the citizens charter and in our election manifesto.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) why he has authorised the Post Office to drop the Royal Mail prefix from the name of its Parcelforce business; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he plans to retain the monarch's cipher on livery and vehicles owned by the Post Office's Parcelforce business, once the Royal Mail prefix has been dropped;

(3) what consultations there were over the proposal to remove the Royal Mail prefix from the title of the Post Office's Parcelforce business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* Details about Parcelforce's name are an operational matter. This decision was taken by Parcelforce management for commercial reasons.

Correspondence

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will be replying to the letter sent on 9 June from the hon. Member for Halifax.

Mr. Heseltine: I will write to the hon. Member.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 13 July 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I have no such plans.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Attorney-General what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

The Attorney-General: I have no plans to relocate any civil servants in the legal secretariat to the Law Officers or the Serious Fraud Office. The property division of the Treasury Solicitor's Department—nearly one quarter of the total staff—was relocated to Taunton in August 1991 but no further parts of the office are suitable for relocation. Some 90 per cent. of the staff of the Crown prosecution service are located near to the courts throughout England and Wales which deal with the criminal cases prosecuted by the service. The scope for devolving headquarters posts to locations outside London is kept continuously under review.

British National Party

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the evidence submitted to the Crown prosecution service following the search of the British National party premises in Welling in January.

The Attorney-General: A police report was submitted to the Crown prosecution service following the execution of a search warrant on 9 January 1992 at premises at 154 Upper Wickham lane, Welling in Kent.

Having given careful consideration to this report and taken the advice of Treasury Counsel, the Crown prosecution service decided not to initiate proceedings, on the basis that the available evidence was not such as to give rise to a realistic prospect of conviction for offences contrary to part III of the Public Order Act 1986.

I have also considered this matter and have concluded that the decision by the Crown prosecution service is entirely justified.

ENVIRONMENT

Caravan Sites Act 1968

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to publish a consultation document on the Caravan Sites Act 1968; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) on 19 June, *Official Report*, column *693*.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to review the outstanding permission for mineral extraction which affect sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Baldry: The Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981 placed a duty on mineral planning authorities to review mineral sites in their area, including environmentally sensitive sites such as SSSIs, and to make such orders revoking or modifying permissions as they considered necessary. The Government announced in the environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" their intention to review the legislative framework governing the updating of minerals permissions. We have already taken action in the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 to deal with the problems caused by Interim Development Order permissions granted in the 1940s and we are consulting on options for updating mineral permissions granted in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

Protected Birds

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will strengthen statutory provision for protection for vulnerable habitats and protected species in the United Kingdom along the lines proposed to him by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Mr. Maclean: The RSPB has made a number of representations to my right hon. and learned Friend, to me and to my officials about the protection of habitats and species. I am always pleased to receive its proposals and take them fully into account in my considerations of policy for nature conservation.

Vacant Public Land

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to develop vacant and derelict public land for recreation purposes.

Mr. Baldry: We have recently announced our intention to establish an Urban Regeneration Agency with powers to reclaim vacant, derelict and underused land in urban areas. As indicated in planning policy guidance note 17 "Sport and Recreation", published in September 1991, the Government encourage the development of sport and recreation in the widest sense and advises local planning authorities on the policies they should incorporate in their development plans for the provision of space and facilities for sport and recreation. The Urban Regeneration Agency will promote the use of land it reclaims for these purposes where appropriate.

"Agenda 21"

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new United Kingdom contributions to international scientific programmes he proposes to establish as a result of the "Agenda 21" chapter on science for sustainable development agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Mr. Maclean: This chapter has four programme areas —strengthening the scientific basis for sustainable development, enhancing scientific understanding, improving long-term scientific assessment, and building up scientific capacity and capability. The United Kingdom is already extremely active in these areas working with developing countries both directly and through governmental and non-governmental international bodies. We are, for example, playing leading roles in a range of international programmes on climate change and its consequences. Some of the additional funds committed by the United Kingdom by replenishing the global environmental facility will no doubt be deployed on projects covered by chapter 35. More specifically, the United Kingdom initiatives on satelite monitoring, on technology, transfer, and on biodiversity—the Darwin initiative—will add significantly to our inputs to promoting science for sustainable development. I understand that new Natural Environment Research Council initiatives in training and research in taxonomy and in biodiversity, are designed to strengthen the United Kingdom science base thus underpinning existing and new applied work with developing countries.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Howard: The need for civil servants in my Department to be located in central London is kept under review, in accordance with Government policy. We continue therefore to look for further opportunities to move posts to other parts of the country, in addition to looking at the suitability of posts to be moved to docklands.

Gipsy Sites

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pending the publication of his consultation paper on the law relating to gipsy sites, he will suspend further approval of local authority applications for the funding of pitches on council sites and any decisions on applications for designation of areas under sections 10 and 12 of the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

Mr. Baldry: I do not think that it would be appropriate to do so.

Abstraction Licences

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority about the provision of funds for the revocation of abstraction licences.

Mr. Maclean: The funding implications of the authority's proposals for this and other water resources capital expenditure were among the issues I discussed with my right hon. and noble Friend at our recent meeting on the authority's corporate plan.

Household Waste

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of household waste has been recycled by Chelmsford borough council in each of the last three available years.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the recycling activities of individual local authorities is not held centrally at present. Recycling plans are now being prepared by every waste collection authority in the country as a result of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The plans are due to be submitted in draft to the Secretary of State by 1 August. they will contain information on the quantities of waste which the council expects to deal with by separating, baling or otherwise packaging it for the purpose of recycling it. The plan for Chelmsford has not yet been received.

Council House Exchanges

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council tenants sought advice from their council about how to exchange their home with a tenant in a different local authority area in the six months from October 1991 to March 1992; and how many mutual exchanges took place in this period.

Mr. Baldry: Information is not collected centrally about the number of council tenants who seek advice from their local authority about exchanging their home.

Information about the number of mutual exchanges is reported by local authorities on their annual housing investment programme returns—HIP1. The latest available information records that 46,100 dwellings were let through mutual exchanges in the period 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991.

Private Sector Leases

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to assist local authorities in tackling homelessness by reducing the cost of private sector leases.

Mr. Baldry: No. It is for local authorities to negotiate the cost of leases with landlords on an individual basis. My Department is, however, providing assistance of £20 million this year to the local authorities most affected by the recent change to finance short-term leases from outside the housing revenue account.

Council House Waiting Lists

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many names are on the waiting lists for tenancies of council houses in England.

Mr. Baldry: Local authorities report the number of households on their council housing waiting lists in their annual housing investment programme—HIP1—returns.

The figures as at 1 April 1991 are in colum B5 of the "1991 HIP1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library.

Vacant Public Sector Land

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many years it would take to get rid of the surplus vacant public sector land; and how much it would cost to run the register for that period if no extra land was added to the register;

(2) what is the regional breakdown of land on the surplus vacant public sector land register with no potential, low potential and moderate/high potential, on a percentage basis;

(3) how many acres of unused and underused land are at present in the ownership of British Rail, the urban development corporations, local authorities, government departments, the residuary bodies and British Coal;

(4) how many acres of unused and underused land have been entered onto and also removed from the surplus vacant public sector land register in 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Baldry: The Secretary of State's register of unused and underused land has for most purposes been superseded by registers maintained by each public sector owner and since 1989 has been maintained only in connection with requests to order the disposal of sites. The central register is therefore too out of date to be used as a basis for meaningful analysis.

The Department does not hold detailed information about the amount of land on the registers maintained by owners or the quality and development potential of individual sites. Nor can we make estimates of the costs incurred by owners in maintaining the registers.

Town and Country Planning

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what benefits he expects to accrue to the United Kingdom from the inclusion of town and country planning in the Maastricht treaty as a new EC competence.

Mr. Baldry: The benefit to the United Kingdom is that the inclusion clarifies the competence of the Community on this aspect of environmental policy as well as the decision-making procedures to be followed on proposals from the Commission.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many permanent jobs have been created in each urban development area *(a)* since 1981-82 and *(b)* since 1987-88, net of losses.

Mr. Robin Squire: Estimates of employment in urban development areas are derived from surveys commissioned periodically by urban development corporations, and refer to the period since the designation of the areas. The figures below give the latest net estimate of permanent jobs created since inception in all UDAs except Merseyside. The figures for Merseyside UDA relate to the period since the area was extended in 1988.

UDA	*Date Established*	*Estimated number of permanent jobs created (net of losses)*
London Docklands	1981	26,000
Merseyside	extended 1988	2,000
Trafford Park	1987	8,231
Black Country	1987	3,000
Teesside	1987	6,025
Tyne & Wear	1987	9,237
Central Manchester	1988	750
Leeds	1988	3,875
Sheffield	1988	5,902
Bristol	1989	4,483

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what levels of borrowing have been undertaken by each urban development corporation in each year since 1985-86.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is as follows:

	Amount
Bristol	— nil
Black Country	— nil
Central Manchester	— £350,000 in 1991-92
Leeds	— nil
London Docklands	— £3,100,000 in 1985-86
Merseyside	— £605,000 in 1985-86
	— £55,000 in 1986-87
	— £10,000 in 1987-88
Sheffield	— nil
Teeside	— £227,000 in 1988-89
Trafford Park	— nil
Tyne and Wear	— nil

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much grant in aid has been made available to each urban development corporation since 1981 as a cash sum *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* 1981 prices.

Mr. Robin Squire: Only two urban development corporations have been in existence since 1981, London Docklands and Merseyside. Their total grant in aid since 1981 is:

	£ million
(a) at current prices;	
London Docklands	1,317·51
Merseyside	268·22
(b) at 1981 prices;	
London Docklands	1,994·65
Merseyside	361·68

For the total grant in aid made available to the other urban development corporations from their inception, I refer to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member on 24 June 1992, *Official Report*, columns *195-96*.

Area Cost Adjustment Scheme

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will redistribute the money made available under the area cost adjustment scheme to south-east authorities outside London in a manner which would treat all local authorities equally; and what sums would be made available to other authorities by such redistribution.

Mr. Robin Squire: The area cost adjustment within standard spending assessments reflects the additional

employment costs faced by authorities in London and the south-east in providing the services for which they are responsible at a standard level. There are no plans to remove this adjustment for authorities in the south-east but we are always willing to consider any evidence brought forward.

If the money made available under the area cost adjustment to south-east authorities outside London were to be redistributed to all authorities outside London the sum available would be £15 per adult.

Planning and Compensation Act 1991

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to bring into force the remaining enforcement provisions of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* On 27 July we shall bring into force—

(1) the new breach of condition notice (section 2 of the Act), enabling the local planning authority to enforce compliance with planning conditions more economically and efficiently;

(2) the revised enforcement "immunity" rules (section 4 of the Act), establishing new time-limits for the planning authority to initiate enforcement action; and

(3) the new "lawful development certificate" provisions (section 10 of the Act), enabling the planning authority to decide, on an application to them, whether present or proposed development of land is lawful for planning control purposes.

A joint Department of the Environment and Welsh Office circular is being issued today, explaining how these provisions are intended to operate.

These provisions complete the implementation of the Government's thorough overhaul of planning authorities' powers for enforcing planning control over all types of unauthorised development of land. Provided that planning authorities use these new and strengthened powers vigorously and quickly, whenever their use is justified, they should now be able to remedy unlawful development whenever it is unacceptable on planning grounds. We intend to review the effectiveness of the strengthened enforcement regime once it has been in operation for a reasonable period.

Recycling

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements will be made for evaluating the environmental impact of recyclable materials in products before a Europewide standard for recycling comes into force.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

I have no reason to believe that a Europewide standard for recycling is coming into force, or being contemplated. However, my Department has commissioned Warren Spring laboratory to carry out research into the environmental impact of recycling. In addition, the recyclability of materials used in products may feature as one of the criteria for the award of ecolabels under the recently agreed EC ecolabelling regulation.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements have been made for exchange of manufacturing information relating to recyclable materials across Europe.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

No arrangements of a formal nature have been put in place, but my Department and the Department of the Environment participate in international and EC conferences, seminars and workshops at which recycling issues generally are debated, and views exchanged.

TRANSPORT

Shipping

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of *(a)* foreign earnings by British shipping, *(b)* earnings of British shipping from the United Kingdom cabotage trade and *(c)* the City of London's maritime earnings, for each of the last 20 years;

(2) what estimate he has made for the earnings of United Kingdom-owned vessels from cross-trades for each of the last 20 years, respectively;

(3) what latest figure he has for the percentage of United Kingdom shipping earnings that come from cross-trade.

Mr. Norris: The table sets out the available figures. It does not include estimates of earnings on United Kingdom cabotage, information on which is not readily available.

	(1) Total International Revenue	*(2) Revenue from Cross Trades*	*(3) Cross Trades as percentage of total*	*(4) City of London Maritime earnings*
1970	1,648	848	51	—
1971	1,921	1,023	53	—
1972	1,863	928	50	—
1973	2,357	1,215	52	—
1974	2,993	1,413	47	—
1975	2,875	1,205	42	—
1976	3,447	1,527	44	—
1977	3,558	1,594	45	—
1978	3,174	1,427	45	—
1979	3,840	1,812	47	218
1980	3,747	1,776	47	204
1981	3,577	1,754	49	319
1982	3,184	1,303	41	283
1983	2,993	1,205	40	279
1984	3,191	1,308	41	297
1985	3,175	1,125	35	254
1986	3,260	1,309	40	245
1987	3,444	1,390	40	249
1988	3,683	1,406	38	352
1989	4,076	1,678	41	450
1990	3,957	1,465	37	694

Notes:—Column 1 includes earnings from United Kingdom passengers and freight on United Kingdom imports.

Column 3 covers ONLY earnings from overseas residents by Baltic Exchange and Lloyd's Register of Shipping. Estimates of earnings from maritime insurance are not readily available.

Estimates for 1991 will be available in the latest edition of the CSO Pink Book ("UK Balance of Payments"), to be published within the next two months.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many seafarers are currently employed on vessels which are beneficially British-owned on, respectively, the United Kingdom register, the Crown dependencies register, British dependent territories register, and any other register, on the latest date for which he has figures, and on each year for the last 20 years.

Mr. Norris: Employment figures which distinguish between United Kingdom and non-United Kingdom flagged ships are not available for years prior to 1986. Separate statistics for the Crown dependencies and

dependent territories registers are not produced. The annual statistics available to the Department do not include seafarers employed by companies which do not belong to the Chamber of Shipping.

With these provisos, the table shows the information requested:

Total	31 December				
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1991[1]
United Kingdom flag	14,969	12,500	11,671	9,996	10,053
Non-United Kingdom flag	6,742	7,799	8,485	9,296	10,343
Back-up United Kingdom flag	8,308	8,[illegible]	8,460	7,1[illegible]	8,056
Back-up non-United Kingdom flag	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	3,595

Total	31 December				
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1991[1]
Total	30,019	28,772	28,616	26,428	32,047

[1] 1 June 1991.
[2] Not available.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the number of vessels registered on the *(a)* French, *(b)* German, *(c)* Greek, *(d)* Norwegian and *(e)* Danish registers in each of the last 20 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The information requested, as at 1 July, is given in the table.

	Registry:				
	France	Germany, FR	Greece	Norway[2]	Denmark[3]
1972	1,390	2,546	2,241	2,826	1,331
1973	1,376	2,234	2,536	2,758	1,362
1974	1,341	2,088	2,651	2,689	1,349
1975	1,393	1,964	2,743	2,706	1,371
1976	1,388	1,957	2,921	2,759	1,413
1977	1,327	1,975	3,344	2,738	1,407
1978	1,317	1,999	3,666	2,646	1,397
1979	1,247	1,926	3,827	2,531	1,315
1980	1,241	1,906	3,922	2,501	1,253
1981	1,199	1,820	3,710	2,409	1,169
1982	1,171	1,782	3,501	2,409	1,152
1983	1,173	1,769	3,169	2,340	1,112
1984	1,174	1,813	2,904	2,271	1,101
1985	1,136	1,816	2,599	2,219	1,070
1986	984	1,752	2,255	2,107	1,063
1987	954	1,414	1,948	1,979	1,256
1988	930	1,233	1,874	2,078	1,240
1989	921	1,185	1,839	2,304	1,256
1990	900	1,179	1,814	2,557	1,260
1991	910	[1]1,522	1,863	2,577	1,290

[1] Includes the former German Democratic Republic.
[2] Includes the Norwegian International Register, NIS.
[3] Includes the Danish International Register, DIS.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what figure he has for the number of beneficially British-owned vessels registered, for each of the last 20 years respectively in *(a)* the Crown dependencies, *(b)* British dependent territories, *(c)* the United Kingdom and *(d)* none of the above;

(2) if he will list the number of vessels, not beneficially British owned, which have been registered on the United Kingdom register, the registers for Crown dependencies and the registers of British dependent territories, in each of the last 20 years respectively.

Mr. Norris: Information is only available from 1988 onwards, as follows—vessels over 100 gross registered tons:

Number of United Kingdom parent owned vessels, by registry and year[1]

Registry	1988	1989	1990	1991	[2]1992
United Kingdom	1,720	1,668	1,584	1,557	1,542
Crown Dependency	83	68	87	91	91
Dependent Territories	149	141	117	120	119
Foreign	528	536	674	698	709
TOTAL	2,480	2,413	2,462	2,466	2,461

[1] As at 31 December.
[2] As at 31 March 1992.

Number of non-United Kingdom parent owned vessels, by registry and year[1]

Registry	1988	1989	1990	1991	[2]1992
United Kingdom	290	268	279	262	257
Crown Dependency	79	69	49	46	45
Dependent Territories	779	660	619	603	604

[1] As at 1 January.
[2] As at 31 March 1992.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what calculation he has made of the average age of the United Kingdom-owned fleet registered in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the Crown dependencies and *(c)* the dependent territories at the latest date for which figures are available; and what estimate he has of the average age of vessels of the United Kingdom's main merchant navy competitors.

Mr. Norris: Figures for British-registered fleets and for the fleets of other major shipping registers, are shown in the tables:

Average age[1] of the United Kingdom owned trading[2] fleet: by registry: 31 March 1992

Registry	Average age Years	Months
United Kingdom	16	1
Crown Dependencies	14	2
Dependent territories	12	7
Foreign registries	15	5
All United Kingdom owned ships	14	8

[1] Average age of total deadweight.
[2] Trading vessels are those which carry cargo or passengers for commercial purposes. Certain vessel types, for example, dredgers and fishing vessels, are therefore deemed "non trading".

Average age[1] of trading[2] fleets owned in other countries: 31 March 1992

	Average age Years	Months
United Kingdom	14	8
Denmark	8	9
France	13	6
Germany	9	6
Greece	15	6
Italy	12	9
Netherlands	9	6
Spain	13	4
All European Community owned ships	12	5
Liberia	13	3
Panama	12	1
United States of America	19	3
Cyprus	15	11
Norway	13	0
Japan	8	10
All ships	13	4

[1] Average age of total deadweight.
[2] Trading vessels are those which carry cargo or passengers for commercial purposes. Certain vessel types, for example, dredgers and fishing vessels, are therefore deemed "non-trading".

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the percentage of, respectively, officers and ratings who are British nationals on United Kingdom vessels on *(a)* the United Kingdom register, *(b)* Crown dependency registers, *(c)* British dependent territory registers and *(d)* foreign registers.

Mr. Norris: The most recent figures relating to seafarers employed by companies which belong to the Chamber of Shipping show that, at 1 June 1991, 97 per cent. of officers and 90 per cent of ratings of United Kingdom-flagged, British-owned, vessels were United Kingdom nationals. The equivalent figures for British-owned, foreign-flagged, vessels, were 85 and 63 per cent. respectively.

Merchant Navy

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the regulatory requirements currently laid upon the British Merchant Navy which he is currently examining with a view to their possible removal or easing;

(2) if he will list the regulatory requirements laid upon the British Merchant Navy which have been removed or eased in each year, respectively, for the last 20 years.

Mr. Norris: We are committed to reducing the regulatory burden on the shipping industry as far as is compatible with continued high safety standards. This is a continuous process. Recent achievements include the introduction of new type approval arrangements to facilitate the entry of vessels into the United Kingdom register. We are also currently reviewing the rules which govern the nationality of senior officers on British merchant vessels.

Vehicle Testing

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the regional information held by all district offices of his Department's vehicle inspectorate about public vehicle testing, including the percentage failure rates at initial annual tests and re-tests and the most common failure items.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The information will be placed in the House Library at the earliest opportunity.

M6

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange for the renovation of the sign on the northbound cross carriageway of the M6 at exit 20.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes.

Cycling

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the statutory provisions regarding cycling on the pavement; what are the exemptions for young riders on very dangerous roads; and when the law was enacted.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Cycling on the footway is an offence under section 72 of the Highways Act 1835, as amended by section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1888. It currently carries a maximum penalty of £100. There are no exemptions for young riders.

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress the national transport laboratory has made in the field of alternative fuels for transport.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department's Transport Research Laboratory is currently reviewing national and international research and experience in the use of a wide range of alternative fuels and engines for road vehicles. The review is scheduled for completion by end of November 1992 and the findings will be published in due course.

In addition to the TRL review, my Department continues to keep abreast of developments worldwide and to encourage technological developments aimed at reducing the environmental impact of vehicles.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the percentage of the British-registered shipping fleet which is owned by the 20 largest British-owned shipping companies *(a)* by number of vessles and *(b)* by tonnage, at the latest available date.

Mr. Norris: The 20 largest British direct-owned shipping companies own 40 per cent. by number and 77 per cent. by tonnage of the total United Kingdom registered fleet.

Medical Advisory Council

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who are the members of the Medical Advisory Council who advise him on withdrawal of driving licences on medical grounds; and what are their qualifications.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Secretary of State is advised by a number of expert medical panels. I understand that the question specifically relates to the Secretary of State's honorary advisory panel on driving and disorders of the nervous system. Its membership and individuals' qualifications are:

Dr. C. J. Earl (Chairman)—Consultant Neurologist
Mr. J. G. Brice—Consultant Neurosurgeon
Dr. S. D. Shorvon—Consultant Neurologist
Dr. D. W. Chadwick—Consultant Neurologist
Dr. R. A. Cooper—Consultant Physician
Professor C. P. Warlow—Professor of Medical Neurology
Mr. A. E. Richardson—Consultant Neurosurgeon
Dr. M. J. Parsonage—Consultant Neurologist
Professor W. B. Jennett—Professor of Neurosurgery

The chairman is nominated by the president of the Royal College of Physicians and appointed by the Secretary of State.

Railway Preservation

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage the railway preservation movement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The railway preservation movement has been growing in strength and importance. The Government acknowledge the movement's contribution to the railway heritage. The Department made 10 light railway orders for steam railway lines in 1991 and expects to determine perhaps a further six in 1992. We welcome this evidence that the movement is thriving.

London Underground

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's 5 July 1991 report on London Underground Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: London Underground Limited is today publishing its 12-month response to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report detailing the progress which has been made in implementing the report's recommendations.

Since the publication of the report last year, LUL has made good progress with implementing the wide-ranging recommendations made by the MMC. Work on 58 of the report's 114 recommendations is now complete. Of the others, only one has been rejected altogether, and work is under way to implement the others, which are of a longer-term nature.

In its report, the MMC identified scope for improvement in a number of important areas which have subsequently been addressed by both the Government and the management of the underground.

The MMC concluded that the underground was suffering from the effects of long-term underfunding. In response to this, last year's IFR settlement provided for a record £3·7 billion grant to be given to London Transport over the three years from 1992-93, the vast bulk of which will go towards investment on the Underground. The MMC also identified scope for management improvements and efficiency savings. The underground responded to that finding with the publication last November of its company plan, designed to bring about a step change in the efficiency and quality of underground services, through improvements to working practices and an extension of contracting out. This plan has the Government's support.

Another key finding in the MMC's report was that there was inadequate political commitment to the underground's planning processes. As was announced at the publication of the Government's three-month response to the report, the Government and LUL are now working together on the preparation of a 10-year strategic plan for the underground.

On 27 May, the Government set the underground 12 new quality-of-service targets. These took on board the MMC's recommendation that new targets should be based on outputs rather than inputs and, where possible, should be measured in terms of customer satisfaction.

I am confident that LUL is committed to continuing to build on all these initiatives, and fulfilling the promise made in its response to

"transform the services provided so that London will have an Underground to be proud of".

Copies of LUL's response have been placed in the Library. I will be continuing to pay close attention to progress on implementing the remaining recommendations. A third and final response will be made in two years' time.

Car Alarms

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to issue amendments to the construction and use regulations to improve noise standards from car alarms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* The Government have approached representative organisations for their views on a consultative draft of the regulations. We have also been awaiting possible regulatory developments in the European Community. The draft regulations are currently being revised to take account of progress in both these areas, and I expect to make them later this year.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* Bodies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible, and their audit arrangements are listed in "Public Bodies 1991", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Since the entries were prepared, the only executive body then not subject to audit by the National Audit Office, the Red Sea Lights Company, has been dissolved and a new non-departmental public body, the Traffic Director for

London, has been established. The latter will be audited by private accountants to be appointed by competitive tender. The initial appointment will be for two years.

Transpennine Roads

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department received the transpennine roads study; and when it will be published.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on Friday 3 July at column *730*. The Department received the consultants' findings on the transpennine roads study during February 1992.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Norris: About 85 per cent. of the Department's staff are now located outside London. Next year, we plan to relocate up to 250 posts in marine to Southampton and 200 posts in central services to Hastings. There are separate reviews under way of the future location of 525 posts in highways, safety and traffic command and the Department's headquarters accommodation needs and options. Decisions are expected to be taken later this year.

Liverpool Air Travel

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assistance he is prepared to give to the establishment of a regular Liverpool to London docklands air flights service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: It is a matter for airlines' commercial judgment which services they should operate. Any application for a new air service between Liverpool and London would be for the Civil Aviation Authority to decide on, in accordance with its statutory air transport licensing responsibilities.

I cannot comment on the merits of such an application, since it could be the subject of an appeal to the Government under statutory procedures.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Darling: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will provide a table of the number of appeals to the immigration appeals tribunal allowed and dismissed in 1991 and the first quarter of 1992.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is as follows:

Appeals to the immigration appeals tribunal

	Allowed	*Dismissed*
1991[1]	130	224
January to March 1992	60	103

[1] Because of an administrative error at the immigration appellate authorities no figures are available for the period October to December 1991. Estimated figures have therefore been provided for 1991 based on the number of appeals allowed and dismissed from January to September 1991.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will provide a table showing the number of appeals to the immigration adjudicators allowed and dismissed in 1991 and the first quarter of 1992 broken down according to the nationality of the appellant and the type of decision appealed against.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information concerning the nationality of appellants is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The number of appeals to immigration adjudicators allowed and dismissed in 1991 and the first quarter of 1992, broken down according to the type of decision, is given in the table.

Type of decision	*1991*		*January to March 1992*	
	Appeals allowed	*Appeals dismissed*	*Appeals allowed*	*Appeals dismissed*
1. Exclusion—Appeal at port	20	243	3	81
2. Exclusion—External appeals	64	1,277	13	268
3. Refusal of Certificate entitlement	41	233	6	41
4. Refusal of entry clearance for temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	1,495	6,515	524	2,233
5. Refusal of entry clearance for employment, business or independent means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	27	217	10	40
6. Refusal of entry clearance requested by wives and children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	466	1,405	150	457
7. Refusal of entry clearance requested by female fiancees	27	42	11	27
8. Refusal of entry clearance requested by husbands	598	1,313	138	434
9. Refusal of entry clearance requested by male fiances	221	523	34	107
10. Variation of landing conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration of conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S.14(2))	21	179	8	50
11. Refusal to vary leave to enter	198	5,691	57	1,332
12. Decision to make deportation order	23	661	6	187
13. Refusal to revoke deportation order	1	20	1	11
14. Giving of removal directions	2	21	1	6
15. Destination only appeal	0	0	0	0
Total	3,204	18,340	962	5,274

Mr. Darling: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the average delay, listed by each immigration appeals hearing centre, (i) between receiving the explanatory statement and papers about a case *(a)* from a British post overseas and *(b)* from the Home Office and sending those papers to an appellant or his or her authorised representative and (ii) between the hearing of an immigration appeal by an adjudicator and the dispatch of the determination to the appellant or authorised representative.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The immigration appellate authorities are able to dispatch copies of the explanatory statement and case papers to an appellant or his or her authorised representative within five says of their receipt from a British post overseas or the Home Office. The current average time between the hearing of an immigration appeal by an adjudicator and the dispatch of the determination to the appellant or authorised representative is as follows for each hearing centre:

	Weeks
Thanet House, London	5
Harmondsworth	5
Birmingham	6
Manchester	10
Leeds	7
Glasgow	4

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Monetary Union

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had in the EC Council of Ministers about progress towards the Madrid conditions for moving to stage III of European monetary union; and what priority he attaches to this matter during the EC presidency.

Mr. Nelson: Progress towards convergence is covered at Ecofin's bi-annual discussions on multilateral surveillance, the last of which took place in February. Also, since last September Ecofin has examined the convergence programmes of Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Germany and Spain.

The United Kingdom attaches a high priority during its presidency of the EC to encouraging member states to take the necessary action to achieve convergence.

VAT (Heritage Buildings)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will remove VAT on the repair of heritage buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: When we agreed the EC sixth VAT directive we accepted that we would not extend the scope of our current zero-rating. Our policy is to use discretionary repair grants to target help where it is most needed.

Business Investigations

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the manner in which inspectors are appointed to investigate businesses under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Mr. Nelson: Persons may be appointed by the Securities and Investments Board under sections 94 and 106, and by the Secretary of State for Trade under sections 94, 106 and 177 of the Act.

Taurus Programme

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account has been taken of the requirements of private shareholders in the Taurus development programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The needs of the private shareholder are being very much taken into account in the development of Taurus. The London stock exchange, as Taurus operator, has built high levels of system security and investor protection into the system. The Uncertificated Securities Regulations 1992, which set out the legal and regulatory framework for Taurus, contain a number of safeguards for private shareholders. These include the requirement for each company to appoint a company controller who will hold a person's entitlements to shares at no cost to himself, together with the 'locking up' arrangement, the complaints commissioner and the compensation scheme.

EC Budget

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the ratio between receipts from and contributions to the European Community budget for each of the member states in the current year.

Sir John Cope: The ratio for the United Kingdom in 1992 is forecast to be 1:1.9—taking account only of receipts coming to the public sector. As no details of individual member states' receipts in the current year are available, it is not possible to calculate the ratio for other member states.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC budget this year and what it was in each of the last 10 years; and what it would have been if the Fontainebleau rebate mechanism had not been in operation.

Sir John Cope: The information requested is given in the table.

	Net contribution before abatement £ million	*Net contribution after abatement £ million*
1982	606	606
1983	647	647
1984	656	656
1985	1,974	1,808
1986	2,273	572
1987	2,874	1,721
1988	2,956	1,362
1989	3,469	2,315
1990	4,172	2,475
1991	3,042	545
[1]1992	4,480	2,599

[1] Forecast.

Source: Relevant Statement on the Community Budget.

European Community Legislation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the direct consequence of the implementation of EEC legislation on United Kingdom public expenditure in each year ending 31 March since 1987.

Sir John Cope: The United Kingdom public expenditure costs of EC legislation with a direct effect on Community budget spending are best measured by reference to the United Kingdom's gross contribution to the Community budget, less abatement, as follows:

United Kingdom gross contribution less abatement

Year	*£ million*
1986-87	3,778
1987-88	3,769
1988-89	3,567
1989-90	4,487
1990-91	4,573
1991-92	3,700

United Kingdom public sector receipts, mainly in the form of agricultural support and the structural funds, generally offset increased United Kingdom public expenditure resulting from Community programmes.

No central estimate is available of the aggregate effect on United Kingdom public expenditure of the implementation of Community legislation which does not have a direct effect on Community budget spending.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Nelson: Following the review in 1991 the then Economic Secretary announced on 18 December that about 200 posts in CCTA—the Government centre for information systems—would be relocated to Norwich over the next three years.

Overseas Assets

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total of the United Kingdom's net assets overseas—assets less liabilities—at the end of each calendar year from 1987 to 1991; and what is the latest estimate.

Mr. Portillo: The estimated levels of identified overseas assets and liabilities from the end of 1987 to the end of 1990 are shown in table 8.1 of the Pink Book, "1991 UK Balance of Payments", published by the Central Statistical Office. Further estimates for the levels of identified net overseas assets at the end of 1990 and 1991, based on information available at March 1992, are shown in paragraph 3.47 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1992-93, the Red Book. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the findings of the Treasury's recent staff review of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* The chief executives of English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales commissioned a report from the Treasury's consultancy and inspection services division. The review covered a number of organisational and management issues as well as staffing in the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's scientific and secretarial support unit. The report is an internal management document and it is for the chief executive to consider how to take it forward.

Bingham Report

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with Lord Justice Bingham concerning the timing of the receipt of his report.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* Lord Justice Bingham's inquiry is independent of the Government and the timing of his report is a matter for him. I understand that he hopes to complete his report before the end of this month.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audit each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* All the NDPBs sponsored by Her Majesty's Treasury are audited by the NAO. These are the National Economic Development Council, and various pay review bodies: the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, the Doctors and Dentists Review Body, the Nurses Midwives and Other NHS Professionals Review Body, the Pharmacists' Review Body and the Top Salaries Review Body.

Customs Searches

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from hon. Members about the treatment of constituents at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick and *(c)* Manchester airports by customs officers.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* During April, May and June of 1992 my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received representations from hon. Members concerning the treatment at Heathrow on behalf of seven of their constituents. These related to one complaint about customs clearance of a postal package and six by passengers. No representations have been received in respect of Gatwick or Manchester airports during this period.

EC Agricultural Reform

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions have been held in the Council of Finance Ministers of the comments by the Court of Auditors on the potential for fraud in the MacSharry proposals for agricultural reform; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lamont *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* The Council of Economic and Finance Ministers had a preliminary

discussion of the Court of Auditors' special opinion, which was produced in connection with the review of Community future financing, on 9 June. However, it was not possible on that occasion to discuss all aspects of the report and the Council did not focus on the potential for fraud in the reformed common agricultural policy.

The Government are committed to the fight against fraud and welcomes the warning note given by the Court of Auditors about the control risks associated with CAP reform. We are pressing strongly for the inclusion of robust anti-fraud provisions in the regulations governing the reformed CAP.

Tackling fraud in the Community is a priority for the United Kingdom presidency.

VAT (Whisky)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what offset agreements in respect of harmonisation of VAT rates were agreed to in the Council of Ministers as part of the agreement on Scotch whisky; and what effect the VAT agreement will have on the maintenance of each existing zero rate.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Chancellor gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 3 July 1992, at columns *755-56*.

All the United Kingdom's existing zero rates are fully safeguarded by the sixth VAT directive. That protection is reinforced by a provision in the draft VAT rates and structures directive.

Currency

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the date for the issue of the reduced size 10p piece; and when he expects standard versions of the new £2 currency coin to be available from banks.

Mr. Nelson: The new, smaller 10p coin will be issued on 30 September 1992. A £2 coin to commemorate the tercentenary of the Bank of England will be issued during 1994. No decision has been made as to the exact date that the standard version of this coin will be available from banks.

Consultancy and Research Costs

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on consultancy and outside research capacity in his Department for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Nelson: My Department spent some £2·69 million on consultancy and outside research in 1991-92. This figure includes the costs of consultants working for CCTA —the Government centre for information systems— economic research and other consultancies.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on ministerial transport in his Department, for the last year for which the information is available.

Mr. Nelson: My Department spent £360,661 on ministerial transport in 1991-92. This covers travel abroad and within the United Kingdom and payments to the Government car service.

Hospitality Costs

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on hospitality in his Department for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Nelson: The total expenditure on entertainment by my Department in 1991-92 was £115,541. This includes the costs of the several international conferences and other large intergovernmental meetings.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional loans, support credits and other facilities are made available to countries entering the narrower bands of the ERM; and what additional responsibilities fall on the member Governments.

Mr. Nelson: If one currency is at its limit against another in the ERM, the central banks of both currencies each have an unlimited obligation to buy or sell at the limiting rates during European business hours. The EMS provides for a very short-term facility (VSTF) under which credit is automatically available in unlimited quantities to finance such obligatory intervention at the limiting rates. If intervention is undertaken when one currency is not at its limit against another in the ERM, the VSTF can be made available, but not automatically. VSTF credits have to be repaid within a period of three months.

The amounts available under the VSTF do not differ between wide band and narrow band currencies.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what loans, support credits and other facilities are made available under the terms of ERM entry to Britain to maintain the pound within the 6 per cent. bands; to what extent these have been called on since Britain joined; and at whose cost these aids are provided.

Mr. Nelson: On the first part of his question, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him today.

Since becoming a member of the exchange rate mechanism, the United Kingdom has not had recourse to these credit facilities.

Where intervention is carried out at the limits of the ERM bands, interest on drawings under the very short-term facility (VSTF) is paid by the central bank of the currency at its lower limit.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the method of calculation of the British balance of trade and payments figures following the inauguration of the single market; how deficits with the whole of the EEC and with individual countries in it will be measured; how British external balances with countries outside will be assessed; and how borrowing and regional aid levels necessary to balance trade flows can then be assessed.

Mr. Nelson: The only change in the methodology used to estimate the United Kingdom balance of payments

accounts resulting directly from the completion of the single market at the end of this year concerns the data on trade in goods.

A new system, known at Intrastat, linked to VAT returns is being introduced throughout the European Community to measure trade in goods between member states. The present system, based on custom's documents, will continue to be used to measure trade with countries outside the Community.

There will be a transitional period while Intrastat becomes fully established, but after this the trade figures will be available in the same detail as at present.

Advisory Staff

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of staff employed in directly providing advice, research and policy development for Ministers in his Department; and what is the cost of such staff for the last year for which the figures are available.

Mr. Nelson: As noted in my departmental report—Cm. 1918—some 860 staff in central Treasury are engaged in the process of providing policy advice to Ministers. CCTA —the Government centre for information systems—also employs a further 300 staff in non-support roles, bringing the total to 1,160. The pay costs of these staff amount to some £28·4 million.

These figures do not include staff in central support services within central Treasury and CCTA. Staff in Forward—the civil service catering organisation—and in Chessington computer centre—which deals largely with payroll—have also been excluded.

Financial Services

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the grounds on which recognised professional bodies are permitted to have a different authorisation procedure under the Financial Services Act 1986; and if he will review these.

Mr. Nelson: The arrangements for authorisation of members of recognised professional bodies reflect the fact that their members' investment business is incidental to the practice of their profession, in which they are subject to the rules of the body concerned. I have no plans to review these arrangements.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the new rules on disclosure of the Securities and Investments Board; what discussions he has had with the SIB about these; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Rules on disclosure are a matter for the Securities and Investments Board. As part of its review of retail regulation under the Financial Services Act, the board published a policy statement on disclosure and standards of advice in May 1992.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the workings of the Financial Services Act 1986 as it affects the retail sector; and what discussions he has had with a view to changing the rules governing the disclosure of commission by tied agents and the disclosure of commission, charges and expenses by all financial retailers and intermediaries.

Mr. Nelson: Rules on disclosure are a matter for the Securities and Investments Board. As part of its review of retail regulation under the Financial Services Act, the board published a policy statement on disclosure and standards of advice in May 1992.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on consumer protection and consumer understanding of requiring providers of bundled products to disclose separately how much of an investor's money goes to each constituent part.

Mr. Nelson: This is a matter for the Securities and Investments Board.

Iraqi Funds

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total of Iraqi funds currently blocked in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: The total sum of Iraqi assets held by United Kingdom banks is estimated to be £580 million.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken to release blocked Iraqi funds in order to settle the claims of creditors who conducted legitimate business in Iraq prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Mr. Nelson: Any company who conducted legitimate business in Iraq prior to 4 August 1990 and is owed money, should apply to the Bank of England for permission for payment to be made. The bank will normally grant permission in these circumstances. However, the request for payment also has to be made by the Iraqi entity involved, and we have no powers to compel them to make such an approach.

Trinidad Terms

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to extend the remit of the Trinidad agreement to cover middle-income countries.

Mr. Nelson: No. Trinidad terms are specifically designed to address the debt problems of the poorest and most heavily indebted countries.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *226*, on imports and exports of manufactured goods whether he will now publish in the *Official Report* the figures requested.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* Further to my reply of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *226*, the information is regularly published in table A9 of the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" and table D5 of its annual supplement. The latest figures available from the Central Statistical Office database are as follows:

United Kingdom Trade in Manufactures
Balance of Payments basis

	Exports		*Imports*	
	£ billion	*Per cent. of total trade*	*£ billion*	*Per cent. of total trade*
1977	25·6	81	19·7	57
1978	27·7	79	22·7	62
1979	31·0	76	28·2	64

	Exports		Imports	
	£ billion	Per cent. of total trade	£ billion	Per cent. of total trade
1980	34·9	74	29·4	64
1981	34·9	69	30·4	63
1982	37·3	67	35·2	66
1983	40·1	66	42·9	68
1984	46·6	66	51·1	67
1985	52·2	67	56·0	69
1986	54·4	75	60·6	73
1987	60·5	76	68·8	75
1988	64·6	81	80·0	78
1989	75·1	81	92·3	79
1990	82·6	81	94·2	78
1991	85·1	82	88·5	78

Audio Tapes

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had from voluntary associations representing the blind in regard to the difficulties that would be posed by the European Commission's proposal to levy tax on all blank audio tapes.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply. There have been numerous representations from both national and local voluntary groups since the European Commission's intention to propose a levy on blank recording tapes, to compensate copyright owners for home taping, became known in January 1991. The Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Talking Newspaper Association of the United Kingdom, many local talking newspaper associations and numerous individuals have made their concerns known. The Government will take these representations fully into account when deciding its negotiating position on the proposal, which has not yet been published.

WALES

Pembroke Power Station

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the probable effect on acid rain in Wales of an increase in utilisation of Pembroke power station from recent levels of 10 to 15 per cent. capacity to 60 per cent. capacity; and how this would be affected by the burning of orimulsion rather than other fuels.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The environmental effects of the burning of orimulsion fuel at Pembroke power station including the consequences of any increase in utilisation of the station are currently being considered by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in relation to the application by National Power under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It would not be appropriate for me to comment, in view of the Secretary of State's appellate role under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he has received from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution about the pollution control equipment that would need to be installed at Pembroke power station, in particular to reduce levels of sulphur dioxide emissions, if orimulsion were to be burnt at this station.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This issue is currently under active consideration by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution which is considering under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, National Power's application to burn orimulsion at the Pembroke power station. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further in view of the Secretary of State's appellate role under the Act.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the value of financial assistance offered or given by his Department towards the cost of drawing up the application for trust status or any other ways of promoting a move to trust status by *(a)* Clwyd Community and mental health services, *(b)* Glan Clwyd district general hospital and associated hospitals and *(c)* Wrexham Maelor hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Following the invitation to prepare a formal application to become an NHS trust in April 1993, a contribution of £38,000 was made available to each of the three health units in Clywd to help meet costs incurred within the application process.

Health Targets

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish targets for Wales which are directly comparable to each of the targets set by the Government in the document "The Health of the Nation".

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The aim in setting targets across a wide range of health gain areas is to take Wales into the 21st century with a level of health on course to compare with the best in Europe. This forms the cornerstone of all our efforts in Wales and to accomplish this we intend to reach and if possible surpass the range of health goals we have set outselves.

We have identified 10 health gain areas for specific attention against five in England. The targets already set reflect the specific circumstances of Wales with technical differences noticeably in starting points/levels, age groupings, classification categories and time series. Where direct comparisons with the English strategy are possible, for example in smoking and alcohol, our targets are more ambitious than those in "The Health of the Nation".

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he intends to revise his targets for health gain in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is my intention that targets contained in the Welsh Health Planning Forum's protocols for investment in health gain and in the Health Promotion Authority for Wales's "Health for all in Wales" strategy will be reviewed approximately every three years in the light of advances in health care and developments elsewhere.

Acid Deposition

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the *(a)* current and *(b)* future levels of acid deposition in Wales; and what action he (i) has taken or (ii) proposes to reduce levels of acid deposition in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 22 June, at column *66*.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those schools in each education authority which have expressed interest in grant maintained status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: There has been a significant increase in the number of schools interested in grant-maintained status. My Department has received inquiries from around 40 schools since April. It would not, however, be appropriate for me to make such information public until such time as the views of parents on whether to apply for grant-maintained status have been sought through the ballot box. Ballots have already taken place at Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan, Abergele, and Ysgol Caergeiliog, Anglesey.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

UNCED

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will be the effect on projects in Africa supported or sponsored by the Overseas Development Administration of the agreement achieved at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development of *(a)* the statement on forestry principles and *(b)* the desertification initiative.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There will be no direct effect on current projects, which we believe to be consistent with the UNCED forest principles. We will respond to requests from developing countries for assistance with implementing the agreements reached at UNCED, including in the areas of forests and land degradation or desertification.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to reduce the financial crisis and debt burden faced by the Government of Zambia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have pledged or disbursed £40 million in balance of payments grants, in addition to a programme of technical assistance costing some £15 million this year, and have rescheduled service payments totalling £4·1 million due in 1992 on past British aid loans. We have also told the Zambian Government that, provided its economic reform programme remains in place, we are prepared to consider cancellation of all its outstanding aid debt to the United Kingdom.

Other official debt owed to the United Kingdom and other government creditors will be considered in the context of the Paris club. Subject to International Monetary Fund approval of Zambia's economic reform programme, adherence to which would result in the clearance of Zambia's arrears to the IMF, we shall be pressing for Zambia to receive Trinidad terms at the Paris club's July meeting. These terms resulted directly from proposals made by the Prime Minister, in 1990, to relieve the burden of debt on the poorest, most heavily indebted countries.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the attitude of Her Majesty's Government regarding debt relief for Zimbabwe; and if it is his intention that Zimbabwe should be eligible for the full Trinidad terms following the meeting of the Paris club on 23 July.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Zimbabwe has consistently serviced her debts in full and, as a result, has maintained her creditworthy status. Our understanding is that the Government of Zimbabwe are determined to continue this policy, and do not intend to apply for any debt relief.

Our approach has been to focus on Zimbabwe's overall financing needs. We are supporting Zimbabwe with a substantial aid programme which totalled over £53·4 million in 1991.

Guyana

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that none of the environmental projects that the Overseas Development Administration funds in Guyana should involve logging or deforestation.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I gave details of the projects the ODA is currently funding in my reply to the hon. Lady on 9 July.

The ODA's policy on development projects in tropical forest areas is set out in our manual of environmental appraisal, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House. The manual makes it clear that natural forests should be managed on a sustainable basis and that aid projects should aim to conserve forest resources and should avoid indiscriminate logging or deforestation. It would not be right, however, to rule out all forms of tree-felling, for example logging on a trial or experimental basis, designed to demonstrate that controlled economic use is compatible with conservation, and part of sustainable management.

European Parliament Development Committee

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings of the European Parliament Development Committee will be held, and when, during the course of the British presidency; and what are the key themes that Her Majesty's Government will be raising at these meetings.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Development Committee of the European Parliament will meet five times during our presidency; 13 to 15 July, 21 to 23 September, 14 to 16 October, 4 to 6 November, and 1 to 3 December. The Minister for Overseas Development will address the committee at its July and December sessions; and will take the opportunity to discuss the main themes which will feature in the Development Council on 18 November: Community development policy to the year 2000, population, the follow-up to UNCED, the untying of aid, and the use of non-governmental organisations in Community aid.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in the Overseas Development Administration who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government departments.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The location of the work of the ODA has been reviewed on a number of occasions, most recently before the ODA's London HQ moved in 1991 to new accommodation. A number of additional functions were then transferred to ODA's HQ in East Kilbride. Over 60 per cent. of ODA staff work outside London. The ODA's London HQ comprises an integrated core of policy and programme departments which must remain together and with the Minister.

South Africa

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money in pound sterling the European Commission contributed to the South African Council of Churches and related bodies between 1986 and 1990; what was the purpose of this funding; and what steps have been taken by the European Commission to establish how the cash has been used.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The European Community committed the equivalent of a total of £77 million, at current exchange rates, during the period 1986-90 for specific projects recommended by the South African Council of Churches, the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Kagiso Trust and certain trades unions. The purpose of this expenditure was to support organisations providing assistance to South Africans disadvantaged by apartheid, focusing largely on education and community and social development. All the funds were channelled through European non-government organisations, which were required by the European Commission to report on their use and to provide satisfactory accounts. The Commission also carried out physical monitoring on a sample basis.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Research Councils

36. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much the research councils will be allocated from the science budget 1992-93; and what percentage increase is proposed for the next two years.

Mr. Waldegrave: In 1992-93 the research councils will for the first time be allocated £1 billion—£1,030 million. The science budget for 1993-94 and 1994-95 is planned to increase in real terms by 1·8 per cent. and 2·6 per cent., excluding the effect of the dual support transfer.

British-trained Scientists

37. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps are being taken to encourage British-trained scientists to remain in this country.

Mr. Robert Jackson: There have always been British scientists living abroad whom we would like to see back working in Britain; just as there are non-British scientists working in Britain who will be welcomed back home by their countries of origin. The fact remains, however, that the guidance of university appointments indicates that Britain has consistently had a favourable net balance of trade at all levels in the brain trade in the 1980s.

Science and Technology

38. **Mr. Duncan-Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the Vice-President of the European Commission to discuss science and technology issues.

Mr. Waldegrave: I met Vice-President Pandolfi on 23 June, to discuss the European Commission's research and development framework programme, and again on 1 July, when the European Commissioners visited London on the United Kingdom's assumption of the presidency of the European Community.

British Rail

39. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to extend the charter promulgated by British Rail.

Mr. Waldegrave: Revised performance targets for 1993 will be set during the autumn. The Government and British Rail will also be reviewing the achievements of the current passengers charter once we have had more experience of its operation to see how these can be built upon.

Scientific Research

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps have been taken to promote science research and activity in Leicestershire.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government provide funds for the promotion of science research and activity in, and for the benefit of, the United Kingdom as a whole, including Leicestershire.

Citizens Charters

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if citizens charters will be published in looseleaf form to permit amendments.

Mr. Waldegrave: We intend to set increasingly tougher standards for public services; and further improve their quality and responsiveness to the public. Each public service organisation will determine how best to publicise its own improved standards of service.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many times so far he estimates that individuals have availed themselves of provisions in citizens charters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The citizens charter aims to provide better quality service, greater customer choice, published standards of service and accessible means of redress, to all users of public services. Published, measurable standards ensure the public know what quality of service they can expect to receive; compare this with other service providers, and measure performance in achieving the standards required.

Over time, we will set even tougher service standards; and further improve the quality and responsiveness of public services. For example, the patients charter set maximum two-year waiting times for NHS operations; these will be reduced to 18 months from April 1993 for hip and knee replacements and cataract operations.

Research and Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when Her Majesty's Government will publish the 1992 annual review of Government-funded research and development; and what steps will be taken to ensure widespread distribution of the report.

Mr. Waldegrave: The "1992 Annual Review of Government Funded Research and Development" will be published on 28 July. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and made available to relevant Select Committees and to the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. Publication will be marked by a press conference and the review will be on sale at HMSO bookshops.

Intestacy

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the charitable donations for the last five years arising from funds of intestate deceased residents of the county palatine.

Mr. Waldegrave: A list of charitable donations made by the Duchy over the last five years would run to several hundred items.

Donations made from the duchy benevolent fund during the last five years are as follows:

	£
1987	61,063
1988	81,122
1989	99,805
1990	119,124
1991	129,653
1992	[1]78,814

[1]Up to 30 June 1992.

The duchy's policy has been not to reveal the identity of a recipient or the amount given. This is the usual policy of charitable foundations. However, the duchy would of course have no objection to a recipient giving this information.

Substantial amounts have been given to educational establishments, including universities, in the county palatine; to ecclesiastical causes, to the elderly and infirm and various youth projects.

Many small donations have also been made, usually after seeking local advice, to individuals or to causes worthy of assistance.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Waldegrave: Parts of my Department have already been relocated to provincial centres. The headquarters of the Occupational Health Service was relocated to Edinburgh in August 1989. In addition, the Civil Service College, Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency and Her Majesty's Stationery Office are based outside London: at Sunningdale, Basingstoke and Norwich respectively. The Central Office of Information has a regional network across the country. I see no scope for further relocation of the remaining small central core.

Nuclear Structure Facility, Daresbury

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) of 2 June, *Official Report*, column *417*, what representations he has received from the scientific community about the successor arrangements for nuclear physics research following the closure of the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury.

Mr. Waldegrave: My office has received two letters on this subject.

PRIME MINISTER

Whaling

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will undertake to raise Japan's continuing whaling activity with the Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Kiichi Miyazawa, when he meets him this week; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minsiter if he will discuss the ban on commercial whaling and the proposed whale sanctuary in the Antarctic with the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Miyazawa, during his visit to London; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I expressed the Government's concern at the continued hunting of Minke whales and urged Japan to continue to work within the International Whaling Commission.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to veto entry into the EC of any country which carries out commercial whaling; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom supports membership of the Community for European countries which want to join and can take on the obligations. Commerce in whale products by EC member states was prohibited by a specific Council regulation—348/81—which was subsequently subsumed and extended by EC CITES regulations 3626/82 and 3418/83, implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species —New applicants will be expected to apply the EC CITES regulation.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what action Her Majesty's Government will be taking to mark 1993 as the European Year of the Elderly;

(2) what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government are well advanced with plans for the European Year of the Elderly. The Department of Health, in co-operation with the Department of Social Security, has overall co-ordinating responsibility in the United Kingdom. Following wide consultations, a group has been set up to advise on the programme for the year. The group involves representatives of a wide range of organisations reflecting the interests of older people, including the National

Pensioners' Convention, and will take direct account of the views of older people themselves. The programme in the United Kingdom will focus on four major themes: combating "agism" and promoting positive images of aging; volunteering; health promotion and active leisure, including remaining mentally active; social integration, including problems of isolation and loneliness, information needs and housing, transport and community care issues.

Four task groups have been set up to put forward specific proposals, and to implement them once agreed, with particular reference to promoting better relations between the generations and multicultural aspects.

There will be a core programme involving high-profile national events and a general programme, including activities being organised by individual organisations, but not co-ordinated through the official structure.

The Departments of Health and of Social Security are providing funds for the costs of a secretariat, based at Age Concern England's headquarters, to co-ordinate the official programme and disseminate information. A total of £65,000 has already been committed in the current year.

The European year 1993 will be launched in the United Kingdom at the Age Resource awards presentation in London later this year.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to remove the age limit of 70 years on membership of *(a)* community health councils, *(b)* jury service and *(c)* other similar bodies; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The age limit of 70 for appointment to community health councils is a recommendation of the Department of Health, not a requirement. Active participation in CHC affairs can be both time-consuming and taxing, and those appointing members must ensure that the individuals appointed can remain active and committed without detriment to themselves or the work of the CHC, during their term of office.

The upper age limit for jury service was increased from 65 to 70 in 1988. We have no current plans to make further changes.

Age limits for appointment to other bodies will depend on the nature of the tasks carried out by those bodies.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Prime Minister if he will transfer responsibility for funding citizens advice bureaux from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Office of Public Service and Science.

The Prime Minister: Citizens advice bureaux are funded directly by local authorities. The Department of Trade and Industry provides grant-in-aid to the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux and Citizens' Advice Scotland which provide the support services to citizens advice bureaux. The Government do not believe that it would be helpful to separate the funding of either body from the wider consumer protection role of the Department of Trade and Industry.

British National Party

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Prime Minister what the outcome was of the submission of evidence to the Crown prosecution service, to which he referred in his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column 462.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General today.

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister when he will announce his timetable for the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on 13 May to the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) at column *125*.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations he has received about the effects of United Nations sanctions upon Libyan health services.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister under what circumstances Libya may seek a temporary lifting of the United Nations sanctions against it.

The Prime Minister: Sanctions will be lifted when Libya has complied in full with United Nations Security Council resolutions 731 and 748.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what information he has on the number of occasions which Libya has sought permission from the United Nations sanctions committee to operate flights on grounds of significant humanitarian need.

The Prime Minister: According to the information made available to us by the United Nations, Libya has not sought such clearance.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the monitoring by the United Nations of sanctions against Libya.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* United Nations Security Council resolution 748 established a sanctions committee to oversee the efficient implementation of the sanctions against Libya. The committee relies on member states to provide its information on national enforcement of the regime and in highlighting any reported breaches. It has met eight times to date.

Maastricht Treaty

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he is taking to inform the public about the implications for them of the Maastricht treaty; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Memoranda produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Her Majesty's

Treasury outlining the content of the treaty have been published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office and are publicly available. The Government are considering whether to issue additional information about the treaty and its benefits.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister how many letters he has received from the general public supporting a national referendum on the Maastricht treaty.

The Prime Minister: I have received approximately 700 representations supporting a national referendum on the Maastricht treaty.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Alton: To ask the Prime Minister, following the interim ruling of the European courts, on Sunday trading, if he will make a statement; and whether the Government will now provide official support for the Bill of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) which seeks to amend the Shops Act 1950.

The Prime Minister: On 8 July, the Advocate General of the European Court of Justice—ECJ—gave his opinion in the cases concerning the law on Sunday trading in England and Wales which had been referred to the ECJ by English courts. The opinion is not a judgment of the ECJ, and the cases before it remain sub judice. Our position on the Bill in question therefore remains as I explained in my reply on 30 June at column 709.

EC Meetings (Publicity)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 6 July 1992, *Official Report*, column *17*, if he will set out the reasons why he does not intend to seek to change the rules concerning publicity for Council and COREPER meetings held during the United Kingdom presidency of the European Council.

The Prime Minister: The proceedings of the Council and of COREPER cannot be made public without the unanimous agreement of all member states. I therefore see no prospect of a change to these rules in the foreseeable future.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister whether it is his intention during the EC presidency to promote acceptance of the definition of subsidiarity as the minimum of interference.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* The principle of subsidiarity is clearly defined in article 3b of the treaty on European union. It contains a presumption of activity at national level. Work will be undertaken during our Presidency on practical steps for implementing the principle of subsidiarity in line with the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council.

Brazil (Street Children)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to launch his personal initiative to raise funds for the Brazilian street children; what follow-up initiatives he has taken since his visit to Sao Martinho in Rio de Janeiro; and what information he has about the well-being and whereabouts of street children removed from the streets of Rio de Janeiro in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* I am looking into what might be done to help Brazilian street children and am in touch with a number of interested parties. This is a serious problem which requires sympathetic handling.

Uruguay Round

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration he has given to the communiqué on the Uruguay round issued by the Cairns group Ministers on 28 June; what further action the Government will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* The Government welcome the communiqué issued by the Cairns group Ministers, and support the points they make about the importance of the Uruguay round. At the Munich summit, the G7 leaders recognised the progress made in recent months. We expressed their conviction that an agreement is now within reach, and could be achieved before the end of 1992. The United Kingdom will continue to work hard for this during our presidency of the European Community.

EC and EEC

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the different ways in which the initials EC have been used *(a)* by Government and by Government Departments and *(b)* by European institutions, giving the dates between which each usage has been current and the source and meaning of each alternative usage.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* The initials EC are used by the Government and other bodies mentioned to stand for the European Communities, for example, the European Coal and Steel Community—ECSC—established in 1951, the European Economic Community—EEC—and the European Atomic Energy Committee—Euratom—both established in 1957. This is the correct usage. The Maastricht treaty on European union contains an article saying that the term European Economic Community will be replaced by the term European Community abbreviated as EC.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the different ways in which the initials EEC have been used *(a)* by Government and by Government Departments and *(b)* by European institutions, giving the dates between which each usage has been current and the source and meaning of each alternative usage.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* The initials EEC are used by the Government and other bodies mentioned to stand for the European Economic Community, established by the treaty of Rome in 1957. Since at least the Single European Act, however, the initials EC have been used as a convenient shorthand. The Maastricht treaty on European union contains an article saying that the term European Economic Community is to be replaced by the term European Community, abbreviated as EC.

Tibet

Dr. Godman: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has recently held with the leaders of other member states of the Security Council of the United Nations concerning the issue of human rights in Tibet; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* I raised human rights in Tibet with Premier Li Peng in Peking last September. I also raised human rights in his discussions with him in New York in January and in Rio de Janeiro in June. At the recent Munich summit leaders of the G7 countries called on the Chinese to make considerable further improvements in human rights.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cameroon

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has discussed the subject of human rights recently with the Government of Cameroon.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government of the Cameroon are aware of the importance we attach to human rights. We have made representations to them about human rights, on several occasions both in Yaoundé and to the Cameroon ambassador in London. We shall continue to monitor the situation closely, and make representations whenever necessary.

Radiation Research

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what technical or financial support the United Kingdom has pledged to the radiation research programme of the International Sakharov College of Radioecology in Minsk.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None. The British Government have not been approached to pledge technical or financial support.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the other signatories of the partial test ban treaty of 1963, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty of 1970 and the threshold test ban treaty of 1974 to negotiate a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 3 July 1992, at column *757*.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about progress being made for a comprehensive nuclear weapons test ban treaty to be negotiated.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A comprehensive test ban treaty is a long-term objective. We participate actively in discussion of test ban issues in the conference on disaramament in Geneva. These take place on the basis of a non-negotiating mandate. Progress can only be made on a step-by-step basis taking into account a number of factors including verification.

India

Ms. Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what opportunities he has taken to raise with the Indian authorities the human rights concern of widespead custodial violence.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I raised this with the Indian high commissioner in May and our high commissioner did so with the Indian Home Minister in New Delhi in early June.

Bosnia

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will be reimbursing the Ministry of Defence for transporting humanitarian aid to Bosnia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The extra costs to the MOD of providing airlift to the interim operation to relieve Sarajevo will fall to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Financial responsibility for the provision of aid once the airport is open to non-military flights will lie with the Overseas Development Administration.

West Tripura

Ms. Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest information he has on the mass rape in Ujan Maidan village, West Tripura, by members of the Assam Rifles, during a cordon and search operation in the district between 31 May and 2 June 1988; and what information he has about investigations into the circumstances of the women's rape and measures taken to bring those responsible to justice.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: An Indian commission of inquiry into this incident submitted its report in December 1991. This confirmed that at least eight tribal women in Ujan Maidan had been raped by soldiers of the Assam Rifles. We do not know how or whether those responsible were punished and have asked the Indian Government for information.

Czechoslovakia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what details he has received from the Government of Czechoslovakia of particular ecclesiastical items stolen, and placed on the west European art market.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At the request of my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for National Heritage, our embassy in Prague has approached the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior to obtain details of stolen ecclesiastical items. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also raised the issue with senior colleagues of President Havel during his visit to Czechoslovakia in May. The embassy subsequently followed this up with a further call on the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry has confirmed that it is in the process of drawing up a list which should be completed shortly. This will be forwarded to the relevant authorities and art trade associations in London upon receipt.

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the present waiting times until first interview for all categories of applicant in each country and at each post in the Indian subcontinent.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The estimated present waiting times to first interview (in months) are:

Settlement

Subcontinent post	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
Islamabad	3	3	6	9
Karachi	1	3	4	7
Dhaka	3	6	8	9
New Delhi	0	3	7	10
Bombay	0	4	9	12
Madras	1	1	1	1
Calcutta	1 week	1 week	1 week	1 week

Visitors

Due to seasonal high demand, applicants for visit visas in Islamabad requiring a full interview can expect to wait between five and seven days. Elsewhere they are dealt with on day of interview.

Settlement queues are organised as follows:—

Q1 Persons with a claim to the right of abode, dependent relatives over 70 years, special compassionate cases.

Q2 All spouses and all children under 18 years.

Q3 Fiance(e)s and others applying for the first time.

Q4 Re-applicants.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long a person applying for entry clearance for settlement at the British post in *(a)* Manila, *(b)* Accra, *(c)* Lagos, *(d)* Kingston, *(e)* Nicosia, *(f)* Cairo, *(g)* Bangkok and *(h)* Rabat on 31 March or the lastest convenient date could expect to wait for (i) interview, (ii) referral of the case to the Home Office and the requested information being received by the post, (iii) decisions and (iv) an explanatory statement prepared by the post in the event of an appeal against a refusal to be despatched to the immigration appellate authorities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As at 30 June the timings required at (i), (ii) and (iv) were as follows.

The information requested at (iii) is not available. Times vary according to the circumstances of individual cases. Many decisions are made on the day of interview.

Post	*(i)*	*(ii)*	*(iv)*
Manila	4 weeks	3 months	5 months
Accra	2 days	2 months	3 months
Lagos	1 day	3 months	3 months
Kingston	4 weeks	2-3 months	1 week
Nicosia	1 day	3 months	3 months
Cairo	1 day	3 months	1 month
Bangkok	8 weeks	2-3 months	2 months
Rabat	1-14 days	4 months	3 months

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)*, men, *(b)* women and *(c)* children were waiting in each queue at each post in the Indian subcontinent on 31 March or the latest convenient date.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The number of men, women and children waiting in the settlement queues for interviews in the Indian sub-continent posts at 30 June is:

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
Islamabad				
Men	2	520	83	498
Women	6	405	82	50
Children	9	64	1	45
Total	17	989	166	593
Karachi				
Men	0	38	9	7
Women	0	53	11	0
Children	0	5	0	0
Total	0	96	20	7
Dhaka	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Total	351	1,580	214	275
New Delhi				
Men	0	85	99	64
Women	0	194	142	44
Children	0	44	10	1
Total	0	323	251	109
Bombay				
Men	0	16	106	74
Women	0	315	125	33
Children	1	139	0	8
Total	1	470	231	115
Madras	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Total	0	11	0	0
Calcutta	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Total	0	2	0	0
Totals ISC	370	3,471	882	1,099

[1] Breakdown not available.

Queue 1. Persons with a claim to the right of abode. Dependent relatives over 70 years old. Special compassionate cases.

Queue 2. All spouses and all children over 18 years.

Queue 3. Fiancé(e)s and others applying for the first time for settlement.

Queue 4. Reapplicants.

There are no queues for visit applications other than in Islamabad, where due to seasonaly high demand, applicants requiring a full interview can expect to wait 5-7 days.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long a person applying for entry clearance on 31 March or the latest convenient date at each post in the Indian subcontinent could expect to wait, in each queue, for *(a)* first interview, *(b)* referral of the case to the Home Office and the requested information being received by the post, *(c)* decision after first interview and *(d)* the explanatory statement prepared by the post in the case of appeal against any refusal to be dispatched to the immigration appellate authorities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: *(a)* As at June the estimated waiting times for settlement interviews (in months) were:

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
Islamabad	3	3	6	9
Karachi	1	3	4	7
Dhaka	3	6	8	9

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
New Delhi	0	3	7	10
Bombay	0	4	9	12
Madras	1	1	1	1
Calcutta	1 week	1 week	1 week	1 week

Settlement queues are organised as follows:
Q1 Persons with a claim to the right of abode, dependent relatives over 70 years, special compassionate cases.
Q2 All spouses and all children under 18 years.
Q3 Fiance(e)s and others applying for the first time.
Q4 Re-applicants.

Visit visa applications are dealt with within 24 hours except in Islamabad which, due to seasonal high demand, applicants requiring a full interview can expect to wait five to seven days.

(b) If referred to the Home Office, inquiries concerning applications may take from one to 12 months depending on individual circumstances.

(c) Decisions after first interview are taken within 24 hours in the majority of cases in Indian Sub-Continent posts.

(d) Dispatch times of explanatory statements are, at 30 June:

	Settlement	*Non-Settlement*
Islamabad	12 weeks	4 weeks
Karachi	8 weeks	4 weeks
Dhaka	12 weeks	12 weeks
New Delhi	12 weeks	4 weeks
Bombay	8 weeks	4 weeks
Madras	12 weeks	4 weeks
Calcutta	4 weeks	4 weeks

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many explanatory statements related to entry clearance appeals were awaiting typing at each post in the Indian subcontinent in Manila, Lagos and Accra, on the latest available date; how many staff are employed, both full-time and part-time, to type statements; and when he expects any backlogs to be cleared.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is given in the following table, as at 30 June,:

Post	*Number*[1]	*Number*[2]
Islamabad	0	11
Karachi	1	1
Dhaka	176	5(3)
New Delhi	41	4
Bombay	4	(11)
Madras	Nil	1
Calcutta	11	(1)
Manila	83	2
Lagos	4	3
Accra	22	1

[1] Number of explanatory statements awaiting typing
[2] Staff whose duties include typing explanatory statements; staff also employed on other typing duties shown in brackets.

The posts in Dhaka and Manila estimate that they should clear the backlogs in three months and two months respectively.

Hong Kong

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British Dependent Territories' citizens from Hong Kong have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been granted the status of British national (overseas) in each year since 1989.

Mr. Goodlad: Details of the number of British dependent territories' citizens applying for British national (overseas) status are as follows:

1989	*1990*	*1991*	[1]*1992*
Applications 53,222	80,213	101,534	67,947
Granted 49,519	78,265	107,423	64,080

[1] To 30 June 1992

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for naturalisation as British dependent territories citizens on the basis of a connection with Hong Kong have been *(a)* received, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused for each year since 1989 and to the nearest available date.

Mr. Goodlad: Details of the number of applications for naturalisation as British dependent territories citizens by virtue of a connection with Hong Kong are as follows:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	[1]*1992*
Received	3,098	12,543	7,588	1,293
Granted	1,098	11,699	11,463	5,673
Refused	73	95	399	310

[1] To 30 June.

In any one year the number of British dependent territories citizens naturalisation applications received and the numbers approved/rejected cannot be compared directly. This is because the processing time can result in applications from one calendar year being finalised in a different year.

Tibet

Mr. Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the parliamentary delegation announced in March by the Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Qichen is leaving for China; how long they will spend in Tibet; what parts of Tibet and Tibetan autonomous areas in Qinghai and Sichuan provinces they propose to visit; whether they will be free to visit any place they wish and if he will provide an independent translator fluent in Tibetan, Chinese and English and an independent expert on Tibetan affairs to accompany them.

Mr. Goodlad: The high-level study group agreed between the Prime Minister and Premier Li Peng under the leadership of Lord Howe is to visit China later this year. Details of its itinerary and membership have still to be settled.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Goodlad: An internal investigation in 1988 into the viability of relocating parts of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing outside central London considered a number of relocation sites, including Glasgow and Cardiff. Hanslope Park, an estate near Milton Keynes owned by the FCO, was chosen for the 245 posts then identified for possible relocation. The number of posts has since fallen to 166 because of the subsequent abolition of some posts and reorganisation of FCO departments. This relocation programme is well advanced and is due to be completed by mid-1994.

European Political Parties

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made on the effects for the United Kingdom of article 138a of the treaty of Rome, inserted by the treaty of Maastricht, dealing with pan-European political parties.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We welcome contacts at the European level between national political parties, including in the European Parliament. But there is no provision in article 138a of the treaty on European union for any specific action by member states or the Community in relation to political parties.

Iraq

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions are taking place with his European Community counterparts about their release of blocked Iraqi funds for *(a)* the financing of trade in goods not embargoed under United Nations Security Council resolutions 706 and 712 and *(b)* for settling creditors' claims; and what sums have been released in the case of each Community country, including the United Kingdom under each head.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We regularly exchange views with our European Community partners about all aspects of policy towards Iraq. Iraq continues to refuse to export oil to pay for essential humanitarian supplies and to meet claims for compensation as provided for in UN Security Council resolutions 706 and 712.

In conformity with the ruling of the United Nations sanctions committee we released £70 million of Iraqi funds frozen in the UK for the purchase of humanitarian goods of British origin following the release of Mr. Ian Richter in November 1991. We do not plan to release further assets.

There is a general agreement among our EC partners that Iraqi funds should remain frozen until Iraq meets its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions. We have no figures of any frozen Iraqi funds released by our partners.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of the Vienna talks between representatives of the United Nations and the Iraqi Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Despite a further round of talks between the United Nations and the Iraqi Government in Vienna in June the Iraqi Government still refuse to export oil to finance the purchase of essential humanitarian supplies as provided for in United Nations Security Council resolutions 706 and 712.

Vietnam

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Vietnam about the detention of prisoners of religious conscience; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: We continue to raise with the Vietnamese authorities, both bilaterally and with our EC partners, individual human rights cases, including prisoners of religious conscience. I also raised our concern about Vietnam's human rights record with the Vietnamese Foreign Minister during the latter's visit to Britian in June.

France (Road Blockades)

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the French authorities on behalf of those British citizens stranded in France as a consequence of the blockade of roads by demonstrating farmers and truckers.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have been asked to reply.

I am glad to say that the blockades have almost all now been lifted. My right hon. Friend has kept in close and regular contact with his French counterpart Mr. Bianco on behalf of British coach and lorry drivers and British holiday-makers caught up in the blockades. Consular staff in France have given assistance to British citizens where necessary.

EDUCATION

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Forman: The Department keeps under review the balance between its staff in central London and those in its Darlington offices.

Schools Information

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of parents have received in the past 12 months *(a)* a written report on their child's progress in school, *(b)* a publication with comparable information about all schools in their locality including examination results, truancy rates and destination of school leavers and *(c)* a reminder of their right of appeal and how to use it in cases where the local education authority or school governors refuse them a place for their child in the school of their choice.

Mr. Forth: The parents charter, published in September 1991, promised that steps would be taken to ensure that all

parents would receive or have access to the information mentioned. All these promises have been or are in the process of being implemented. New reporting regulations, introduced in May, require annual written reports to be sent to all parents on their child's educational progress. Comparative tables of public examination results will be produced this autumn; in 1993 these will also cover national curriculum assessment results, truancy rates and school leavers' destinations. Since February of this year, all LEAs and governing bodies of LEA-maintained schools have been required by law to remind parents of their right of appeal when informing them of a decision not to allocate a place for their child at their preferred school. The model articles of government for grant-maintained schools were amended in January this year to include this requirement.

Computer Networks

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what steps are being taken to draw together the research in the United Kingdom and other European countries on high band width computer networks;

(2) if he will use Britain's presidency of the European Community to initiate an EC-wide network for connecting basic and applied research laboratories and universities.

Mr. Forman: The information systems committee of the Universities Funding Council—UFC—is participating in a European multi-protocol project to connect European countries via high band width computer networks. Fifty of the 200 sites connected to the United Kingdom joint academic network—JANET—already have full multi-protocol access. The United Kingdom and Germany are taking the lead in the European multi-protocol project. Several other European countries have expressed an interest in joining.

The SuperJANET initiative will enhance United Kingdom development providing very high band width multi-protocol computer networking to United Kingdom academic sites.

The UFC and the DTI have jointly funded United Kingdom participation in the EUREKA COSINE project. This has recently completed a successful pilot project in academic computer networking across Europe and will move to a higher performance production service later this year.

The European Community is actively pursuing the provision of pan-European networks for academic sites through its consultations with the European Consultative Forum on Research Networking, which represents academic and research networking interests in the Community.

Schools, Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he will write to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight to provide the advice which he undertook to supply following the meeting on 26 February and the visit of his regional team to Lake, Sandham and Nodehill schools.

Mr. Forth: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Youth Service Funding

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on his Department's plans for funding the voluntary sector youth service in London.

Mr. Forman: I have nothing to add to what my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Baroness Blatch, said in another place on 6 July, *Official Report*, columns *981-84*.

Rural Primary Schools

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has had about the consequences of future trends in devolved school budgets under local management of schools for the viability of small rural primary schools; what safeguards exist to protect such schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Department has received a number of representations within the last four weeks on issues arising from the local management of schools—LMS—including the funding of small rural schools. Under LMS, local education authorities—LEAs—can provide additional support to small schools in two ways: they may offer salary protection to schools with fewer than 330 pupils, and they may build factors into their formulae which allow for the higher costs of providing a balanced curriculum in small schools.

Special Needs

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the 10 local education authorities in England which spent most per pupil on the education of pupils with special needs, with the average amounts spent for each such authority and *(b)* the 10 local education authorities with the greatest number of pupils with special needs, with the number in each case, for the last year for which the information is available.

Mr. Forth: The latest year for which information on local education authorities—LEAs—actual spending is available is 1989-90. Information is not collected separately on LEAs' spending on special needs within mainstream schools, nor on support services for special needs. Table 1 lists the 10 LEAs in England which spent most per pupil in maintained or non-maintained special schools, hospital schools, or receiving education other than at school. Table 2 indicates the 10 LEAs providing education for the greatest number of such pupils. To provide a reasonable match with spending data, pupil number data are for January 1990.

Table 1
Special education spending[1] per pupil[2]
1989-90

Local education authority	*£*
Solihull	14,665
Harrow	13,970
Merton	13,750
Barking and Dagenham	13,090
Cumbria	12,455
Somerset	12,330
Ealing	12,205
Bradford	12,180
Oxfordshire	12,035
Waltham Forest	11,480

Table 2
Number of pupils[2] receiving special education
January 1990

Local education authority	*Number*
Inner London education authority	6,954
Kent	4,160
Hampshire	4,132
Lancashire	3,968
Essex	3,047
Birmingham	2,721
Nottinghamshire	2,321
Hertfordshire	2,232
Avon	2,133
Devon	2,114

[1] Total expenditure other than capital financing costs and inter-authority recoupment payments, less income other than from specific Government grants and inter-authority recoupment receipts.
[2] Pupils in special schools, hospital schools or receiving education other than at school, January 1990.

Pupil Numbers

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many primary schools there are in England with *(a)* fewer than 50 pupils and *(b)* between 50 and 75 pupils; and how many secondary or middle schools there are with (i) fewer than 200 pupils and (ii) between 200 and 300 pupils, at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is given in the table:

Maintained schools in England by size: January 1991

Full-time pupils	*Schools*
Primary	
0 to 50	1,293
51 to 75	1,247
Over 75	15,955
Middle	
0 to 200	154
201 to 300	378
Over 300	511
Secondary	
0 to 200	45
201 to 300	69
Over 300	3,292

Subjects Allied to Medicine

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what criteria will be used by the Higher Education Funding Council for the funding of subjects allied to medicine; and what account such funding will take of the relative costs of the subjects within that category;

(2) what steps he will take to ensure adequate funding for the clinical training of university students of optometry under the future arrangements proposed by the Higher Education Funding Council.

Mr. Forman: The Higher Education Funding Council for England is consulting institutions on the funding methodology for teaching and on the academic subject categories to be adopted from 1993-94. The council has adopted the general principal that the number of subject categories should be relatively small so as to maximise institutions' management freedom. The precise coverage of academic subject categories will be the subject of further consultation. It will be for individual institutions to determine the level of funding for particular courses within each category, taking account of cost differences.

Sex Education

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what aims and standards his Department has for the teaching of sex education to all children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Section 1 of the Education Reform Act 1988 requires the curriculum of maintained schools to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. As part of that preparation, all pupils are now required to be taught those aspects of sex education contained in national curriculum science. Beyond that statutory requirement, school governing bodies are responsible, under the provisions of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, for deciding whether any further sex education should be included in their school's curriculum; and for maintaining a written record both of that decision, and the content and organisation of any sex education they decide should be provided. In addition, section 46 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 requires that any sex education which schools provide—whether or not it is required as part of the national curriculum—should be given in such a manner as to encourage pupils to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life. Detailed decisions about how such education is delivered in the classroom should take full account of local circumstances, the particular needs of pupils and the views of parents.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) in what circumstances sex education can be excluded from the teaching of human biology within the national curriculum;

(2) if he will give details of the circumstances in which teachers and parents may withdraw children from lessons about HIV and AIDS.

Mr. Forth: There is no statutory right of withdrawal from the secular curriculum: pupils may not be withdrawn from the teaching of any aspects of sex education provided by their school, whether or not these are required by the national curriculum. Schools should be ready to discuss with parents both their policies and approaches to sex education, and to consider any anxieties or suggestions which individual parents may have.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of school children at the ages of 11, 14 and 16 years have received sex education.

Mr. Forth: This information is not available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Environmental Initiatives

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new environmental initiatives he intends to promote for the European Community during his term as President of the European Agriculture Council.

Mr. Curry: We intend to press forward our initiative to integrate environmental protection requirements into the common agricultural policy.

Seagulls, Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what radiological surveys of the seagulls killed by British Nuclear Fuels at Sellafield in the cull carried out in June have been carried out by the scientific services in his Department.

Mr. Curry: None.

Set-aside

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what flexibility will be applied to the new 15 per cent. set-aside scheme to take into account field layout and cost structure.

Mr. Curry: We have stressed to the Commission the importance of providing flexibility in the implementing regulations for the scheme. I hope that this will be reflected in the final text of these regulations.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what experiments have been undertaken to see if meat from bovines suffering from BSE is infective; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Experiments in which mice have been inoculated with muscle tissue from cows confirmed to have BSE are in progress. Two of these have passed the end point for these studies and no clinical evidence of a scrapie or BSE-like disease has resulted. The results so far show that, as in all other naturally occurring transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, there is no detectable infectivity in muscle tissue and thus meat.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy for each year since 1986, and the latest figure for 1992 for the total number of cattle diagnosed that were *(a)* under two years of age, *(b)* aged two to three years, *(c)* aged three to four years, *(d)* aged five to six years and *(e)* aged seven or more years.

Mr. Soames: There were 847 cases of BSE confirmed in Great Britain prior to the disease becoming notifiable on 21 June 1988. Since then the number of confirmed cases is as follows by year of report.

	Number
1988	2,185
1989	7,136
1990	14,179
1991	25,013
1992[1]	13,430

[1] to 3 July.

The distribution of confirmed cases of BSE as at 10 July 1992 with a date of onset of disease between January and June 1992 of known age is as follows:

Age band (yrs)	*Number of cases*
2 and less than 3	1
3 and less than 4	[1]225
4 and less than 5	3,734
5 and less than 6	2,132
6 and less than 7	737
7 and over	340

[1] These animals will have been born during the period from 1 January 1988 to 30 June 1989.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will invite the Royal Society and the Royal Colleges of Medicine to carry out a wholly independent study of the epidemiology of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Soames: No. The spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee—the Tyrrell committee—already exists to look at all matters relating to spongiform encephalopathies.

Dogs and Cats

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* dogs and *(b)* cats are exported and imported for breeding purposes each year; and how many (i) dogs and (ii) cats are imported for scientific experiments each year.

Mr. Soames: This information is not available.

Sugar Quota

Mr. Cann: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to protect the British sugar industry from cuts in its quota.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on July 6, *Official Report*, column *62*.

Agricultural Support

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of Government spending was allocated to agricultural support in *(a)* 1962, *(b)* 1972 and *(c)* the most recent year available; and what equivalent proportion is estimated to be required in 1995.

Mr. Curry: The figures for 1962 and 1972 are not readily available. The most recent year for which figures have been published is the financial year 1991-92 when the proportion of Government spending allocated to agriculture was 0·7 per cent. There are no estimates available for what the equivalent proportion will be in 1995.

Fisheries Conservation

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he sent his consultation paper for new fish conservation proposals to *(a)* the Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation Ltd. and *(b)* the Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation Ltd.

Mr. Curry: The Department of Agriculture, for Northern Ireland issued the consultation paper on effort control and decommissioning to both Northern Ireland producer organisations on 30 April 1992.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he received any representations from *(a)* the Northern Ireland Fish Producers

Organisation Ltd. and *(b)* the Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation Ltd. prior to the publication of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill and after he published his consultation paper for the fishing industry.

Mr. Curry: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland received comments from both organisations in June after the publication of the Sea Fisheries (Conservation) Bill.

National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions when, where and with whom in each of the last five years he, his predecessors in that office, Ministers in his Ministry and their predecessors have officially met representatives of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations.

Mr. Curry: I have had regular meetings with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations since I came to the Ministry three years ago. I recently attended its executive committee in Cheltenham on July 4 and I offered the federation a further meeting on 7 July.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and dencentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Curry: Some 78 per cent. of the Ministry's staff are based outside London. Planning is at various stages of development for moving 1,000 posts away from a number of locations in London and the south-east.

Salmon

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Scotland about further measures to protect British salmon stocks.

Mr. Curry: The Department maintains close and regular contacts with the Scottish Office on matters relating to British salmon stocks and their protection.

Farm Workers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average number of farm workers employed per hundred hectares on farms of *(a)* under 100 hectares, *(b)* 100 to 200, *(c)* 200 to 300, *(d)* 300 to 400, *(e)* 400 to 500, *(f)* 500 to 600 and *(g)* 600 and over hectares.

Mr. Curry: The information is as follows for the latest available date, with separate details for the total farm labour force and regular hired workers.

Average number of persons per 100 hectares of total area
England and Wales
June 1991

Total area of holding[1] *(hectares)*	*Total labour force*[2]	*Regular hired workers*[3]
Under 100	7·8	1·4
100—<200	2·9	0·8
200—<300	2·3	0·9
300—<400	2·1	1·0
400—<500	1·7	0·9
500—<600	1·7	1·1
600 and over	1·3	0·8
All holdings	4·5	1·1
NUMBER OF PERSONS ('000s)	486·0	115·0

[1] Based on main holdings in the annual June census.
[2] Includes all whole-time and part-time workers on the holding in June 1991, i.e. farmers, partners, directors, spouses, managers, regular family and hired workers, seasonal and casual workers.
[3] Whole-time and part-time.

Cerone

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the approved shelf life of the pesticide product *(a)* Union Carbide cerone, *(b)* Embetec cerone and *(c)* ICI cerone, MAFF registration numbers 3467, 04416 and 00463, respectively;

(2) how long the approved shelf life of the Union Carbide product cerone was for the years 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Soames: For a pesticide product to gain full approval under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 evidence of two years storage stability at ambient temperature must be supplied. Only if such evidence is not forthcoming will a shelf life be specified on the approved product label. The information on cerone is as follows:

(a) Union Carbide cerone (MAFF 00464)—This product has been commercially withdrawn. From 1981 to 1986 it held approval (No. 3467) for efficacy under the former Agricultural Chemicals Approval Scheme (ACAS) with no specified shelf life on the label.

(b) Embetec cerone (MAFF 04416)—This has been replaced by Rhone-Poulenc's cerone which holds provisional approval, with no specified shelf life on the label.

(c) ICI cerone (MAFF 00463)—This has provisional approval with no specified shelf life on the label.

Badger Baiting

Mr. Burns: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of badger baiting there have been in Essex in each of the last three available years; and what action is being taken to enforce the laws against badger baiting in Essex.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

In 1988 there were seven prosecutions and one conviction in Essex under the Badgers Act 1973, although it is not possible to say how many of these involved alleged cases of badger baiting. There were no prosecutions under the 1973 Act in Essex in 1989 or in 1990, the last year for which statistics are available.

The enforcement of the law in Essex is an operational matter for the chief constable.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Residential Requirements

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what residential requirements he sets for the payment of DSS benefits; whether he plans any changes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: People who do not have a fixed abode, and who meet the entitlement conditions for a benefit, will often have to come to a social security or Employment Service office in person to collect their girocheque or notification to pick up their order book from a post office. In some cases they are posted to an address nominated by claimants. For unemployed people the entitlement conditions include being available for, and actively seeking work. These conditions are rigorously checked by Employment Service staff. Social security and Employment Service staff are careful to verify the identities of all claimants, and our computer systems will show if someone is making a duplicate claim at another office.

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 29 June, *Official Report*, column *428*, to the hon. Member for Harwich, (Mr. Sproat) about appeals against disability living allowance decisions, if he will make a statement on the factors which account for the delay in resolving the appeal of the constituent of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough, Ref. YR691179c.

Miss Widdecombe: An appeal to the social security commissioner was made by the hon. Member's constituent on 18 November 1991 and leave to appeal was granted by the commissioner on 23 January 1992. A submission by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was sent to the office of the social security commissioners on 19 February 1992 and the appeal is now awaiting a date for hearing. Hearings by the social security commissioners are a matter for my noble Friend, the Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people with learning difficulties have been awarded the lower rate of the mobility component of the disability living allowance;

(2) how many people with visual impairments have been awarded *(a)* the lower rate care or *(b)* the lower rate mobility component of the disability living allowance;

(3) how many awards of the higher rate mobility components made since 3 February were made *(a)* on the grounds that the person was severely mentally impaired and displayed severe behavioural problems and *(b)* under the deaf-blind provisions;

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available figure for the number of people awarded the higher rate mobility component on the grounds of severe mental impairment is 116. The other information is not yet available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown of the numbers awarded the disability living allowance to date by *(a)* those awarded the higher rate of the care component, *(b)* those awarded the middle rate of the care component, *(c)* those awarded the lower rate of the care component, *(d)* those awarded the higher rate of mobility component and *(e)* those awarded the lower rate of the mobility component.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available figures for components awarded on new claims and top-up claims, including claims made on the grounds of terminal illness, are as follows:

Numbers	
Highest rate of the care component	8,700
Middle rate of the care component	9,900
Lowest rate of the care component	27,800
Higher rate of the mobility component	24,400
Lower rate of the mobility component	31,600

There is some overlap the categories because some new claims result in dual awards of both a care and mobility component.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many requests for a review of an adjudication officer's decision on attendance allowance and mobility allowance received by his Department prior to 3 February remain outstanding; how many have been decided: and how many, and what percentage, of reviews decided resulted in the award of the lower rate of disability living allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown of successful disability working allowance applicants by *(a)* people already working and *(b)* people who started working shortly before making an application for benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: Up to 30 June the number of successful applications for disability working allowance was 1,130. Of these we estimate that about 5 per cent. started work as employees in the week of the claim.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown of successful disability working allowance applicants by *(a)* average hourly earnings, *(b)* average hours worked, *(c)* average age, *(d)* sex, *(e)* marital status, *(f)* householder status and *(g)* qualifying benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on the householder status of applicants is not available. The table provides estimated figures derived from a provisional analysis of claims up to 31 May.

	Successful claims
Average hourly earnings	£3·12
Average hours worked a week	29·8
Average age	36
Number of awards to men	468
Number of awards to women	357
Number of awards to single people	536
Number of awards to couples	289
Householder status	not available
Qualifying benefits:	
Invalidity benefit	80

	Successful claims
Severe disablement allowance	43
Income support with disability premium	118
Housing benefit with disability premium	70
Disability living allowance	86
Attendance allowance and other benefits	659

NOTE: Customers may have more than one qualifying benefit.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people claiming the disability living allowance had help completing their claim forms either *(a)* from the telephone claims completion service of a regional disability benefits centre or *(b)* from his Department's visiting service;

(2) how many applications for the disability living allowance have been received by his Department to date; and if he will provide a breakdown by *(a)* the number and percentage of these that resulted in an award, *(b)* the number and percentage of these that were refused broken down by grounds for refusal and *(c)* the number and percentage of these that are awaiting a decision;

(3) what is his Department's policy regarding the notification of income support, housing benefit and community charge departments when someone is awarded the disability living allowance; and whether such notification distinguishes between the mobility and care component and the rate of these components, respectively;

(4) how many applications for the disability working allowance have been received by his Department to date; and if he will provide a breakdown by *(a)* the number and percentage of these that resulted in an award, *(b)* the number and percentage of these that were refused and *(c)* the number and percentage of these that are awaiting a decision;

(5) if he will provide a breakdown by number and percentage of the total number of claims for disability working allowance received by his Department that were refused on the grounds that *(a)* the claimant was not in remunerative work, *(b)* the claimant's income was above the limit, *(c)* the claimant was not in receipt of a qualifying benefit, *(d)* the claimant was receiving family credit, *(e)* the joint income of the claimant and his or her partner exceeded the limit, *(f)* the claimant was working less than 16 hours a week or *(g)* for other reasons;

(6) how many claims for disability living allowance included a report by an examining medical practitioner; and if he will break this down by *(a)* the number and percentage of successful claims, *(b)* the number and percentage of unsuccessful claims and *(c)* the number and percentage of cases where the claimant had already completed the self-assessment application form;

(7) how many requests for reviews of disability living allowance have been received by his Department breaking these down by *(a)* numbers seeking a review of a decision to refuse benefit and *(b)* numbers seeking a review of the rate of benefit awarded; and if he will provide a breakdown of this total by (i) successful reviews, (ii) unsuccessful reviews and (iii) reviews not yet decided.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Low Incomes

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the recommendations made in the publications of the University of Bristol's statistical monitoring unit in 1991 and 1992 about the measurement of low incomes have been followed by his Department in preparing the report on households below average income in 1989.

Mr. Burt: The methodology of the forthcoming report on households below average income—HBAI—in 1989 is based on the recommendations of a technicl stocktaking exercise in 1991. During this exercise external analysts were consulted, including Professor Peter Townsend of the university of Bristol. A member of the Bristol statistical monitoring unit also attended a follow-up seminar in February 1992, along with independent analysts from established and authoritative institutions. The use in HBAI of equivalence scales, allied to sensitivity testing, was supported by all independent analysts from other institutions. This methodology has accordingly been adopted in the forthcoming edition of HBAI.

Although the university of Bristol statistical monitoring unit's views on some key issues are not shared by the majority of independent or Government expert opinion, the Department has of course given them due weight, as it does all advice on methodological issues.

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to make available and publish the results of the households below average income analysis for 1991.

Mr. Burt: The households below average income analysis based on 1990-91 data should be available in mid-1993.

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the other countries which have adopted his Deparrtment's equivalence scale in measuring low incomes.

Mr. Burt: Equivalence scales can be expected to vary from country to country. However, I understand that equivalence scales, with relative rates for singles and couples similar to those employed by the households below average income analysis—HBAI—have been employed in studies in Finland, Sweden, Ireland and France. The approach incorporated in the 1992 edition of HBAI is to produce results on a central set of equivalence scales and subject these to extensive sensitivity testing. This approach was recommended in the report of last year's HBAI stocktaking review, a copy of which is available in the Library. It has been endorsed by almost all the external analysts consulted.

Disability Allowances

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications have been submitted to date for *(a)* disability working allowance and *(b)* disability living allowance from claimants in Wales; and, of these claims, how many have been refused since the introduction of the allowances.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of disability working allowance and disabilty living allowance are

matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Miss Widdecombe: There are 662 posts being relocated from the south-east to Leeds over the next year; the first staff from DSS moved into the new Leeds building, Quarry house, last week. In addition 3,000 new posts will be created outside London in 1993, when Child Support Agency centres are established in Belfast, Birkenhead, Dudley, Falkirk, Hastings and Plymouth.

Disability Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals have been heard by disability appeal tribunals to date; and if he will provide a breakdown of these by *(a)* outstanding mobility allowance, *(b)* outstanding attendance allowance and *(c)* disability living allowance appeals.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of disability appeal tribunals is the responsibility of the president of the Independent Tribunal Service, his honour Judge Holden, and the hon. Member may wish to contact his office to obtain this information.

Benefit Claims

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for invalidity benefit, sickness benefit, severe disablement allowance and income support were referred to the regional medical services in each month since January 1992; how many of these cases resulted in medical examinations; and what were the outcomes *(a)* where examinations took place and *(b)* where they did not.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available for these benefits is in the table.

References to the regional medical services cleared during quarter ending 31 March 1992

	Number
Incapable of work (without examination)	127,745
Claim terminated before examination—no opinion given	3,571
Failed to attend examination	14,664
Incapable of work (after examination)	51,545
Capable of work (after examination)	9,332
Capable of work within limits (after examination)	14,785
Total number of references cleared	221,642

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will show the level of unemployment benefit *(a)* in real terms at 1992 prices and *(b)* as a percentage of the equivalent average wage for (i) a single unemployed person, (ii) an unemployed person with a dependent spouse and (iii) an unemployed person with a spouse and two children for each year since 1979.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables:

Table 1
Unemployment benefit actual rates

Date	*Single unemployed person (£)*	*With dependent spouse (£)*	*With dependent spouse and two children (£)*
November 1979	18·50	29·95	33·35
November 1980	20·65	33·40	35·90
November 1981	22·50	36·40	38·00
November 1982	25·00	40·45	41·05
November 1983	27·05	43·75	44·05
November 1984	28·45	46·00	—
November 1985	30·45	49·25	—
July 1986	30·80	49·80	—
April 1987	31·45	50·80	—
April 1988	32·75	52·95	—
April 1989	34·70	56·10	—
April 1990	37·35	60·40	—
April 1991	41·40	66·95	—
April 1992	43·10	69·70	—

Table 2
Equivalent value of unemployment benefit at April 1992

Date	*Single unemployed person (£)*	*With dependent spouse (£)*	*With dependent spouse and two children (£)*
November 1979	42·62	68·99	76·83
November 1980	41·25	66·72	71·72
November 1981	40·14	64·94	67·80
November 1982	41·98	67·92	68·93
November 1983	43·32	70·07	70·55
November 1984	43·42	70·20	—

Date	Single unemployed person (£)	With dependent spouse (£)	With dependent spouse and two children (£)
November 1985	44·06	71·27	—
July 1986	43·84	70·88	—
April 1987	42·88	69·33	—
April 1988	42·97	69·47	—
April 1989	42·14	68·12	—
April 1990	41·44	67·01	—
April 1991	43·17	69·82	—
April 1992	43·10	69·70	—

Table 3
Unemployment benefit as percentage of average earnings

Date	Single unemployed person per cent.	With dependent spouse per cent.	With dependent spouse and two children per cent.
November 1979	16·21	26·25	29·23
November 1980	15·28	24·72	26·57
November 1981	15·05	24·35	25·42
November 1982	15·57	25·19	25·56
November 1983	15·69	25·38	25·55
November 1984	15·18	24·55	—
November 1985	15·26	24·69	—
July 1986	14·60	23·61	—
April 1987	14·04	22·70	—
April 1988	13·32	21·54	—
April 1989	12·88	20·82	—
April 1990	12·64	20·43	—
April 1991	12·98	20·99	—
April 1992	12·77	20·65	—

Notes:
1. Child dependency additions were abolished from 26 November 1984.
2. Average earnings are taken from Gross Adult Males All Occupations (New Earnings Survey).
3. Over 70 per cent. of those registered unemployed are in receipt of Income Support.

Social Fund

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish the study on the social fund by York university; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) on 8 July at column *224*.

SCOTLAND

Tourism

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the budget of the Scottish tourist board is currently spent outside the United Kingdom on the marketing of Scotland as a tourist location.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In 1991-92, 19·6 per cent. of the Scottish tourist board's gross expenditure was spent on overseas promotion. The estimate for 1992-93 is 20·3 per cent.

Health Service (Consultants)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each health board the names of the consultants holding a merit award and its grade.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is of a personal and confidential nature and cannot therefore be made publicly available.

Prison Population

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the prison population in Scotland at the latest available date.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As at Friday 3 July 1992, the prison population in Scotland was 5,294.

Grampian Healthcare

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received an application for national health service trust status from Grampian Healthcare; and if he will say from which date the statutory 90 days consultation period will commence.

Mr. Stewart: I can confirm that an application for NHS trust status has been received from Grampian Healthcare. The Secretary of State intends shortly to instruct Grampian health board to carry out formal consultation on the application on his behalf. The board will decide the date on which the three month consultation period will commence.

Training

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each local enterprise company area in Scotland and for Scotland and Great Britain as a whole, for the latest available period, the wages earned by employment training trainees who three months after leaving were *(a)* in a full-time job, *(b)* in a part-time job and *(c)* self employed.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 June 1992]:* The information requested is not available, in all the categories requested, for individual local enterprise company areas. Data about leavers are obtained through a survey which started in July 1989. Returns from leavers are incomplete; and information is therefore only available at the level of Scotland and for Great Britain. The survey shows that for trainees leaving the programme between August 1990 and July 1991 and in employment six months afterwards net weekly earnings were as follows:

percentage

Area	*up to £100*	*up to £200*	*£200 and over*	*prefer not to say*
Scotland				
Full-time work	26	47	13	15
Part-time work	81	7	1	11
Self-employment	54	17	6	23
Great Britain				
Full-time work	24	53	10	14
Part-time work	78	10	1	11
Self-employment	42	19	8	30

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has about the level of private sector financial contributions to government training schemes; how many youth training places have been offered by the private sector in each of the past five years; and what has been the average cost to public funds of a youth training place in real and actual terms in each of the past five years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 16 June 1992]:* Information about the level of private sector financial contributions to Government training schemes in the last five years and about the number of youth training places offered by the private sector from 1987-88 to 1990-91 is not available. The number since April 1991 is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the youth training leavers survey—to which not all leavers respond— shows that, in Scotland in 1991-92, an estimated 61 per cent. of youth training leavers trained with employer-led organisations or other private sector training providers. Information about the average cost to public funds in each of the past five years of a youth training place, in actual terms and at 1992-93 price levels, is available only for Great Britain as a whole and is set out in the table.

Youth Training unit price per annum in Great Britain for 1987-88 to 1991-92

£

	Actual	*At 1992-93 price levels*
1987-88	2,600	3,595
1988-89	2,527	3,258
1989-90	2,620	3,169
1990-91	2,375	2,656
[1]1991-92	2,732	2,855

[1]Provisional figure, subject to revision.

A 1991-92 figure for Scotland will be available when checking of the relevant information has been completed and I will write to the hon. Member on that point.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are currently on *(a)* youth training and *(b)* employment training in Scotland; and how many of these training programmes involve work experience with an employer.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* In Scotland, the latest available information indicates that at the end of May 1992 there were 35,206 people on youth training and 16,402 on employment training. The majority of trainees receive work experience as part of their training; however information about the exact numbers receiving such experience is not held centrally.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* As the responsible Minister I shall, over the next 12 months, follow-up commitments in the White Paper Cm 1200 "This Common Inheritance" and its successor CM 1655 "The First Year Report". In particular, the Scottish Office will develop an environmental housekeeping strategy for its accommodation and purchasing.

Over the next year and beyond I shall seek to achieve greater integration of environmental concerns into wider policy-making. I shall also continue to ensure that Scotland's environment is further safeguarded through the influence of Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Scotland and the creation of a Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

Water Supplies

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state, by region or island water authority, the water supply zones which do not fully comply with the requirements of the EC drinking water directive, stating for each the parameters concerned and expected compliance date in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 1990 incorporate the requirements of the EC drinking water directive. The zones listed in the table are currently subject to improvement undertakings given by water authorities because one or more of the standards set in the regulations has been infringed in the past. Details of current water quality in individual supply zones are available in public registers maintained by water authorities.

In the zones listed, reported results continue to show that, in many cases, breaches of the standard are marginal or infrequent. It is also clear that many of the zones listed are not experiencing difficulty in achieving the standards concerned, and in these cases the undertakings are simply precautionary. In the majority of zones the contravention relates to only one of the 57 standards set.

Region/Supply Zone	*Standards not fully met*	*Compliance Date for Zone*
Borders		
Ale	Aluminium	1998
Cockburnspath	Iron	2005
Earnscleugh	Aluminium	1995
Tweedsmuir	Bact[1]	1994
Watch	Iron	2005
West Linton	Trihalomethanes	1993
Central		
Alloa	Aluminium, Lead	1997
Ardeonaig	Trihalomethanes	1995
Balquhidder	Trihalomethanes	1995
Bo'ness, Blackness Whitecross	Trihalomethanes	1998
Bonnybridge, Camelon, High Bonnybridge	Aluminium	1995
Bridge of Allan	Aluminium	1995
Cowie, Plean, Airth Stirling (part)	Aluminium	1992
Cumbernauld	Trihalomethanes	1998
Falkirk, Larbert, Carron Stenhousemuir, Skinflats	Aluminium	1997
Kirkintilloch (part), Lenzie	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1998
Kirkintilloch-Waterside	Trihalomethanes	1998
Lennoxtown, Milton of Campsie Torrance, Balmore	Trihalomethanes	1998
Dumfries and Galloway		
Areeming (Lochenkit) North	Iron, pH, Colour, Manganese, Aluminium, Bact[1]	1992
Areeming (Lochenkit) South	Iron, pH, Colour, Manganese Aluminium, Bact[1]	1992
Auchnneel	Aluminium, pH, Trihalomethanes	1995
Black Esk	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1995
Carsphairn	Bact[1]	1992
Castle Douglas	Trihalomethanes	1992
Creetown	Trihalomethanes	1992
Euchan	Aluminium, pH, Bact[1], Trihalomethanes	1995
Glengap	Trihalomethanes	1992
Glengap/Ringford Borehole	Trihalomethanes	1992
Killylour	Aluminium	1994
Killylour/Terregles Borehole	Aluminium	1994
Lochfoot	pH, Aluminium	1995
Lochinvar	Trihalomethanes	1992
New Abbey	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1995
Newton Stewart	Trihalomethanes	1992
Palnure	pH, Trihalomethanes, Bact[1]	1992
Penwhirn	pH, Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1995
Sanquhar	Trihalomethanes	1992
Winterhope	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1995
Fife:		

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Auchterderran	Iron	2008
Buckhaven	Iron	2018
Cleish	Iron	2002
Cowdenbeath	Iron	2001
Dunfermline	Iron	1999
Dunfermline South	Iron	1995
East Neuk	Iron	2003
Falkland	Iron	2017
Fordell	Iron	2007
Glenrothes North	Iron	2014
Glenrothes South	Iron	2017
Kinross	Iron	2017
Kirkcaldy	Iron	2013
Newburgh	Iron	2019
North East Fife	Iron	2007
North Fife	Iron	2003
St. Andrews/Pipeland	Iron	2019
Tayport	Iron	2020
Grampian		
Auchengoul	Iron	2010
Buckie	Iron, Aluminium	2010
Cairnbulg	Iron	2010
Forehill (Except Peterhead)	Trihalomethanes	1994
Fraserburgh (Bogensourie)	Aluminium	1993
Fraserburgh/Hillhead	Iron	2010
Glendye	Aluminium	1996
Glenlatterach	Aluminium	1994
Keith (Herricks)	Aluminium	1994
Kennethmont	Iron	2010
Largie (Insch)	Iron	2010
Lossiemouth (High Level)	Aluminium	1994
Peterhead-Forehill	Trihalomethanes	1994
Highland		
Achaphubuil	Bact[1]	1997
Acharacle	Bact[1]	1994
Achiltibuie	Iron, Colour, Aluminium Turbidity, Manganese, Bact[1]	1997
Achmelvich	Bact[1]	1995
Achmore	Bact[1]	1995
Achnasheen	Bact[1]	1995
Aird of Sleat	Bact[1]	1997
Altnaharra	Bact[1]	1997
Applecross	Bact[1]	1995
Ardgour	Bact[1]	1995
Ardneaskin	Bact[1]	1997
Ardvasar/Daraich	Bact[1]	1997
Ardvasar/Uisdein	Bact[1]	1997
Armadale	Bact[1]	1997
Arnisdale	Bact[1]	1997
Aultbea	Bact[1]	1994
Badachro	Bact[1]	1994
Badcaul/Dundonnel	Bact[1]	1994
Ballaculish (South)	Bact[1]	1992
Balmacara	Bact[1]	1994
Balnain/Bearnock	Bact[1]	1995
Beasdale	Bact[1]	1997
Bettyhill/Meadie	Bact[1]	1995
Bettyhill/Mor	Bact[1]	1997
Blaich	Bact[1]	1995
Bohuntin	Bact[1]	1997
Bonar Bridge/Ardgay	Iron, pH, Aluminium, Colour, Turbidity, Bact[1]	1996
Bracadale	Iron, Colour, Bact[1]	1995
Braes	Bact[1]	1995
Caithness except Wick	Iron, Aluminium, Manganese	1996
Cannich	Bact[1]	1995
Carbost	Bact[1]	1995
Carnoch/Glencoe	Bact[1]	1994
Corpach	Iron, Colour, Manganese	1998
Corpach/Caol/Loy	Aluminium, Colour, Iron, pH, Turbidity, Manganese	1998
Culrain	Aluminium, Bact[1], Colour, Iron, pH, Manganese	1997
Diabeg	Bact[1]	1997
Dores	Bact[1]	1997
Dornie	Bact[1]	1994
Dornoch	Aluminium, Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1996
Drimnin	Bact[1]	1997
Drumbeg	Bact[1]	1997

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Drumfearn	Bact[1]	1997
Durness	Bact[1], Turbidity	1995
Easter Ross and Black Isle/Assynt	Aluminium, Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1994
Elgol	Bact[1]	1997
Elphin	Bact[1]	1995
Fassfearn	Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese	1997
Ferness	Bact[1]	1997
Fort Augustus	Bact[1]	1994
Fort William	Colour, Iron	1998
Foyers	Bact[1]	1994
Gairloch	Bact[1]	1992
Garve	Aluminium, Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1995
Glenachulish	Bact[1]	1994
Glendale	Bact[1]	1995
Glenelg	Bact[1]	1995
Glenfinnan	Bact[1]	1995
Glenuig	Bact	1997
Glenurquhart/Allt Coilte	Bact[1]	1994
Glenurquhart/Nam Bat	Turbidity	1998
Golspie, Brora	Aluminium, Colour, Turbidity	1996
Gorthleck	Bact[1]	1994
Grantown on Spey (Dreggie)	Colour, Iron, pH, Turbidity	1995
Harrapool/Broadford	Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese	1994
Helmsdale Ord	Bact[1]	1992
Helmsdale/Caen	Bact[1]	1992
Inveralligin	Bact[1]	1997
Inverasdale	Bact[1]	1995
Invergarry	Bact[1]	1994
Inverinate	Bact[1]	1997
Inverinate (Forestry)	Bact[1]	1997
Invermoriston Ness	Bact[1]	1995
Inverness/Balmore	Colour, Iron, Manganese Turbidity	1998
Inverness/Oldtown	Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1998
Isle of Ornsay	Bact[1]	1995
Kentallen	Turbidity	1992
Kilchoan	Bact[1]	1994
Kilmaluag	Bact[1]	1997
Kilmuir	Bact[1]	1994
Kingussie	Bact[1]	1994
Kinlochewe	Bact[1]	1995
Kinlochleven	Bact[1]	1992
Kishorn	Bact[1]	1997
Kyleakin	Bact[1], Turbidity	1995
Kylesku	Bact[1]	1997
Laggan Bridge	Bact[1]	1997
Laid	Bact[1]	1997
Laide	Bact[1]	1995
Lairg	Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1992
Letterfearn	Bact[1]	1997
Lochaline	Bact[1]	1994
Lochend	Bact[1]	1997
Lochinver	Bact[1]	1992
Loth, Portgower	Bact[1]	1997
Mellon Udrigle	Bact[1]	1997
Melness	Bact[1]	1995
Melvich, Strathy	Bact[1]	1994
Nairn	Aluminium, Colour, Turbidity	1995
Nedd	Bact[1]	1997
North Erradale	Bact[1]	1997
Onich	Bact[1]	1992
Oykel Bridge	Bact[1]	1997
Penifiler	Bact[1]	1997
Poolewe	Bact[1]	1995
Raasay	Bact[1]	1995
Ratagan	Bact[1]	1997
Rogart Muidhe	Bact[1]	1995
Rogart Upper	Bact[1]	1994
Rosehall/Invercassley	Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1997
Rosemarkie	Bact[1]	1994
Roskhill, Dunvegan	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1992
Roybridge	Bact[1]	1995
Salen	Bact[1]	1997
Sallachy	Bact[1]	1997
Sconser	Bact[1]	1997
Scourie	Bact[1]	1994
Shiel Bridge	Bact[1]	1997
Shieldaig	Bact[1]	1997

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Skerray	Bact[1]	1997
Spean Bridge	Bact[1]	1994
Stoer	Bact[1]	1994
Strath Halladale	Bact[1]	1997
Strath Naver	Bact[1]	1997
Strathcarron	Bact[1]	1997
Strathnairn	Aluminium, Colour, Iron Manganese	1994
Strollamus	Bact[1]	1997
Strontian	Bact[1]	1994
Tarscavaig	Bact[1]	1997
Teangue	Bact[1]	1997
Tomich	Bact[1]	1997
Tongue	Bact[1]	1994
Torridon	Bact[1]	1997
Torrin	Bact[1]	1997
Trislaig	Bact[1]	1997
Uig/Glenuig/Earlish	Bact[1]	1994
Uig/Idrigill	Bact[1]	1997
Waternish	Bact[1]	1995
Waterstein	Bact[1]	1997
Wick	Aluminium, Colour, Iron, Nitrite, Manganese, Turbidity	1996
Lothian		
Alnwickhill Joppa	Bact[1], pH	1992
Alnwickhill, Leith	Bact[1], pH	1992
Alnwickhill, Newington	Bact[1], pH	1992
Alnwickhill, Portobello	Bact[1], pH	1992
Balgreen	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Castlehill	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Chalkieside	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Deans	Aluminium, Bact[1], Trihalomethanes	1998
Dechmont	Trihalomethanes	1998
Dechmont Law	Aluminium, Bact[1], Trihalomethanes	1998
East Craigs	Trihalomethanes	1998
Fairmilehead Direct	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Fairmilehead Gilmerton	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Firhill Mid	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Firhill North	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Firhill South	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Firhill West	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Fountainhall	Aluminium, Bact[1], pH	1995
Garleton	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1995
Harburnhead	Bact[1]	1993
Harlaw/Marchbank	Bact[1]	1993
Hillend	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Hopes	Aluminium	1995
Kingslaw	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Kinleith	Bact[1]	1993
Latch	Bact[1]	1993
Pateshill Direct	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Pateshill District	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Pateshill Longridge	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Preston	Trihalomethanes	1998
Stobshiel	Aluminium, pH	1995
Torduff	Bact[1], pH	1993
Traprain	Aluminium, Bact[1],	1995
Waterston	Aluminium, Bact[1] Trihalomethanes	1998
West Mains	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Whittinghame	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Orkney		
Mainland North and West	Aluminium	1997
Mainland South and East	Aluminium	1994
Mainland, Kirkwall	Aluminium	1996
Sanday	Aluminium	1995
Westray	Aluminium	1994
Shetland		
Aith	Aluminium	1995
Burra Isle	Aluminium	1993
Gulberwick and Quarff	Aluminium	1995
Reawick and Skeld	Aluminium	1997
Sandness	Aluminium	1996
Sandwick	Manganese	1994
Walls	Aluminium	1996
Whalesay	Aluminium	1996

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Strathclyde		
Airdrie (South), Calderbank, Coatbridge (South)	Trihalomethanes	1998
Alexandria, Bonhill, Renton, Balloch (Leven Valley)	Trihalomethanes	1999
Ardeer	Aluminium Lead	1993
Ardrishaig, Lochgilphead	Aluminium Lead	1995
Ardrossan and Environs	Aluminium	1992
Ayr	Aluminium	1993
Baillieston	Trihalomethanes	1998
Bearsden, Faifley, Yoker, Clydebank	Aluminium	1996
Bellshill, Mossend and Holytown	Trihalomethanes	1998
Blackwaterfoot, Shiskine, Machrie	Trihalomethanes	2002
Bowling, Bonhill, Old Kilpatrick	Trihalomethanes	1998
Bowmore, Port Ellen (Islay)	Aluminium	1993
Brodick	Trihalomethanes	2000
Caldercruix and Plains	Trihalomethanes	1998
Campbeltown	Aluminium	1994
Carradale	Aluminium	1992
Catacol	Trihalomethanes	1997
Clachan	Aluminium	1994
Coatbridge	Trihalomethanes	1998
Craighouse (Jura)	Trihalomethanes	1999
Croofur, Newton Mearns	Aluminium	1995
Darvel Valley	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1993
Dervaig	Trihalomethanes	1994
Dumbarton Town	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1998
Furnace, Minard	Aluminium	1994
Garelochhead, Rhu, Rosneath	Trihalomethanes	2003
Girvan and Environs (South)	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1994
Girvan and Environs (North)	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Greenock Town	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1996
Holyloch, Kilmun, Inellen and Dunoon and Environs	Aluminium	1993
Inverary, Bridge of Douglas	Aluminium	1994
Inverclyde West	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1996
Irvine	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Kilbirnie (North)	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1992
Kilmarnock (North)	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1993
Kilmarnock (South)	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Kilmaurs	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1993
Kilmelford	Trihalomethanes	1993
Kilmory (Legg) Sliddery	Trihalomethanes	1998
Lamlash	Trihalomethanes	1996
Lenzie, Millerston, Muirhead and Stepps	Trihalomethanes	1998
Motherwell (Loch Lomond Supply)	Trihalomethanes	1998
Muirkirk	Trihalomethanes	2001
Neilston/Uplawmoor	Aluminium	1996
Newarthill (East)	Trihalomethanes	1998
Paisley (North)	Trihalomethanes	1998
Paisley (Town)	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1994
Pirnmill	Trihalomethanes	1997
Prestwick	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Renfrew East, Clarkston, Giffnock, North Mearns area	Aluminium	1995
Renfrewshire South	Aluminium	1994
Renfrewshire West	Trihalomethanes	1998
Ross of Mull	Trihalomethanes	1994
Rothesay	Aluminium	1994
Saddell	Trihalomethanes	1998
Saltcoats and Stevenston	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Skelmorlie	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1995
Stewarton and Environs	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1993
Strachur	Aluminium	1995
Tarbert	Aluminium	1994
Tayinloan	Trihalomethanes	1999
Tayvallich	Trihalomethanes	2000
Tobermory	Aluminium	1993
Troon, Dundonald (Kilwinning)	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Whitehouse	Trihalomethanes	2001
Western Isles		
Leverburgh	Lead	1997
Northton	Lead	1997
Rodel	Lead	1997

[1] "Bact."—microbiological parameters.

Note: "Compliance dates" are latest dates by which all parameters in zones will comply. Individual parameters may comply earlier.

Hospitals (Tertiary Referrals)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision is made for the enumeration of tertiary referrals in hospital *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* out-patient treatment as separate consultant episodes; from what date this was done and what arrangements were made for reference back to fund-holding general practitioners for renewed authorisation; if he will estimate the impact of the change in recording and enumeration methods on achieving consistent time-series statistics on numbers of cash treated in hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* Provision for the recording of information on in-patient tertiary referrals is included in the SMR 1 scheme which was introduced in 1961. The scheme, which records the information by consultant episode, has identified the referring general practitioner practice number since 1 January 1991.

Tertiary referrals to out-patient departments are separately identified on the SMR 0 return which was introduced on 1 April 1991. The return identifies the referring general practitioner practice number.

It is for individual health boards or trusts to consider what arrangements shall be introduced for reference back to fund holding general practitioners for renewed authorisation.

There have been no recent changes to the data collection methods which have affected the consistency of time-series on the number of cases treated in hospitals.

Multiple Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the total numbers of *(a)* sets of (i) twins, (ii) triplets, (iii) quadruplets, (iv) quintuplets and (v) sextuplets born in Scotland in each year from 1980 to 1991, *(b)* maternities in Scotland in each year and *(c)* multiple births of each type in each year which were conceived as a result of (1) IVF, (2) GIFT and (3) other forms of assisted conception.

Mr. Stewart: The information is as follows:

Type of birth	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Twin	658	611	607	677	665	681	721	721	706	677	731	709
Triplet	4	7	6	2	10	9	10	10	9	13	16	24
Quadruplet	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	1	2
Quintuplet	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sextuplet	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total maternities	68,689	68,865	65,963	64,776	64,800	66,342	65,456	65,839	65,842	63,090	65,556	66,630

Information on the number of multiple births in Scotland attributed to assisted reproduction is not available. Some information on these matters is published in the first annual report of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, and in earlier annual reports of the interim licensing authority, copies of which are available in the Library.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sporting Attainment

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has for improving levels of sporting attainment among young people in inner cities.

Mr. Key: We want to encourage young people to higher levels of sporting achievement both in inner city areas and elsewhere. The Sports Council promotes good practice and partnerships in the inner cities by supporting a range of local initiatives. I am greatly encouraged that the 1993-94 city challenge bids contain significant proposals for improving sports provision.

English Heritage

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has held with the chairman of English Heritage about the proposed move to Nottingham.

Mr. Key: My right hon. and learned Friend and I discussed the proposed move with the chairman in May.

Sports Participation

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what survey his Department has carried out of the proportion of adults in the United Kingdom regularly participating in sporting activities.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what study his Department has carried out of the proportion of adults in the United Kingdom regularly participating in sporting activities.

Mr. Key: My Department pays for the inclusion on a three-year cycle of questions in general household survey relating to participation in sport. These questions will next appear in the 1993-94 survey. In addition the Sports Council, which is funded by my Department, was a joint sponsor of the Allied Dunbar national fitness survey the results of which were published on 15 June.

European Festival of Arts

18. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will outline his plans for the European festival of arts taking place during the British presidency of the EC.

24. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will outline his plans for the European festival of arts taking place during the British presidency of the EC.

Mr. Mellor: I have sent each hon. Member a personal copy of the programme for the European arts festival, which contains details of more than 600 events across the United Kingdom.

In addition, a schools and youth programme is being prepared for publication for the start of the autumn school term. This will include special workshops, visits to exhibitions and performances, competitions for special curriculum awards and a wide range of topic and project work. More than 2,000 schools have so far expressed interest in taking part. I shall send hon. Members a copy when it is available.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultation was undertaken to determine the programme for the European arts festival.

Mr. Mellor: The Festival Director, John Drummond CBE, has consulted extensively in preparing the programme for the European arts festival, including the four arts councils, the regional arts boards, the Museums and Galleries Commission and a large number of arts organisations and others. He has also been supported by a widely based festival committee. In addition, all primary and secondary schools have been invited to participate in the education and youth programme.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration was given to the scheduling of more than one event in the European arts festival for North Staffordshire; and if he will make it his policy to consult Staffordshire county council and the Stoke on Trent city council twinning officer to ensure that youth events and events in schools are scheduled for Stoke on Trent, North constituency.

Mr. Mellor: The festival programme has very wide coverage. North Staffordshire is one of 250 locations attracting 600 events. Two thousand primary and secondary schools are also involved in the education and youth programme. The festival organisers have been in touch with all local education authorities in the United Kingdom.

Tourism

20. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he will take steps to encourage the flow of tourists to Leicestershire.

Mr. Key: Nearly half the Government's grant in aid to the English tourist board is devolved, under contract, to help the developmental and promotional work of the regional tourist boards. The East Midlands tourist board, which covers Leicestershire, will this year receive over £400,000 from the ETB. That is a more than 12 per cent. increase over 1991-92.

25. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps the Government are taking to encourage a wider regional spread of tourism.

Mr. Mellor: It has always been the policy of this Government to encourage the widest possible geographical spread of tourism. This is reflected in the policies and activities of the British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board. Nearly half of the English tourist board's grant-in-aid received from my Department goes to support the work of the regional tourist boards. This year these boards will receive a total of £6·89 million—double the sum of only three years ago.

BBC

21. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to meet the chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation to discuss the method of appointment of the director general.

Mr. Mellor: None. This is a matter for the BBC governors.

Departmental Functions

22. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he last met representatives of local authority organisations to discuss the functions of his Department.

Mr. Mellor: I met the Association of County Councils on Wednesday 17 June.

Football

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations he has had about the implementation of the Taylor report.

Mr. Mellor: I completed on 3 July a round of consultations with interested parties on proposals to re-examine the all-seating requirement for Football League grounds. I announced the conclusions of my re-examination last Friday, in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry).

Public Art

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what initiatives he is considering to promote public art and support for art schemes.

Mr. Key: The Department of National Heritage already funds a scheme administered by the Royal Society of Arts known as "Art for Architecture" to encourage the integration of works of art and craftwork into new and refurbished buildings at the planning stage. Since its launch in 1990 the scheme has contributed to 17 projects and has received Government funding totalling over £0·25 million.

In addition, I welcome the lead taken by the Arts Council in promoting the principles of support for art which also emphasises the fact that art should be integral, rather than peripheral, aspect of new buildings. But at the same time I would like to reaffirm the Government's view that these schemes must be voluntary.

Arts Funding

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate he has made of the ratio of public to private funding for the arts for the most recent available period.

Mr. Mellor: Total Government funding for the Arts in the current year stands at £253 million. Annual business sponsorship of the arts, including corporate membership, was more than £57 million in 1990-91—the latest year for which firm figures are available. The arts also gains substantially from the patronage of businesses and individuals; from grants made by the Foundation for Sport and the Arts; and through the gift aid scheme.

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proportion of his Department's spending on the arts goes to the professional arts and what proportion to the voluntary or amateur arts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Precise figures are not available. The Arts Councils and, particularly, the regional arts boards support the amateur arts in a variety of ways, for example by making grants to festivals and other community events, and by meeting the costs of the involvement of professional artists with amateur groups.

National Lottery

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of the national lottery income he expects to be spent in Wales.

Mr. Mellor: Arrangements for the distribution of national lottery funds have not yet been decided. The proceeds will be used to benefit good causes and worthwhile projects throughout the nation.

Fitness

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has had regarding the recent Sports Council-Health Education Authority national fitness survey.

Mr. Mellor: The Allied Dunbar national fitness survey was published on 15 June 1992. To date we have received no representations.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Mellor: It is the Government's policy to relocate Government offices outside London in those cases where it is possible and appropriate to do so, taking into account such factors as effectiveness, efficiency, value for money and accessibility of the site. Of the approximately 1,000 civil servants in the Department of National Heritage, 397 are appropriately located in the Historic Royal Palaces Agency at Hampton Court Palace and other royal palaces, 168 are members of the Royal Parks constabulary and 40 are royal parks staff also appropriately located on site in the royal parks. The remaining 360 senior officials and other policy staff form the central core of DNH. A variety of options for rehousing them are currently under consideration and I shall be making a statement in due course.

British Sports Forum

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what support he intends to give to the British Sports Forum.

Mr. Key: I welcome the formation of the British Sports Forum which will create a tough, authoritative voice for non-governmental sports organisations in the United Kingdom. I itend to invite a member of the forum to sit on the proposed United Kingdom Sports Commission.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total amount spent by public sector employers on training in each year from 1979 to the latest date available on the same basis as shown in "Training Statistics 1991 for 1986-87", published by her Department.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the current unemployment rates in each of Allendale, Corby, Dudly, Glanford, Hartlepool, Isle of Dogs, Middlesbrough, North-east Lancashire, North-west Kent, Rotherham, Salford/Trafford, Scunthorpe, Speke, Telford, Tyneside, Wakefield, Wellingborough, Delyn, Milford Haven, Swansea, Clydebank, Inverclyde, Invergordon, Tayside, Belfast and Londonderry.

Mr. McLoughlin: The smallest geographical areas for which unemployment rates are officially compiled are travel-to-work areas—TTWAs. Information for each of these can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. Those areas requested for which no matching TTWA exists are listed, along with their nearest equivalent TTWA.

Area	*"Best fit" TTWA*
Allendale	Carlisle
	Workington
	Keswick
Glanford	Scunthorpe
Isle of Dogs	London
North East Lancashire	Clitheroe
	Pendle
North West Kent	Medway and Maidstone
	Sittingbourne and Sheerness
Salford and Trafford	Manchester
Speke	Liverpool
Tyneside	Newcastle
	South Tyneside
Delyn	Flint and Rhyl
Milford Haven	Haverfordwest
Clydebank	Glasgow
Inverclyde	Greenock

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment she has made of the number of civil servants in her Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. McLoughlin: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Roxborough and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 6 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *471-72*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Naturalisation

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the 65,623 applications for naturalisation made under the provisions of the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990 were *(a)* decided, *(b)* granted, *(c)* refused and *(d)* withdrawn, under each class and category of the scheme, in each quarter since March 1991; and how many of these applications were from (i) heads of households or (ii) family members.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information about family members is not available for refusals or withdrawals of applications. The remaining information requested is as follows:

Class	*Decided*	*Granted*		*Refused*
	Principal beneficiaries	*Principal beneficiaries*	*Dependents*	*Principal beneficiaries*
April-June 1991				
Sensitive Service	121	121	204	—
July-September 1991				
General occupational				
Managers and administrators	37	37	80	—
Approved occupations				
Statistical assistants	28	28	51	—
Disciplined Service				
Independent Commission Against Corruption	15	15	39	—
Royal Hong Kong Auxillary Air Force	3	3	7	—
Entrepreneurs	31	31	24	—
Sensitive Service	500	500	954	—
October-December 1991				
General occupational				
Managers and administrators	1	1	3	—
News Editors and journalists	58	58	88	—
Medical doctors	274	274	605	—
Legal professionals	109	109	177	—
Teaching professionals	43	43	51	—
Educational administrators	24	24	46	—
Approved occupations				
Statistical assistants	6	6	14	—
Translators/Interpreters	21	21	40	—
Disciplined Service				
Customs and Excise	201	201	410	—
Fire Service	152	152	329	—
Independent Commission Against Corruption	42	42	89	—
Sensitive Service	603	603	1,129	—
General Occupational				
Managers and administrators	430	12	26	418
Business professionals	297	—	—	297
Accountants and auditors	861	—	—	861
Accounting associate professionals	309	—	—	309
Information science professionals	24	24	41	—
News editors and journalists	120	35	55	85
Medical doctors	505	57	128	448
Physical & life science professionals	98	25	44	73
Nurses and midwives	885	527	967	358
Other medical professionals	120	—	—	120
Legal professionals	10	10	23	—
Legal associate professionals	109	—	—	109
Teaching professionals	206	96	162	110
Educational administrators	232	73	143	159
Other teaching personal	758	—	—	758
Approved occupations				
Social work professionals	29	29	60	—
Translators/interpreters	3	3	7	—
Disciplined Service				
Correctional Service	332	332	711	—
Customs and Excise	59	59	121	—
Fire Service	386	386	869	—
Immigration Service	22	22	45	—
Royal Hong Kong Police Force	31	31	82	—
Garrison (Army)	83	83	193	—
Entrepreneurs	25	25	48	—
Sensitive Service	309	290	535	19

Class	Decided Principal beneficiaries	Granted Principal beneficiaries	Granted Dependents	Refused Principal beneficiaries
April-June 1992				
General Occupational				
Managers and administrators	775	38	80	737
Business professionals	775	315	459	460
Business and administration associate professionals	2,133	—	—	2,133
Accountants and auditors	1,896	409	731	1,487
Accounting associate professionals	576	—	—	576
Engineers and related professionals	2,900	—	—	2,900
Architects, planners and surveyors	1,088	171	325	917
Engineering associate professionals	2,894	63	121	2,831
Information science professionals	1,778	834	986	944
News editors and journalists	207	15	19	192
Medical doctors	748	21	51	727
Physical and life science professionals	125	—	—	125
Nurses and midwives	939	440	788	499
Other medical professionals	205	—	—	205
Health associate professionals	481	—	—	481
Legal professionals	928	17	35	911
Legal associate professionals	213	—	—	213
Teaching professionals	217	38	65	179
Educational administrators	326	—	—	326
Other teaching personnel	1,139	—	—	1,139
Approved occupations				
Computing equipment controllers	49	—	—	49
Life science technicians	17	—	—	17
Physical science technicians	92	—	—	92
Social work professionals	435	19	35	416
Statistical assistants	76	—	—	76
Translators/interpreters	214	—	—	214
Disciplined Service				
Correctional Service	322	246	482	76
Customs and Excise	126	22	44	104
Fire Service	442	174	429	268
Immigration Service	588	74	133	514
Independent Commission against corruption	105	—	—	105
Royal Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force	3	—	—	3
Royal Hong Kong Police Force	402	402	906	—
Garrison (Army)	471	31	85	440
Garrison (Navy)	36	—	—	36
Entrepreneurs	42	8	9	34
Sensitive Service	92	92	166	—

Applications withdrawn up to 30 June 1992

Class	Principal beneficiaries
General Occupational	
Managers and administrators	20
Business professionals	2
Business and administration associate professionals	6
Accountants and auditors	7
Architects, planners and surveyors	2
Engineering associate professionals	5
Information science professionals	7
News editors and journalists	3
Medical doctors	5
Physical and life science professionals	1
Nurses and midwives	13
Other medical professionals	2
Health associate professionals	2
Legal associate professionals	1
Teaching professionals	5
Educational administrators	1
Other teaching personnel	10
Approved occupations	
Social work professionals	2
Statistical assistants	2
Translators/Interpreters	2
Disciplined Service	
Correctional Service	7
Customs and Excise	2
Fire Service	13
Immigration Service	7
Royal Hong Kong Police Force	16
Garrison (Army)	3
Entrepreneurs	2
Sensitive Services	14

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British citizenship under section 4(5) of the British Nationality Act 1981 have been *(a)* made, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused in each quarter since January 1991; and how many of those granted have been on the grounds of service in the armed forces.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Five applications were received in May 1991 and two in December 1991. Of these, two have been granted, three have been refused and two have not yet been decided. Neither of the two granted was on grounds of service in the armed forces.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his best estimate as to how many applications for *(a)* adult registration with entitlement, *(b)* naturalisation and *(c)* registration of minors his Department (i) will receive and (ii) expects to grant in 1992-93.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The latest estimate of the numbers of citizenship applications likely to be received and granted in 1992-93 is as follows:

	Intake	*Applications granted*
Adult registration	4,000	4,000
Naturalisation	25,000	28,500
Minor registration	5,000	9,500
Total	34,000	42,000

Visas

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for entry clearance from *(a)* wives, *(b)* husbands, *(c)* fiancés and *(d)* financées made at British posts in (i) New Delhi, (ii) Bombay, (iii) Calcutta, (iv) Madras, (v) Dhaka, (vi) Islamabad, (vii) Karachi and (viii) Colombo for each quarter since January 1991 were (A) received, (B) granted and (C) refused; how many refusals at each post were (1) wholly and (2) partly because the visa officer was not satisfied that the primary purpose of the marriage was not immigration; how many refusals at each post were (x) wholly and (y) partly because the visa officer was not satisfied that the couple could support and accommodate themselves without recourse to public funds; what was the refusal rate at each post; and what percentage of those refusals were wholly and partly on primary purpose grounds.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information for the Indian sub-continent for each quarter of 1991 and for the first quarter of 1992 is given in the tables. Where the numbers are small, the figures for individual posts have been combined. Information on refusals which takes account of successful appeals is not compiled for periods shorter than 12 months. Corresponding information for Colombo is not available centrally.

Table 1

Spouses and fiance(e)s in the Indian sub-continent applying for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom

Number of persons or percentage

	Husbands					
	1991					*1992*
	1st quarter	*2nd quarter*	*3rd quarter*	*4th quarter*	*Year*	*1st quarter*
New Delhi (including Calcutta)						
Applications received[1]	70	70	50	60	240	80
Applications granted[2]	40	40	20	30	130	50
Applications refused initially	50	40	40	30	150	30
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	52	n/a
Bombay (including Madras)						
Applications received[1]	100	80	80	70	320	80
Applications granted[2]	30	40	40	30	140	50
Applications refused initially	40	30	50	60	170	60
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	48	n/a
Dhaka						
Applications received[1]	130	190	200	280	800	210
Applications granted[2]	70	60	60	40	220	70
Applications refused initially	60	40	50	60	200	50
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	43	n/a
Islamabad (including Karachi)						
Applications received[1]	560	480	600	630	2,270	840
Applications granted[2]	380	440	300	380	1,500	340
Applications refused initially	400	330	410	470	1,610	460
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	42	n/a

Number of persons or percentage

	Fiances					
	1991					*1992*
	1st quarter	*2nd quarter*	*3rd quarter*	*4th quarter*	*Year*	*1st quarter*
New Delhi (including Calcutta)						
Applications received[1]	50	50	50	30	180	40
Applications granted[2]	20	30	10	20	60	30
Applications refused initially	40	20	30	40	120	30
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	67	n/a
Bombay (including Madras)						
Applications received[1]	70	50	20	30	180	70
Applications granted[2]	10	20	20	40	80	10
Applications refused initially	30	10	20	80	140	50
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	54	n/a
Dhaka						
Applications received[1]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]	10	10
Applications granted[2]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]

Fiances

	1991 1st quarter	2nd quarter	3rd quarter	4th quarter	Year	1992 1st quarter
Applications refused initially	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	[4]—	n/a
Islamabad (including Karachi)						
Applications received[1]	70	40	60	50	220	60
Applications granted[2]	50	50	70	40	220	30
Applications refused initially	70	30	50	40	190	20
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	28	n/a

Number of persons or percentage

Wives

	1991 1st quarter	2nd quarter	3rd quarter	4th quarter	Year	1992 1st quarter
New Delhi (including Calcutta)						
Applications received[1]	200	170	140	170	680	210
Applications granted[2]	130	110	150	160	540	180
Applications refused initially	20	20	40	20	90	30
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	n/a
Bombay (including Madras)						
Applications received[1]	450	260	220	260	1,180	420
Applications granted[2]	320	270	300	270	1,160	330
Applications refused initially	30	20	20	30	100	50
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7	n/a
Dhaka						
Applications received[1]	240	290	320	290	1,130	280
Applications granted[2]	240	180	220	190	840	220
Applications refused initially	30	20	20	20	100	40
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	n/a
Islamabad (including Karachi)						
Applications received[1]	800	640	720	740	2,900	910
Applications granted[2]	890	650	700	780	3,010	830
Applications refused initially	90	60	120	100	360	110
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	n/a

Number of persons or percentage

Fiancees

	1991 1st quarter	2nd quarter	3rd quarter	4th quarter	Year	1992 1st quarter
New Delhi (including Calcutta)						
Applications received[1]	50	60	70	50	230	60
Applications granted[2]	40	10	30	30	110	30
Applications refused initially	30	10	20	20	70	20
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	n/a
Bombay (including Madras)						
Applications received[1]	50	50	40	30	160	40
Applications granted[2]	30	20	10	60	130	30
Applications refused initially	10	[5]—	[5]—	10	30	10
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	n/a
Dhaka						
Applications received[1]	10	10	[5]—	[5]—	20	[5]—
Applications granted[2]	[5]—	10	10	[5]—	20	[5]—
Applications refused initially	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	[4]—	n/a
Islamabad (including Karachi)						
Applications received[1]	40	60	60	60	210	50
Applications granted[2]	50	40	40	30	160	40
Applications refused initially	[5]—	10	20	20	50	10
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	24	n/a

[1] Including applications subsequently withdrawn or lapsed.
[2] Granted initially or on appeal.
[3] Applications refused initially, minus applications granted on appeal, as a percentage of applications decided.
[4] Percentage not calculated for five or fewer applicants refused.
[5] Five or fewer.
n/a = not available.

Table 2
Spouses and fiance(e)s in the Indian sub-continent refused[1] entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom in 1991

Number of persons or percentage

	Number refused because couple could not accommodate and/or maintain themselves without recourse to public funds:		*Number refused because primary purpose of the marriage was to obtain admission to the United Kingdom*		*Primary purpose refusals as a percentage of all refusals:*	
	Solely for these reasons	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for this reason*	*Partly for this reason*	*Solely on primary purpose grounds*	*Partly on primary purpose grounds*
New Delhi (including Calcutta)						
Husbands	[4]—	10	110	10	76	10
Fiances	—	10	80	10	69	12
Wives	—	10	60	10	75	9
Fiancees	—	—	40	20	60	20
Bombay						
Husbands	—	—	110	—	82	3
Fiances	—	10	90	10	88	8
Wives	—	10	40	10	52	10
Fiancees	—	—	10	—	[2]67	[2]7
Dhaka						
Husbands	20	30	70	40	43	21
Fiances	—	—	—	—	[3]—	[3]—
Wives	20	10	—	—	5	2
Fiancees	—	—	—	—	[3]—	[3]—
Islamabad (including Karachi)						
Husbands	20	380	550	380	52	35
Fiances	—	20	40	30	52	34
Wives	100	40	40	30	16	11
Fiancees	20	10	—	—	6	4
Total Indian sub-continent						
Husbands	40	430	840	430	56	29
Fiances	—	40	210	50	70	17
Wives	120	60	150	50	30	9
Fiancees	20	10	60	20	40	13

[1] Applications refused initially, minus applications granted on appeal.
[2] Percentage based on fewer than 15 applications refused.
[3] Percentage not calculated for five or fewer applications refused.
[4] Five or fewer, or ½ per cent, or less.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for entry clearance from *(a)* wives, *(b)* husbands, *(c)* fiancés and *(d)* fiancées in each British post in all countries apart from those of the Indian sub continent were *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused in each quarter since January 1991; how many such applications in each category, at each post and in each quarter were refused (i) wholly and (ii) partly because of the primary purpose rule; what was the refusal rate at each post; and what percentage of those refusals were *(x)* wholly and *(y)* partly on primary purpose grounds.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The only information requested which is available centrally is that on applications granted and refused in Hong Kong, and is given in the table.

Applications in Hong Kong for entry clearance to the United Kingdom

Number of persons

	Applications Granted[1]	*Refused initially*
Wives		
1991		
1st quarter	50	[3]—
2nd quarter	40	[3]—
3rd quarter	40	—
4th quarter	30	[3]—
1992		
1st quarter	40	—
Husbands, fiances[2]		
1991		
1st quarter	20	[3]—
2nd quarter	20	[3]—
3rd quarter	30	[3]—
4th quarter	20	—
1992		
1st quarter	10	[3]—
Fiancees		
1991		
1st quarter	[3]—	[3]—
2nd quarter	10	—
3rd quarter	[3]—	—
4th quarter	[3]—	[3]—
1992		
1st quarter	[3]—	—

— Nil.
[1] Granted initially or on appeal.
[2] Data for husbands and fiances separately are not available.
[3] Five or fewer.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for *(a)* single entry and *(b)* multiple entry visit visas were (A) received, (B) granted and (C) refused at each post in the Indian

subcontinent, Ghana, Nigeria and Jamaica in each quarter of 1991 and the first quarter of 1992; what was the delay between application and interview for those whose applications were felt to need a second or long interview at each of the above posts in (i) June 1991, (ii) January 1992, (iii) June 1992 or (iv) the nearest available date.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on applications in Jamaica for a visit entry clearance, and separate information on applications in the other countries for single entry and multiple entry visit visas, are not available centrally. The other information requested is given in the tables.

Table 1: Persons applying for a visit visa to the United Kingdom

	Number of persons Applications		
	Newly received[1]	*Granted*	*Refused initially*
Dhaka			
1991			
1st quarter	1,700	1,230	400
2nd quarter	3,180	2,470	580
3rd quarter	3,730	2,790	810
4th quarter	2,830	1,980	750
Year	11,450	8,480	2,530
1992			
1st quarter	2,450	1,780	560
New Delhi			
1991			
1st quarter	7,360	5,620	600
2nd quarter	16,750	13,330	1,400
3rd quarter	13,130	9,770	1,190
4th quarter	6,460	5,040	620
Year	43,700	33,750	3,810
1992			
1st quarter	7,190	5,580	760
Bombay			
1991			
1st quarter	6,700	5,400	1,140
2nd quarter	16,660	14,350	2,060
3rd quarter	9,760	8,840	1,390
4th quarter	5,360	4,520	720
Year	38,480	33,120	5,300
1992			
1st quarter	6,770	5,870	790
Calcutta			
1991			
1st quarter	980	920	40
2nd quarter	2,890	2,770	50
3rd quarter	2,020	1,940	30
4th quarter	870	850	40
Year	6,760	6,480	160
1992			
1st quarter	1,130	1,080	30
Madras			
1991			
1st quarter	1,540	1,490	50
2nd quarter	3,440	3,380	70
3rd quarter	3,040	2,970	60
4th quarter	1,230	1,180	60
Year	9,250	9,010	230
1992			
1st quarter	1,960	1,900	40
Islamabad			
1991			
1st quarter	6,930	4,600	2,040
2nd quarter	14,050	9,570	3,420
3rd quarter	14,470	8,770	4,150
4th quarter	8,650	4,620	3,050
Year	44,110	27,570	12,650
1992			
1st quarter	7,870	4,350	2,430
Karachi			
1991			
1st quarter	2,720	2,510	250
2nd quarter	8,410	7,290	830
3rd quarter	7,310	6,220	900
4th quarter	4,630	3,660	910
Year	23,070	19,680	2,890
1992			
1st quarter	3,660	2,910	540
Accra			
1991			
1st quarter	3,280	2,320	520
2nd quarter	5,990	4,840	1,060
3rd quarter	6,690	4,920	1,530
4th quarter	3,590	2,470	1,130
Year	19,550	14,550	4,240
1992			
1st quarter	2,710	1,920	820
Lagos			
1991			
1st quarter	13,520	8,960	3,160
2nd quarter	14,340	8,960	3,400
3rd quarter	7,090	9,030	2,530
4th quarter	17,810	12,150	4,980
Year	52,760	39,090	14,070
1992			
1st quarter	11,410	7,210	2,590
Kaduna			
1991			
1st quarter	1,320	1,060	170
2nd quarter	2,040	1,550	360
3rd quarter	2,660	2,150	360
4th quarter	1,960	1,440	520
Year	7,980	6,210	1,420
1992			
1st quarter	1,670	1,160	400

[1] Including applications subsequently withdrawn.

Table 2: Waiting time for persons applying for a visit visa who required a lengthy interview

Number of days

Post	*Waiting time for person interviewed at end of period*		
	June 1991	*January 1992*	*May 1992*
Dhaka	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
New Delhi	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Bombay	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Calcutta	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—

Post	Waiting time for person interviewed at end of period		
	June 1991	January 1992	May 1992
Madras	1	[1]—	[1]—
Islamabad	1	8	9
Karachi	[1]—	3	[4]14
Accra	5	[2]2	[3]9
Lagos	15	[2]5	[3]2
Kaduna	8	[2]8	[3]8

[1] Same day.
[2] At end of December 1990.
[3] At end of March 1991.
[4] At end of April 1992.

Hong Kong

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* British nationals and *(b)* holders of certificates of identity from Hong Kong have been admitted to the United Kingdom in each quarter since January 1991 as (i) persons of independent means, (ii) self-employed persons, (iii) business people (iv) visitors (v) students (vi) husbands and fiancés, (vii) wives and fiancées and (viii) other dependent relatives.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information for British dependent territories citizens and British nationals (overseas) from Hong Kong is given in the table. Data on admissions of holders of certificates of identity from Hong Kong are not available.

Admissions to the United Kingdom of BDTCs and BN(O)s from Hong Kong

Number

Admission category	1991				1992	
	1st quarter	2nd quarter	3rd quarter	4th quarter	Year	1st quarter[1]
Visitors						
ordinary	4,950	9,050	18,400	7,140	39,600	7,700
business	1,090	1,410	1,480	1,400	5,390	1,590
Students	460	300	7,320	1,010	9,100	490
Husbands and fiances[2]	10	20	20	20	60	10
Wives and Fiances[2]	40	40	50	30	170	30
Parents and Grandparents[2]	10	[3]—	[3]—	10	30	[3]—
Children[2]	50	50	120	30	240	20

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] Seeking, or accepted for, settlement in the United Kingdom.
[3] Five or fewer.

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many outstanding immigration applications there are at Lunar house from *(a)* students, *(b)* family members in the United Kingdom applying for variation of stay, *(c)* settlement entry clearance applications referred from overseas posts and *(d)* asylum-seekers; and what are the average times applicants in each category might expect to wait before a decision.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information is that at end of June 1992 there were in total about 20,700 cases in the general immigration caseworking groups—including eastern European cases and referred entry clearance applications—the majority of which were under consideration or the subject of further inquiries, and about 59,700 cases in the asylum and special cases division.

The estimated average length of time between the receipt of an application and the decision, for cases decided in caseworking groups and the public inquiry offices, in the first quarter of 1992, was two months for students and 17½ months for asylum applications. Information on average waiting times for family members in the United Kingdom for variation of leave and for settlement entry clearance applications referred from overseas posts is not available.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were received into prison department establishments under Immigration Act powers during *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 to the latest convenient date, by individual prison establishment; what was the average daily population of persons so detained in each of those years; what was the average length of time spent in detention by persons so detained in each of those years; and whether he will give a breakdown by nationality of persons so detained for each of those years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information about detainees received into prison service establishments in England and Wales under the Immigration Act 1971 in 1991 and the first quarter of 1992 is given by establishment and nationality in the tables.

The provisional average population in 1991, including persons originally received for a criminal offence, was 222. The average period of detention in 1991 is provisionally estimated as about eight weeks. The corresponding averages for the first quarter of 1992 are 216 and just over nine weeks.

Receptions of persons detained under the Immigration Act 1971 into prison service establishments in England and Wales: by establishment, 1991 and March quarter 1992

Number of persons

Establishment	[1]1991	March quarter [1]1992
Remand Centres		
Brinsford	—	2
Brockhill	1	—
Dorchester	—	1
Feltham	10	4
Glen Parva	1	—
Haslar	443	84
Hindley	1	—
Low Newton	—	2
Moorland	—	1
Local Prisons		
Bedford	3	1
Belmarsh	14	6
Birmingham	71	26
Bristol	19	5
Brixton	16	1
Canterbury	36	—

Establishment	March quarter [1]1991	March quarter [1]1992
Cardiff	4	—
Chelmsford	5	—
Dorchester	6	6
Durham	5	1
Exeter	4	8
Gloucester	8	1
Holloway	34	13
Hull	16	2
Leeds	18	7
Leicester	55	6
Lewes	4	2
Lincoln	10	2
Liverpool	4	3
New Hall	2	—
Norwich	18	2
Oxford	6	—
Pentonville	378	68
Preston	14	13
Pucklechurch	2	—
Reading	2	—
Risley	2	—
Shrewsbury	—	2
Swansea	6	—
Winchester	2	1
Wormwood Scrubs	4.	9
All establishments	1,224	279

[1] The figures, which are provisional are those recorded centrally and are approximate: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.

Receptions of persons detained under the Immigration Act 1971 into prison service establishments in England and Wales: by nationality, 1991 and March quarter 1992

Number of persons

Nationality	March quarter [1]1991	March quarter [2]1992
Algeria	8	14
Angola	3	9
Bangladesh	36	7
Colombia	8	2
Cyprus	—	2
Ethiopia	5	—
France	6	5
Germany	2	2
Ghana	33	19
Hong Kong	11	7
India	70	48
Jamaica	12	9
Liberia	—	3
Mauritius	—	2
Morocco	11	5
Netherlands	—	2
Nigeria	76	50
Pakistan	29	13
Romania	6	1
South Africa	1	4
Turkey	26	19
United States of America	2	3
Yugoslavia	4	3
Zaire	28	16
Other nationalities	[2]75	[3]12
Not recorded	772	22
All nationalities	1,224	279

[1] The figures, which are provisional are those recorded centrally and are approximate: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.
[2] Where fewer than five were recorded.
[3] Where fewer than two were recorded.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were detained under Immigration Act powers for a period of more than two months on completion of a custodial sentence during 1991.

Mr. Charles Wardle: During 1991, 36 people were so detained for a period of more than two months. This figure excludes the subjects of deportation orders who served a custodial sentence of seven days or less and in relation to whom the information is not readily available.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons detained under Immigration Act powers applied to the Home Office to be allowed to depart voluntarily under *(a)* the supervised departure provisions and *(b)* the voluntary departure provisions of the immigration rules in each quarter since January 1991.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The readily available information relates to persons subject to deportation action who were removed under the supervised departure procedures, or left voluntarily, and persons dealt with as illegal entrants who left voluntarily. This information is given in tables 14 and 15 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Control of Immigration; Statistics—Third and Fourth Quarters and Year 1991", a copy of which is in the Library. In the first quarter of 1992, 227 persons subject to deportation action were removed under the supervised departure procedures and 15 left voluntarily, and 82 persons dealt with as illegal entrants left voluntarily; these figures are provisional. Most of these persons will have been detained prior to departure. A number will have been subject to restrictions as an alternative to detention, but such cases could be separately identified only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the *(a)* passengers in total and *(b)* persons treated as illegal entrants who were granted temporary admission in 1991 subsequently absconded.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information relates to the number of persons who absconded, either from detention or by failing to respond to the terms of temporary admission/release, and is given in the table. Separate information on these two types of absconder is not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Absconders in 1991

Category of person	Number of persons
Passengers [1]	601
Illegal entrants	168

[1] Includes some absconders recorded as "illegal entrants"

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the European Commission about the entitlement of persons visiting or seeking asylum in other European Community countries to enter the United Kingdom as from 1 January 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have had no discussion with the Commission specifically on these matters, which are considered among the Twelve on an intergovernmental basis outside the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the

decision by the European Court of Justice in the case of Surinder Singh with regard to the enforcement of United Kingdom immigration rules under the treaty of Rome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The case of Mr. Surinder Singh will now be considered by the High Court in the light of the decision by the European Court of Justice on the relevant point of Community law. It would not be appropriate for me to comment in detail on this particular case in advance of the High Court's judgment.

I will carefully study the judgments of both Courts and consider their wider implications, but at present I see no need to amend the immigration rules in the light of the case.

Deportation

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were recommended for deportation with no custodial sentence during *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 to the latest convenient date; and in how many such cases the courts directed release (i) subject to conditions and (ii) without conditions.

Mr. Charles Wardle During 1991, 27 people were recommended for deportation by the courts with no custodial sentence and six during the first half of 1992. The other information requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Special Quota Vouchers

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were waiting for special quota vouchers in *(a)* India, *(b)* east Africa and *(c)* the rest of the world in (i) May 1991 and (ii) December 1991; when those issued with vouchers on those dates had applied; how many vouchers were issued in (1) India, (2) east Africa and (3) the rest of the world in (A) 1991 and (B) the first quarter of 1992; when those applying can now expect to receive vouchers; and how many applicants there were for vouchers in *(v)* India, *(w)* east Africa and *(x)* the rest of the world in *(y)* 1991 and *(z)* the first half of 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information which is currently available is given in the tables.

Table 1
Persons applying for a special voucher for entry to the United Kingdom

Country	Applications newly received[1]		Vouchers issued		Applications awaiting a decision at end of quarter	
	1991	1992 1st quarter	1991	1992 1st quarter	Quarter 2 1991	Quarter 4 1991
India	370	110	600	220	560	480
Kenya	200	50	220	40	550	520
Tanzania	30	10	20	[3]—	80	70
Malawi	[3]—	[4]—	10	[4]—	10	[4]—
Zambia	20	10	20	10	10	[3]—
Rest of the world	20	[4]—	20	[3]—	10	[3]—
Total	640	180	890	270	1,220	1,070

[1] Including applications subsequently withdrawn or lapsed.
[2] Total may differ from sum of countries due to rounding.
[3] Five or fewer.
[4] Nil.

Table 2
Waiting times for persons applying for a special voucher

Months

	Waiting time to main interview for: Persons interviewed at end of quarter			Persons applying at end of quarter[1]
	Quarter 2 1991	Quarter 4 1991	Quarter 1 1992	Quarter 1 1992
India[2]	15·00	6·00	6·00	6·00
Kenya	[3]—	[3]—	n/a	1·25
Tanzania	1·00	1·00	1·00	1·00
Malawi	0·25	0·25	0·25	0·25
Zambia	1·00	1·00	1·00	1·00
Rest of the world	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] Data relate to expected waiting time.
[2] Data relate to non-priority applicants. Priority applicants—widows with a child in the United Kingdom, heads of household aged 65 or over, and special compassionate cases—are interviewed within three months.
[3] = within a week.
n/a Not available.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Home Office has completed a number of relocation reviews as part of the Government's programme to move civil service posts away from London and the south-east. Plans are well advanced for relocation of the prison service headquarters to Derby in 1993-95, the directorate of telecommunications headquarters to Ruddington—near Nottingham—in 1992 and accounts branch to Merseyside in 1991-92—which involve over

1,600 posts moving from the south-east and others from elsewhere in the country. The police national computer organisation is looking at relocation as part of a wider review. The Home Office keeps under review the location of work in accordance with central guidelines.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 June, *Official Report*, column *428*, whether inquiries made by anyone other than the subject of the record cause such temporary records to be retained; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is whether inquiries have been made by the Security Service since the coming into force of the Security Service Act 1989 which determines whether temporary records need to be retained for tribunal purposes in order to comply with the view of the Security Service Commissioner.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Security Service's policy in relation to temporary records made since the coming into effect of the Security Service Act 1989 after they become more than three years old.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: If they have not by that time been converted into permanent files, or destroyed because no inquiries had been made on the subject since the coming into force of the Act, such temporary records are retained for the purposes of the complaints tribunal.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many records in the categories referred to in paragraph 24 of the Security Service Commissioner's report for 1991 (Cm 1946) have not been destroyed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In cases where no inquiries have been made since the coming into force of the 1989 Act, the Security Service's policy, in accordance with the view of the commissioner, is that no files in the cateogories referred to should be retained.

Empty Housing

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of empty residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham in the ownership of the Metropolitan police and the type of accommodation available; how long each property has been vacant; and what is the intended future use.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is as follows:

Property	*Type*	*Number of units*	*Period vacant months*	*Future use*
Haverlock house, Forest Hill	Flat	1	15	Awaiting allocation
	Flat	1	11	Awaiting allocation
	Flat	1	10	Awaiting allocation
	Flat	1	9	Awaiting allocation
	Flat	1	8	Awaiting allocation
	Flat	2	6	Awaiting allocation
The Hermitage, Forest Hill	Flat	1	2	On offer
	Flat	1	1 week	Awaiting allocation
Moore house, Willow way, Sydenham	Flat	1	13	Under review
	Flat	1	9	Under review
	Flat	1	5	Under review
	Flat	1	2 weeks	Under review
103 Ronver road	House	1	8	On offer
44 Ravensbourne park	House	1	9	On offer
10 Forestholme close	House	1	7	On offer
21 Forestholme close	House	1	3	On offer
1 Arne walk	House	1	3 weeks	Under review
44 Longton grove	House	1	5	On offer

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of empty residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham in the ownership of his Department, the type of accommodation available and how long each property has been vacant; and what is the intended future use.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no empty residential properties owned by the Department in the London borough of Lewisham.

Overseas Voters

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of sending annual reminders to overseas voters wishing to register under the Representation of the People Act 1989 for each year since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Annual reminders are sent to overseas electors by electoral registration officers. Details of the costs are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the Government's total

budget for advertising and publicising the new provisions for overseas voting *(a)* in the Representation of the People Act 1985 and *(b)* in the Representation of the People Act 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The total costs of advertising the provisions of the Representation of the People Acts 1985 and 1989 were £279,000 and £705,000 respectively. In addition, £1,400 was spent in 1991 on updating posters used in British diplomatic posts abroad.

British National Party

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the seizure of literature from the BNP headquarters in Welling earlier in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: On Thursday 9 January, the Metropolitan police searched the headquarters of the British National party. A search warrant had been granted in the belief that material inciting racial hatred might be found there.

A number of magazines were seized and submitted to the Crown prosecution service for advice as to whether the possession and distribution of them constituted offences under the Race Relations and Public Order Acts.

The police have been informed that, in counsel's opinion, the articles were insufficient to justify prosecution.

Female Circumcision

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government are taking to prevent young girls being taken out of the United Kingdom to be circumcised.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A person may apply to a court for an order to prohibit the removal of a child from the country, if he has reasonable grounds to believe that the child if taken abroad would suffer harm. The police at airports and seaports maintain a list, which is also given to the immigration service, of children who are believed to be under threat of removal. Immigration officers are instructed to check this list when a child embarks alone or in the company of one parent or an adult who is not a parent, and to notify any identified subject of the list to a police officer.

Obscene Publications Act 1959

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in England and Wales in each of the last 10 years under section 2 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959; and of those found guilty what sentence was imposed.

Mr. Jack: The information is given in the table.

Number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under section 2 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 as amended by section 1 of the Obscene Publications Act 1964, 1981 to 1990

England and Wales

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Total prosecuted	347	282	491	583	275	129	121	158	125	174
Total found guilty	211	234	370	429	226	126	93	130	96	116
Total sentenced	208	235	370	429	225	129	93	130	96	118
Absolute discharge	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	3	—	—
Conditional discharge	10	9	6	13	11	3	4	8	1	5
Fine	136	128	248	291	130	80	63	77	53	57
Probation order	—	—	1	—	3	1	2	3	2	1
Community service order	2	1	3	3	4	1	4	1	1	4
Fully suspended sentence	39	39	60	77	50	20	10	17	17	30
Immediate custody	21	56	50	42	25	15	10	18	19	19
Otherwise dealt with	—	2	—	3	1	9	—	3	3	2

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many items have been seized under section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 by the Metropolitan police in each year of the last 10 years.

Mr. Jack: Figures for 1982 to 1984 are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1985 to 1992 are as follows:

Year	*Warrants executed*	*Items seized*
1985	52	286,511
1986	46	560,047
1987	90	813,243
1988	101	655,119
1989	166	356,478
1990	142	120,821
1991	116	34,696
[1]1992	36	5,007

[1]January to May only.

The decline in numbers of items seized, as opposed to the number of warrants executed, is accounted for by the obscene publications branch's concentration of effort on cases involving child pornography, in which typical seizures involve fewer individual articles.

South Wales Police

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 7 July, *Official Report*, column *131* if he will make a statement on the reasons for deciding not to revise his assessment of uniform needs of the south Wales police following the undertaken assessment of the urban/rural split in the south Wales area.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We have undertaken to include the definition of urban and rural areas in our review of the allocation formula. Decisions on the next round of allocations to individual forces will be informed of the outcome.

Michael Shirley

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the result of the inquiry into the conviction for murder of Michael Shirley.

Mr. Jack: Mr. Shirley's case is currently being considered in the light of a recently received police report and representations from his solicitor. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as a decision has been reached.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is being taken to end the hunger strike of Michael Shirley at Long Lartin prison.

Mr. Jack: The medical officer is closely monitoring Mr. Michael Shirley's condition in the prison hospital and, although he has refused food since 26 June, he is accepting liquids. Physically, he is stable and staff continue to counsel him to persuade him to end his protest.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms. Hoey) of 15 June, *Official Report*, column *376*, if he will provide comparable information for the periods *(a)* 1 October 1990 to 31 March 1991 and *(b)* 1 October 1991 to 31 March 1992; and what changes in policy with regard to asylum decisions there have been since April 1991.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on decisions on asylum applications taken in the periods 1 October 1990 to 31 March 1991 and 1 October 1991 to 31 March 1992 is given in the table.

There have been no changes in policy in making decisions: applications continue to be determined according to article 1 of the 1951 United Nations refugees convention. Procedural measures were introduced in November 1991 to require all undocumented applicants to attend an interview to establish identity, and to reduce other opportunities for fraud.

Decisions[1] on asylum applications, excluding dependants

	1 October 1990 to 31 March 1991	*[2]1 October 1991 to 31 March 1992*
Granted asylum	350	250
Granted exceptional leave	1,435	2,035
Refused asylum and exceptional leave after determination of case	510	1,165
Refused on safe third country grounds	[3]20	250
Refused under paragraph 101 of the Immigration Rules[4,5]	—	4,730

[1] Provisional figures rounded to nearest 5.
[2] Figures may understate because of delays in recording.
[3] Figure for 1 January 1991–31 March 1991 only. These refusals for 1 October 1990–31 December 1990 are included in "Refused asylum and exceptional leave after determination of case".
[4] For failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, including failure to respond to invitations to interview to establish identity.
[5] Separate figures only available from 1 December 1991. Prior to this, these refusals are included in "Refused asylum and exceptional leave after determination of case".

Police Helicopter Use

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the contracts for each police force in England and Wales for the full-time or part-time use of helicopters; what is the availability for each area; and what is the annual cost in each area.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The operation of police air support units is a matter for chief constables. The table shows the information which is available centrally on the 14 air support units which operate helicopters.

It would not be in the operational interest of the police to disclose details of the availability of helicopters.

Air support unit	*Type of helicopter*	*Owner*	*Operator*	*Maintenance*	*Pilotage*	*Estimated cost 1992-93 £000s*
West Mercia and Staffordshire	MBB BO 105 DB	Veritair Ltd.	Veritair Ltd.	Veritair Ltd.	Veritair Ltd.	570
Devon and Cornwall	MBB BO 105 DBS4	Devon and Cornwall Police Authority	Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	Aeromega Helicopters	516
Dyfed Powys	Aerospatiale AS 355N	Dyfed Powys Police Authority	Dyfed Powys Police	McAlpine Helicopters	Dyfed Powys Police Authority	295
Essex	Aerospatiale AS 355 F1	Aeromega Ltd.	Aeromega Ltd.	Aeromega Ltd.	Aeromega Ltd.	455
Greater Manchester	Aerospatiale AS 355 F2	Greater Manchester Police	Greater Manchester Police	McAlpine Helicopters	Operational Support Services Ltd.	466
Merseyside	Aerospatiale AS 355	Merseyside Police Authority	Operational Support Services Ltd.	McAlpine Helicopters	Operational Support Services Ltd.	487
Metropolitan	3 × Bell 222	Metropolitan Police	Metropolitan Police	Metropolitan Police	Bristow Helicopters	1,800
Northumbria	Aerospatiale AS 355 F1	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	800

Air support unit	Type of helicopter	Owner	Operator	Maintenance	Pilotage	Estimated cost 1992-93 £000s
Sussex	MBB BO 105 DBS-4	Police Aviation Services	Sussex Police	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	707
Thames Valley	Aerospatiale AS 355 F1	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	500
Warwickshire	Schweizer 300C	Warwickshire Constabulary	Warwickshire Constabulary	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	110
West Midlands	Aerospatiale AS 355 F2	West Midlands Police Authority	West Midlands Police	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	570
West Yorkshire	MBB BO 105 DBS4	West Yorkshire Police Authority	West Yorkshire Police	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	439
Wiltshire	MBB BO 105D	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	Police Aviation Services	490

Prison Visitors

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many black and ethnic minority people were appointed to the board of visitors of prisons in England and Wales in the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In 1990-91, 195 appointments were made to boards of visitors.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been taken by his Department to increase black and ethnic minority representations on the boards of visitors of prisons in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In making appointments to a board of visitors, consideration is given to the abilities of the individual candidate to discharge the duties effectively and the desirability of maintaining, so far as possible, a representative balance on the board in terms, for example, of age, sex and social and ethnic background. No fewer than two members of the board are required to be justices of the peace. The membership of individual boards is reviewed every three years.

Advice on the selection and appointment of new members forms part of the training of chairmen of boards of visitors and is also included in the "Notes for the guidance of Chairmen" in the "Handbook for Members of Boards of Visitors", a copy of which I have placed in the library.

The current ethnic make-up of boards is as follows:

Percentage of members in post on 7 July 1992

Ethnic origin	Percentage
Asian	2.31
Black	3.80
White	64.15
Other	0.25
Not known	29.49

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appointments were made to the boards of visitors of prisons in England and Wales in the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The figures for 1990-91 are given. These do not include those 63 members who were appointed during the relevant period but have since resigned; this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Number appointed to Boards of Visitors 1990-91

Ethnic Origin	Number
Asian	1
Black	2
White	59
Other	0
Not known[1]	70

[1] The figures are based upon self-assessment and not all members choose to disclose their ethnic origin.

Bail

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will introduce legislation to give the prosecution the right of appeal to a judge in chambers on the ground that bail has been unreasonably granted by magistrates.

Mr. Jack: We have no immediate plans to do so; but we have received a representation on this point and it will be considered as part of our wider exercise of examining the issues affecting the bail decision-taking process.

Miss Megan Bloem

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the appeal by Miss Megan Bloem case B 500534 will be determined.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* When the Home Office has prepared an explanatory statement setting out the facts and the reasons for the decision, it will be for the immigration appellate authorities to arrange for the appeal to be heard.

Police Retirements

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what is the number of early retirements from the police on medical grounds for each police force for each of the last three years.

Mr. Wardle: I will write to the hon. Member.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Protective Equipment

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if a thimble is too small to carry a mechanical pictogram CE mark as described in annex 11, section 2.12 of the personal protective equipment directive, how big it should be before it is exempt.

Mr. Sainsbury: All PPE units covered by the personal protective equipment directive 89/686/EEC are required to bear the CE mark both on the unit, regardless of its size, and its packaging. Thimbles for private use are not covered by the directive. Those for professional use are.

A Commission proposal on the CE mark currently under discussion would, if adopted as currently drafted, amend the directive and other new approach directives to provide for the mark to be affixed to the packaging or other associated documentation where for practical reasons it cannot be placed on the unit itself.

Paragraph 2.12 of annex II of the directive relates to identification or recognition marks other than the CE mark.

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: Over the next 12 months, I shall continue to follow up specific commitments relevant to my Department in the White paper Cm 1200 "This Common Inheritance" in the subsequent "First Year Report", Cm 1655, and in the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio on 12 June. I shall also be giving priority to the further development of a strategy for integrating environmental considerations into the day-to-day management of my Department.

For the longer term, I will continue to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into the development of all the policies and programmes of my Department where relevant. I shall also continue the practice established by my predecessor of including a report on the environmental aspects of my Department's activities in the annual trade and industry expenditure plans.

Certification Industry

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of resources available to the National Accreditation Council for Certification Bodies to enable it to respond to the expansion in the certification industry both in Europe and internationally;

(2) in what circumstances Government purchasers and regulatory bodies are willing to accept third party certification in lieu of separate supplier assessments;

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the measures that were introduced in 1985 to improve the competence of certification bodies;

(4) what is the Government's policy in respect of competition amongst certification bodies;

(5) what restrictions exist on a certification body which has received Government accreditation as attestation of competence for a function from offering a non-accredited service for the same function;

(6) what assessment his Department has made of the sufficiency of information technology expertise in the National Accreditation Council for Certification Bodies and supporting industry structures, to ensure continued development and expansion of certification services in the field of information technology.

Mr. Leigh: Since accreditation of certification bodies in the United Kingdom, is confined to United Kingdom bodies or others under United Kingdom jurisdiction, the role of the National Accreditation Council for Certification Bodies is limited to providing advice on the suitability or otherwise of such bodies. There is therefore no direct resource implication for the NACCB resulting from the expansion of the certification industry in Europe and internationally. In addition, the NACCB recoups the full economic costs of its assessments through the fees it charges; and increase in its workload which might occur would therefore generally be self-financing.

The NACCB has adequate resources to finance its consequential work to promote the development of and co-operation between national accreditation systems throughout Europe including participation in international discussion of accreditation issues.

Information Technology

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration his Department has given to possible confusion concerning the status and standing of BSi QA within the information technology industry.

Mr. Leigh: BSi Quality Assurance is a commercial business offering certification services. As it forms part of the British Standards Institution it could be perceived that BSi QA is the only body which may offer certification to British Standards. In fact, a number of other certification bodies have also been accredited to offer such services and yet others may apply in the future. Officials in my Department take every opportunity to advise enquirers from the IT industry that competition exists in the market for certification services, and that the DTI QA register contains names and addresses of all the certification bodies and the services they offer. The register is available from HMSO and a copy is located in the House of Commons Library.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment has been made of the costs of establishing IT certification conducted by qualified IT-literate specialists relative to the costs of damage done by low IT-skilled auditors.

Mr. Leigh: IT-literate specialists are now able to qualify as auditors for software quality management system certification following introduction of the TickIT scheme. This scheme was initiated at the behest of both the United Kingdom information technology industry and IT users more widely. My Department has supported development of the TickIT Guide, TickIT auditor qualifications, a professional auditor register, and auditor training course material. The scheme seeks to improve the standard of IT

quality management system—QMS—auditing and to date more than 35 auditors have qualified under the TickIT scheme.

Both IT suppliers and users perceive considerable benefit in the use of qualified IT professionals as auditors, because added value can accrue through having experienced IT practitioners examine and comment on company QMS. The cost/benefit of this approach is also evident through the enthusiasm with which industry at large is beginning to adopt TickIT, and more than 60 companies have achieved certification under this scheme.

A copy of the TickIT guide is located in the House of Commons Library.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give details of the number, and names of all TickIT-accredited bodies which have gained full acceptance by the European Organisation for Testing and Certification.

Mr. Leigh: EOTC is the European Organisation for Testing and Certification. It is an umbrella body which oversees ECITC—the European Committee on information technology certification—a sectoral committee which in turn oversees the ITQS agreement group, the recognition arrangement for assessment and certification of quality systems in information technology. Agreement groups comprise signatories to arrangements for the mutual recognition of certificates relating to the provision of services. ITQS has as its remit the certification of IT quality management systems, using a common set of rules based on European and International standards.

There are four certification bodies accredited for TickIT in the United Kingdom—BSi Quality Assurance, Bureau Veritas Quality International Ltd, Det Norske Veritas Quality Assurance, of which the first named is also a member of EOTC.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what current or planned initiatives exist aimed at developing the European information technology industry.

Mr. Leigh: In accordance with the EC Industry Council resolution on electronics, information and communications technologies of 18 November 1991, the European Commission is carrying out a number of studies in this field; and is setting up a centralised point of information to monitor marketing, market access and distribution practices. In addition the Community's ESPRIT and Telematics R and D programmes aim to strengthen the European science and technology base in IT.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the relationship and possible competition between the TickIT scheme and BSi QA *(a)* domestically and *(b)* in the international community.

Mr. Leigh: TickIT is a scheme which provides for accredited independent certification of quality management systems—QMS—in the software development process in the United Kingdom. Its use internationally is also welcome and there is growing interest from outside the UK.

BSi QA is a commercial business, offering certification services, including services within the TickIT scheme. It is understood that BSi QA offer TickIT accredited certification both domestically and internationally. BSI QA has also offered non-accredited certification in the information technology field; it has furthermore received accreditation by the relevant authority in the Netherlands for provision of certification services in IT.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has to further information technology certification, to underpin the interoperability of telecommunications, computer and software technology.

Mr. Leigh: My Department's approach is that credible IT conformance testing can greatly assist progress towards interoperability. It may be expected that as conformance testing becomes increasingly adopted by the market, so should certification become increasingly influential in promoting user confidence in interoperable products. Therefore my Department is already providing support in establishing a testing infrastructure including the establishment of an United Kingdom open systems interconnection test service.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give details of the arrangements his Department is making to permit other countries to use the TickIT mark.

Mr. Leigh: TickIT-accredited certification bodies can assess and certificate company quality management systems in any country in the world. Following a successful assessment, the certification body issues a certificate and permits use of the TickIT mark on that certificated company's stationery and literature. My powers do not extend to accreditation of bodies which are not legal entities in the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom has been approached by several countries wishing to participate in the TickIT scheme. This they are able to do either by use of the existing TickIT accredited certification bodies or by agreeing to a suitable reciprocal arrangement between their national accreditation body and the United Kingdom National Accreditation Council for Certification Bodies.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give details of the measures his Department has taken to encourage TickIT-accredited bodies to join the Information Technology Quality Systems arrangement.

Mr. Leigh: BSi QA is a TickIT accredited certification body and a founder member of ITQS. My Department has explained fully the benefits of joining the ITQS agreement group to the other TickIT certification bodies.

CFCs

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research he has commissioned into substitutes for chlorofluorocarbons in technologies where CFCs are currently regarded as essential components; and what chemicals are involved.

Mr. Leigh: There is a continuous programme of research by industry worldwide into ozone-benign alternatives to chlorofluorocarbons. The programme has had a number of successes including the announcement by ICI on 1 July of their new ozone-benign refrigerant, KLEA 32.

The DTI encourages industry-led research into environmentally-friendly technologies through a number of schemes of financial support and these schemes are open both to producers of alternatives to CFCs and to those developing cleaner process technologies which reduce or eliminate the need for CFC-based substances.

Nuclear Levy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received from the Major Energy Users Council over the level of profits accruing to Nuclear Electric as a result of the nuclear levy.

Mr. Eggar: I recently met representatives of the Major Energy Users Council to discuss electricity prices for their members. The non-fossil fuel levy was one of a number of matters raised.

North Sea Oil and Gas

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his latest estimate of the cost of abandonment of oil and gas production related structures in the British sector of the North sea.

Mr. Eggar: The cost of abandonment of oil and gas production installations, currently producing or under development in the United Kingdom continental shelf, is estimated to be in the region of £6 billion in 1992 money. The expenditure will take place over a long period, extending well into the next century.

Business Expansion

Ms. Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the availability of long-term finance to small and medium-sized businesses seeking funding for expansion and capital reconstruction.

Mr. Leigh: The vigour and dynamism of small and medium-sized businesses over the past 12 years show that their capital needs for start-up, expansion and re-construction are largely being met from the expanding range of public and private sources. Government initiatives have complemented the role of the banks and other financial institutions. We will continue to encourage everyone concerned to take account of the special needs and potential of this sector, including the need for long-term finance.

Enterprise Funds

Ms. Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what provision is currently available for unquoted companies in *(a)* north Staffordshire, *(b)* Staffordshire, *(c)* west midlands and *(d)* all other regions wishing to secure enterprise funds for investment.

Mr. Sainsbury: Companies in all regions have access to a variety of sources of capital for investment. In certain areas, including parts of the west midlands but not the North Staffordshire travel-to-work areas, certain regional industrial incentives, are available from my Department, notably regional selective assistance.

Fuel Cell Technology

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what consideration he is giving to a combination of combined heat and power technology, and solid oxide fuel cells;

(2) what support he is giving to research on solid oxide fuel cells;

(3) if he will make a statement on the work of the energy support unit at Harwell in relation to fuel cell technology;

(4) what action he is taking to promote the use of existing skills in the United Kingdom to promote the development of solid polymer fuel cell technology.

Mr. Eggar: On 11 March this year, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State announced a research programme to accelerate the development of fuel cell systems for early application in the United Kingdom. He also announced the appointment of a fuel cell advisory panel with members who are experts from industry, to advise and provide guidance on the content of the programme.

In forming this programme, the Department of Energy, now the DTI, consulted with researchers and industry and commissioned studies which indicate that the United Kingdom has technical skills and industrial interests needed to advance the development of two fuel cell types, the solid oxide and solid polymer. While this programme is likely to concentrate on the development of the technologies, it will be guided by potential applications such as combined heat and power.

The energy technology support unit at Harwell will act as the DTI's agent for managing the programme.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will institute a study of legislation in the state of California relating to zero pollution emissions, and the use of fuel cells in hydrogen.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has already undertaken a number of studies on fuel cells and I refer the hon. Member to my answers to his other questions today. On the matter of californian state emissions regulations, these are well documented in technical publications and are available to the public.

Steel Production

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the volume of steel production in the United Kingdom in the first quarter of this year and in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sainsbury: Information on steel production is regularly published in "Economic Trends" which is available in the Library of the House.

Government Departments (Payment of Bills)

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the outcome of the survey of prompt payment by Government Departments.

Mr. Leigh: During the financial year 1991-92, major purchasing Government Departments and agencies undertook sample surveys to determine the percentage of invoices paid within the agreed credit period, or within 30 days where no credit period had been set. All but two departments reported results in the range 70 to 100 per cent.

The full details are:

Department	*Invoices paid within contract terms or 30 days percentage*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	77·0
Customs and Excise	83·0
Defence	89·3
Education and Science	83·2
Employment Service	83·0
Energy	91·8
Foreign and Commonwealth	86·0
Health	85·0
Health and Safety Executive	86·6
Inland Revenue	99·0
Lord Chancellor's Department	82·5
National Savings	93·0
Northern Ireland Office	74·0
Overseas Development Administration	87·6
Property Services Agency	
Building Management	41·6
Projects	80·6
Scottish Office	82·0
Social Security	90·4
Trade and Industry	80·0
Transport	83·0
Welsh Office	65·0

I have asked that Departments continue to monitor their payment performance and that individual Departments report that performance on request.

Regional Financial Assistance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the public sector cost per additional permanent job created as a result of regional financial assistance schemes, excluding multiplier effects.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 6 July 1992]*: I refer the hon. Member to the report published in 1990 by HMSO, "Regional Selective Assistance an evaluation by DTI, IDS and WOID", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

National Economic Development Office

Mr. Adley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives he intends to take following the decision to wind up the National Economic Development Office.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 8 July 1992]*: I announced on 3 July my plans to reorganise the Department of Trade and Industry to enable it to concentrate more on promoting the competitiveness of British industry and commerce, and to relate more closely to industry, sector by sector. The new organisation will encourage the establishment of a flexible and direct dialogue with industry. The Department is inviting inward secondees from industry to join civil servants in the new sectorial divisions, and I also expect to fill a small number of posts with staff drawn from the National Economic Development Office.

RETEX

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons *(a)* he has decided not to forward the Nottinghamshire county council's bid for funding under the RETEX programme and *(b)* he has not offered Nottinghamshire country council and explanation of his decision; and how many such bids so far have met the EC's criteria for the programme, indicating which bids.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 8 July 1992]*: No decisions have yet been taken about any requests for RETEX funding. The RETEX scheme of European Community grants was announced on 4 June 1992. The UK and other member states have until 4 December to present operational programmes to the Commission. The Commission will have six months to consider them. When it has approved them, applications for funding can be considered.

Mr. Straw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which travel-to-work areas in Lancashire are eligible for consideration under the EC RETEX initiative; what representations he has received in respect of Blackburn's eligibility; and by what dates decisions have to be made by Her Majesty's Government, and by the EC Commission.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* The European Commission has decided that RETEX grants for textile dependent areas will not be available outside areas designated under structural funds objectives 1, 2 and 5(b). The travel to work areas of Accrington and Rossendale, Blackburn, Bolton and Bury, Burnley, Liverpool, Pendle, Rochdale and Wigan and St. Helens, which lie wholly or partly in Lancashire, are so designated.

Representations about Blackburn have been received from a number of local interests.

The United Kingdom and other member states have until 4 December 1992 to present operational programmes to the European Commission. Pursuant to article 14(3) of Council regulation EEC 4253/88, the European Commission wil have six months from the receipt of the programmes to decide on the assistance.

Timeshare Act 1992

Mr. Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he now expects to lay the necessary orders to bring the Timeshare Act 1992 into effect.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* I expect to lay the printed notices orders required under the Act within the next two to three weeks. It is intended that the Act should enter into force two months after the laying of these orders.

Coal Industry

Mr. Patchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the European Energy Council last discussed the British coal industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* Prospects for the coal industry were last discussed by the Energy Council in 1986 in the context of the current state aids decision which commenced the following year.

HEALTH

NHS Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the numbers of *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* hospital doctors and dentists and *(c)* nurses and midwives have changed since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested at 30 September for England is shown in the table.

	1979	*1990*	*Per cent. change*
General Practitioners	21,357	25,622	20·0
Hospital Doctors and Dentists	32,749·1	40,576·2	23·9
Nurses and Midwives:			
Including agency staff	358,446·5	402,066·4	12·2
Excluding agency staff	354,421·5	395,361·0	11·6

All figures are in whole-time equivalents except for general practitioners, where whole-time equivalents are not available for 1979; actual numbers are used instead for both years. 30 September is the latest date for which this information is available.

Psychologists

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is her Department's target figure for training places for clinical psychologists; what assessment her Department has made of the projected demand from *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* local authorities for clinical psychologists; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what assessment she has made of the demand for clinical psychologists *(a)* currently and *(b)* in 1991; and what estimate she has made of the extent to which the demand was met in each of these periods.

Mr. Yeo: It is for national health service employers to determine the work force they require and the training staff they need, in the light of the services they are contracted to provide. Regional health authorities, in consultation with employers, which include family health services authorities and local authority social services departments, calculate the overall demand for training and purchase the required number of training places from the educational and training institutions on behalf of the employers.

Regional health authorities purchased 178 training places for clinical psychologists in 1991 and have signed contracts to purchase 215 places in 1992.

Brain Damage

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is currently taking to assist individual districts and units to provide an adequate service to meet the needs of long-term brain-damaged people; if she will provide central funding in each region above and beyond normal allocations for such patients; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: We have recently launched an initiative to improve national health service services for the rehabilitation and long-term support of people with brain injury. Central funding of £1 million per year is being provided to 12 sites around the country to develop model services. The selected sites, with funding for 1992-93, are:

Regional rehabilitation centre, Hunters Moor hospital, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (£40,000);
Leeds general infirmary and Leeds community services (£80,000);
Derbyshire royal infirmary and Derby city hospital (£75,000);
Nottingham health authority (£75,000);
Central Sheffield university hospitals (£70,000);
Regional Neurological rehabilitation unit, Homerton hospital, London (£150,000);
Rivermead rehabilitation centre, Oxford (£70,000);
Rayners Hedge physical rehabilitation service, Aylesbury (£40,000);
Stroke and rehabilitation unit, Royal Cornwall hospital (City), Truro (£65,000);
Frenchay healthcare services, Bristol (£200,000);
Neurobehavioural rehabilitation unit, St. Edward's hospital, Cheddleton, and Neurological rehabilitation unit, Haywood hospital, Burslem (£90,000);
Community unit, Worcester district health authority (£90,000).

Out-patient Treatment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider including as a further national charter standard in the patients charter to ensure continuity of care that health authorities should require that when a patient has a series of out-patient appointments, then whenever possible the same doctor should attend the patient; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Patients attending hospital out-patient clinics are under the care of a named consultant who provides continuity of care. The consultant oversees a team of doctors, including junior doctors on rotation, and is responsible for ensuring that they undertake work within their competence.

Service Committee Decisions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will take steps to ensure that family health service authorities give reasons to the patient for decisions reached when cases are disposed of by service committees without an oral hearing; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will ensure that when an appeal from a family health service authority service committee is heard by her, the patient is given reasons for the decision reached by her; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunal) Regulations 1992 govern the investigation of complaints against family practitioners. These require service committees, whether or not an oral hearing is held, to give reasons for their findings in their reports to family health services authorities which are sent to the patients involved. Similarly, the regulations require my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to give reasons for her decisions on appeals and it is standard practice to do so.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ensure that where district health authorities are merged there is *(a)* an adequate period for consultations between the regional health authority and community health councils involved in any possible merger and *(b)* a formal appeals machinery independent of the regional health authority to handle any appeals from community health councils with the appeals panel having powers to impose its judgment which would be binding on both parties; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Regional health authorities which propose to merge district health authorities should allow an adequate period for consultation with interested parties, including community health councils.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will not approve a proposal for merger unless she is satisfied that

it commands a broad measure of support locally. In these circumstances, we do not see a need for a separate appeals panel.

Regional Secure Units

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation, in the light of the Reed committee's recommendations on regional provision for seriously mentally disordered offenders placed in regional secure units, *(a)* to separate these units from the purchaser or provider system, *(b)* to arrange their funding through regional health authorities and *(c)* to arrange for the monitoring of agreed standards of provision; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: We expect the steering committee for the review of services for mentally disordered offenders to submit its final report at the end of July. We will announce decisions when we have considered both the final report and the responses to consultation on the recommendations the committee has already made.

The performance of health authorities in achieving any standards adopted or objectives set in the light of the review will be monitored through the existing accountability arrangements.

Diabetes

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Novopen syringe tips can be provided to diabetics free of charge under the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: Syringe tips, which incorporate needles, may be provided free of charge through hospital consultants if they are judged to be clinically necessary and the health authority, having regard to its other priorities, is able to meet the cost. We are considering authorising general practitioners to prescribe both injection pens and needles free of charge providing resources allow.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the number of civil servants in her Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Sackville: The relocation of the national health service management executive and the National Health Service Estates agency to Leeds has started. Some 1,000 posts up to the highest management levels are involved. The first moves from London took place on 6 July as planned. By October this year, over 500 posts will have relocated, with the remainder following next spring. The whole move is expected to have been completed by the summer of 1993.

Growth Hormone

Miss Joan Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has any plans to compensate the families of victims of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease contracted from growth hormone injections extracted from cadavers.

Mr. Yeo: We have no plans for specific compensation but the full range of support services and benefits appropriate to people with disabilities and their families is available.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the breaches of the voluntary agreements on tobacco advertising reported in the third and fourth annual reports of the committee for monitoring the agreements on tobacco advertising and sponsorship occurred in Oxford.

Dr Mawhinney: The proportion reported in the third annual report was 35 per cent.—seven out of a total of 20. In the fourth report, this proportion was 77 per cent.—21 out of 27.

Community Care

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS patients had written community care plans at the time of their discharge from hospital in 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not held centrally.

Accident and Emergency Services

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average waiting time for initial assessment in accident and emergency departments in 1991-92; and what proportion of people attending accident and emergency departments had to wait *(a)* five minutes or more, *(b)* 15 minutes or more and *(c)* 30 minutes or more.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Health Authority Amalgamations

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy towards the amalgamation of district health authorities with family health service authorities; whether consultation with the medical profession is required before proposals are submitted to her; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Merger between district health authorities and family health services authorities was identified in "Working for Patients" as a possible long-term option. However, this would require changes to primary legislation, and we have no immediate plans for taking this forward. Primary and secondary care have complementary roles in implementing the "Health of the Nation" strategy. District health authorities and family health services authorities will need to work closely together to improve health. There is substantial scope for this within the current arrangements, for example joint strategies, health investment plans, managerial and public health appointments.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy towards the amalgamation of district health authorities in the North West Thames region; what evidence she has that larger purchasing authorities are more effective in obtaining services from NHS trust hospitals; what consideration she is giving to the need for co-terminosity in a borough such as Hillingdon; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: North West Thames regional health authority has been consulting locally on proposals for

changing district health authorities boundaries to match those of family health services authorities and social services. A public meeting was held on 9 June 1992. We expect any proposals for changing the boundaries of district health authorities to have local support and to demonstrate clear benefits for patients.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of NHS hospitals and trusts had published on or before 1 April their current maximum admission times for each specialty; and which hospital or trust had the longest and which one had the shortest waiting time at 1 April in each specialty;

(2) if she will list the health authorities in England which at 1 April *(a)* had and *(b)* had not published detailed information on local health services including quality standards and maximum waiting times.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. From 1 April, under the patients charter, patients have a right to be given detailed information on local health services. Health authorities are required to publish information about local health services including national and local charter standards and maximum waiting times. From 1 April 1993, health authorities will also have to publish information about their performance in relation to national and local charter standards.

The national health service management executive will be asking regional health authorities to notify them of any instances where information as set out in the patients charter is not made freely available to the public.

Complaints Procedure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS complaints received between 1 April 1991 and 31 March 1992 were dealt with within *(a)* one week, *(b)* one month, *(c)* three months and *(d)* more than three months.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the health authorities and NHS trusts in England which at 1 April *(a)* had and *(b)* had not published a complaints procedure allowing members of the public to have any complaint investigated and to receive a prompt written reply from the chief executive or general manager; and which authorities had, at 1 April, published the number of complaints received and the time taken to deal with them.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally. However, all health authorities are required, by directions issued under the Hospital Complaints Procedure Act 1985, to make formal arrangements for dealing with complaints and for publishing these. The proper investigation of complaints is very important to patients and the national health service, and is one of the three new rights given in the patients charter. From 1 April 1992, under the patients charter, health authorities and NHS hospitals will have to publish details of the numbers of complaints received and the time taken to deal with them.

Wheelchair Accessibility

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the floor space of NHS buildings was accessible to people in wheelchairs as at 1 April.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally.

Surgery Cancellations

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients had their operations cancelled on the day they were due to arrive in hospital in 1991-92.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what proportion of cases an emergency ambulance arrived within 14 minutes in an urban area and within 19 minutes in a rural area in 1991-92.

Mr. Sackville: The latest available figures for England for 1990-91 are given in the table.

	percentage
Emergency calls: Response times: Metropolitan authorities	—
Percentage of calls where response within 14 minutes	83·2
Emergency calls: Response times: Non-metropolitan authorities	—
Percentage of calls where response within 20 minutes	94·8

Before 1991-92, ambulance services in England were categorised as metropolitan and non-metropolitan. Figures were collected for the number of emergency ambulances arriving within 14 and 20 minutes repsectively.

Appointment System

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS out-patients were given specific appointment times in 1991-92; and what proportion were seen within 30 minutes of their appointment time.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the country of residence of women listed as overseas residents in the abortion statistics for the last year in which the information is available.

Mr. Sackville: In the publication of abortion statistics, a distinction is made between those abortions carried out on women resident in England and Wales and those on women not resident in England and Wales. Of the latter, the statistics are classified by three main areas of residence: British Isles, other European, and rest of the world. Within each of these three categories, individual countries of residence are shown where the number of abortions to residents of that country exceeds 24. Countries listed in this way are shown in table 25 of the publication "Abortion Statistics 1990", a copy of which is held in the library.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average charge approved by his Department for a non-NHS abortion in 1990.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available in the form requested. The Department approves scales of charges.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates in the year preceding 15 November 1991, the South Manchester abortion clinic, Stockport was inspected by her Department; and if she will list the recommendations that were made regarding the clinic in the report produced by her inspectors.

Mr. Sackville: The South Manchester private clinic was inspected by the Department's officers on 13 March 1991, and 30 October 1991. The contents of inspection reports are not made public as they contain information which relates or could be related to individual patients.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what scale of charges she has approved for an abortion conducted in a private clinic through the use of RU486.

Mr. Sackville: Information required from places seeking approval under section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967 is supplied to the Department on an "in confidence" basis.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations regarding care of the mother she has made concerning abortions conducted with RU486.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson), on 3 July at column *746*.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made by her Department in investigating the state of the South Manchester Abortion Clinic Stockport, following the presentation of the report by Stockport health authority dated 15 November 1991 by the hon. Members for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) and for Liverpool, Mossley Hill to her predecessor.

Mr. Sackville: Following the discovery of deficiencies contravening the requirements of the Registered Homes Act 1984, Stockport health authority set the owners of the South Manchester private clinic a strict timetable for completion of remedial work. All necessary work was completed on time.

Dentistry

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the average waiting time for a course of dental treatment which requires prior approval because it costs more than £200.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are discussing with the Dental Practice Board the mechanisms for dealing with the likely increased numbers of applications.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether her estimate of the average dentists' annual income took account of the implications of delayed treatment plans and the other implications of the reduction in the figure for costs of treatment requiring prior approval.

Dr. Mawhinney: Yes.

Drug Dispensing

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she proposes to publish her consultation paper on the introduction of original pack dispensing; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are considering the options and will make an announcement in due course.

DEFENCE

Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service Ships

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the lifting equipment recently removed from RMAS Goosander was last subjected to a safety test; and how frequently it has undergone such safety checks in the past.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No lifting equipment has been removed recently from RMAS Goosander. All RMAS vessels, including salvage and mooring craft, are bound by the Health and Safety Act, etc. Act 1974 and the Docks Regulations 1988.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the accidents reported or recorded on board RMAS Goosander while it was stationed at Greenock.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: During 1991, the last year for which complete statistics are available, RMAS Goosander was based at Rosyth and Greenock. During that period, two reportable accidents resulting in minor injuries occurred. There has been one fatal accident in 1992.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the accidents reported or recorded on board RMAS Pochard whilst stationed at Greenock.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: During 1991, the last year for which complete statistics are available, there were two reportable accidents on board RMAS Pochard resulting in minor injuries.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the reasons RMAS Pochard was taken out of service at Greenock and RMAS Goosander deployed in its place.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In 1991, the RMAS fleet of seven salvage and mooring vessels was reduced to four. RMAS Pochard, not being in such good material condition as her sister ship RMAS Goosander, was placed in reserve.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual rate of accidents on *(a)* RMAS Pochard, *(b)* RMAS Goosander and *(c)* the average for RMAS vessels.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In 1991, the last year for which complete statistics are available, there were 94 reportable accidents for all 412 RMAS vessels and 11 shore bases. This includes the two reportable accidents for RMAS Goosander and the two for RMAS Pochard.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how often lifting equipment used on board RMAS vessels is required to undergo safety checks; and what steps he takes to ensure that such requirements are complied with.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Statutory safety checks are undertaken in accordance with Docks Regulations 1988. All vessels are regularly inspected to ensure that lifting equipment meets these regulations.

Jet Skis

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jet skis the Royal Navy possesses.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Fisheries Protection

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the fishery protection services currently provided by Royal Navy vessels in the waters around Scotland and the financial arrangements in force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Royal Navy provides one vessel from the fishery protection squadron for patrols in Scottish waters. The Royal Navy ship, together with the vessels of the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, is responsible for monitoring compliance with UK and EC fishing regulations in Scottish waters. This task is carried out on behalf of the Scottish Fishery Protection Agency from which payment of approximately £1·3 million is received annually.

Aid, Bosnia

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which expenditure category the cost of providing and transporting humanitarian aid items to Bosnia has been debited.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Financial responsibility for humanitarian aid relief to Bosnia lies with the Overseas Development Administration which will meet the additional costs that the MOD incurs providing service assistance.

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Aitken: The Ministry of Defence is already a well-dispersed Department. Currently, 87 per cent. of civilian staff are based outside London and 60 per cent. are outside London and the south-east. Since 1979, some 2,500 staff have been relocated from London and the south-east to sites in Glasgow, south Wales, Sutton Coldfield, Cheadle Hulme and Swindon, amongst others. A recent review of MOD headquarters, together with the planned collocation of the procurement executive in Bristol, will result in the relocation of further 6,000 to 7,000 posts from London by the mid-1990s, leaving only about 3 per cent. of MOD civilian staff in London.

Menwith Hill

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason it has been decided to site the Thistle and Steeplebush 2 operations centres at Menwith Hill in underground bunkers hardened against airborne attack.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are neither underground nor hardened facilities at Menwith Hill station.

Questions on Contracts

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his practice to answer questions seeking the disclosure of the amount payable for contracts between his Department and *(a)* the Crown Estate, *(b)* the Duchy of Cornwall and *(c)* the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has held with the United States of America on alternatives to the European fighter aircraft; and how many jobs in the aircraft-building industries he expects to be created or preserved in the United Kingdom as a consequence.

Mr. Aitken: In the light of Germany's decision not to proceed with production of the European fighter aircraft, the first priority is to consider the implications for the programme jointly with Spain and Italy. The Government hope that it will not be necessary to fall back on alternatives. However, before final decisions are taken on the production of EFA, we will, as a matter of course, examine all the alternatives to ensure that the Royal Air Force operational requirement is met in the most cost-effective way.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the estimated cost of the European fighter aircraft programme prior to the German withdrawal; what estimate he has made of the cost consequence of the Germany withdrawal; and how this is calculated.

Mr. Aitken: The United Kingdom's share of the four nation EFA programme is estimated at £11·7 billion. The German Government have said that they do not intend to proceed with production of EFA but will continue to honour their obligation to complete the development phase. We are now discussing with the other EFA partners —Italy and Spain—the implications of the German decision. The cost of any revised programme will depend on the arrangements eventually agreed.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what alternatives to the European fighter aircraft have been considered; and what are the direct cash implications.

Mr. Aitken: A range of possible alternatives has been considered. The US F22 would offer better performance than EFA in the air defence role, but would not meet the RAF's requirement for a ground attack capability and is estimated to be up to three times more expensive. The US F16 and Swedish Gripen are cheaper than EFA; but have a much inferior capability. The French Rafale and developments of the US F14, F15 and F18 also fall short of the RAF requirement in significant respects, while being no cheaper—and in some cases significantly more expensive.

Merchant Navy

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete the detailed review, which is being conducted by his Department, of the defence

requirement for British merchant ships and seamen in times of crisis; if he will list the main individual areas of the overall subject he is reviewing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The review has now been completed and a statement was made to the house by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on 9 July, *Official Report*, columns 567-68.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make public the conclusions of the Oxburgh report.

Mr. Rifkind: The report of Professor Oxburgh's working group on the safety of United Kingdom nuclear weapons has been given careful consideration within the Ministry of Defence. On the basis of this consideration, I have now decided that the report should be published—subject only to a small number of excisions required to preserve national security. Publication will take place today: copies of the report are being placed in the Library of the House.

This report provides welcome corroboration of our confidence in the safety of our nuclear weapons, and handling and transport arrangements. The report's recommendations, which we have set about implementing, will help us ensure that the high safety standards confirmed by the review are maintained for the future. The decision to publish the report reflects both the Government's emphasis on avoiding unnecessary secrecy on issues of legitimate public interest, and our belief that the report will provide substantial reassurance to those concerned with nuclear safety issues.

Hon. Members will recall that in June 1990 the US house armed services committee commissioned a panel of experts under Dr. Sidney Drell to examine the safety of US nuclear weapons. The Drell report was published in December 1990. The safety of United Kingdom nuclear weapons has long been ensured both by internal audit and control procedures, and by the scrutiny of the MOD's permanently constituted independent advisory body, the nuclear weapon safety committee (NWSC)—a body which Drell recommended the US to replicate. Nonetheless, following publication of the Drell report, the Government decided to ask MOD's chief scientific adviser, Professor Sir Ronald Oxburgh, to lead a review of the safety of United Kingdom nuclear weapons. Professor Oxburgh was supported by a group of distinguished experts drawn form both inside and outside government. The working group's terms of reference were:

"To review, in the light of any relevant aspects of the report of the Drell Panel in the United States, the safety of the present and prospective UK nuclear armoury."

The review was therefore allowed to range freely over all aspects of United Kingdom nuclear weapon safety. Like the Drell team, the United Kingdom review addressed the overall organisational aspects of the management of safety, as well as the specifics of the current and future stockpile. Whole weapon systems were considered, including associated handling and transportation arrangements.

Reviewing the safety of the United Kingdom nuclear stockpile, the working group found that

"procedures have been effective, well implemented and rigorously inspected".

The group was able to identify a number of areas whre improvements could be made in the overall management of safety. However, the group

"found no indication that every practicable step to optimise weapon safety at the design stage had not been taken, and once in service to make weapon handling and storage as safe as possible".

On transport and weapon handling, the review concluded that the approach to safety and security was "sensible and practical". It noted the mechanical unreliability of the current weapon transport vehicles, which are due for replacement later this year; but in all other respects it described road transport arrangements as "a well-run operation". As to the weapon systems themselves, the group found no evidence to suggest that in-service or planned weapons required any significant redesign. Discussing the Trident system, the working group concluded that Trident safety levels would be

"comparable to and in some ways higher than those associated with the Polaris system."

Therefore, provided that the full UK safety case and its assessment are completed, the group saw no reason to suggest that it should not be accepted into service.

The published report contains some 20 recommendations, all of which the Government have accepted. These recommendations cover a wide range of procedural and organisational issues, from the proposal that a formal design review of each in-service weapon system should be held every seven years, to the suggestion that a "champion" of nuclear weapon safety should be established as a central auditor of the various nuclear safety functions undertaken within the MOD. The Ministry is already at work on putting the recommendations into effect, including determining the exact fashion in which the proposal for a "champion" can best be implemented. Three further recommendations, which cannot be published for security reasons, have also been accepted.

The Government would like to record their thanks to Professor Oxburgh and the other members of his team for the thorough review they have undertaken. Their report confirms the Government's confidence in the standards adopted in maintaining the safety of our nuclear weapons. We welcome the group's recommendations to ensure these standards are continued in the future.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 14 July 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

The Attorney-General: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance. My Department, however, does not operate any speciffic programmes in this area.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

The Attorney-General: No such public appointments have been made.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Attorney-General how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

The Attorney-General: The current numbers of civil servants and total personnel costs are:

	Number	*Cost (£ million)*
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	24·0	0·90
Treasury Solicitor's Department	464·5	15·70
Crown Prosecution Service	5,978·0	[1]122·59
Serious Fraud Office	[2]135·0	4·10

[1] 1991-92.
[2] In addition 59 temporary staff are currently employed. The number varies with operational requirements.

Details of staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970 cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate expense.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

The Attorney-General: No such advisers have been retained.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993, the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July 1992 at columns *430-31*.

Crown Courts (Witnesses)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in what percentage of Crown court centres an information point for witnesses has been established.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information in the form requested is not available. All Crown court centres have arrangements which enable court users to make inquiries when they attend court. This duty is undertaken by a particular official in some courts and in others, particularly the larger courts, by way of a separate reception desk at the entrance to the building. The design guide for courts includes specifications to ensure that counters at which enquiries can be made are easily visible and accessible to people when they enter a court building. In line with the citizens charter, we will continue to look for means of improving the ways in which necessary information can be supplied to all those who use the courts.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information on the background of individual public appointments is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor takes all relevant factors into account when considering appointments and he knows of no person appointed by him who has been criticised in published reports of DTI inspectors.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information on the background of individual advisers retained by the LCD since 1987 is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor knows of no person retained by his Department who has been criticised in published reports of DTI inspectors.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The number of staff employed in the Lord Chancellor's Department on the 1 July 1992 was 11,670 and the total personnel costs for the current financial year are £216 million. 1970 pre-dates the creation of the Department, but those areas for which the Lord Chancellor was then directly responsible employed 7,416 staff and the personnel costs were at that time £12·6 million.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Recycling

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to give a tax advantage to recycled products and a tax penalty upon the landfill of waste which could be recycled.

Sir John Cope: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has no current plans to do so.

Physiotherapy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances physiotherapy is excluded from the scope of tax relief on premiums for health care insurance for the elderly; and what other exclusions are made.

Mr. Dorrell: Premiums on private medical insurance contracts for the over-60s may qualify for tax relief provided they offer only some or all of the treatments and medical services specified in Treasury regulations. Physiotherapy is one of the services the cost of which can be indemnified. At present it must be associated either with hospital treatment or with surgical procedures performed by a general practitioner. Regulations laid before the House of Commons on 7 July will allow insurers to include physiotherapy in an eligible contract where it is associated with other forms of general practitioner treatment, including diagnosis.

Correspondence

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the Inland Revenue's published standards for replying to taxpayers' letters in 1991-92; and to what extend these standards were met in practice.

Mr. Dorrell: 1991-92 was a transitional year. The previous system for targeting post for tax and collection offices was expressed in terms of post worked and based on post over 14 days old at the year end. This system was internally focused and provided little useful information on the service being provided to the public. A new system based on turnaround times for correspondence, which is also designed to provide customers with better quality replies to their letters, was trialled in 1991-92. It came fully into operation in 1992-93. The target for tax and collection offices is to respond to all letters within 28 days. In at least 90 per cent. of cases, the aim is to deal with the letter within that time scale. In the remaining cases, the response will tell the customer when the letter will be dealt with.

Redundancy

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the average loss to the Exchequer in income tax, employee's national insurance contributions and reduced VAT payments and excise duties resulting from a redundant Ministry of Defence worker being unemployed for 12 months.

Mr. Dorrell: The effect on the Exchequer would depend on the income and expenditure of the particular workers concerned. It is not possible to provide a meaningful average.

Insurance

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it remains the Government's policy that Departments and non-departmental public bodies should not normally insure commercially; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government have reviewed the question whether Departments and non-departmental public bodies should insure commercially. They have decided to retain the existing general rule that decisions whether to insure with commercial insurance companies should normally be decided on value-for-money grounds. Across the Government as a whole, the cost of paying premiums could be expected to exceed the value of claims met by insurance companies. Use of commercial insurance companies is, therefore, likely to be confined to cases where there are special reasons; for example where insurance in respect of equipment such as boilers is part of an inspection/maintenance services agreement, where large volumes of claims handling work are involved, where evidence of insurance may be needed to obtain prompt medical treatment for employees abroad and, in the case of NDPBs, where there is a legal requirement to insure.

Inheritance Tax (Exemptions)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the procedure by which his Department informs the public of works of art where inheritance tax exemptions have been agreed for granting of public access; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* Public access to works of art granted exemption from inheritance tax may be provided in a number of ways. The publicity arrangements will differ depending on the way chosen.

The owner may arrange to exhibit the object in a house or room which is open to the public for an agreed number of days each year; appropriate publicity for the opening of the house would be required. The owner may lend the object to a public collection for display on a long-term basis: publicity would then be the responsibility of the curator of this collection.

Alternatively, the owner may arrange viewing by appointment provided he is also willing to lend the object on request to a public collection. All objects which can be viewed by appointment are publicised by means of an entry in the register of conditionally exempt property held by the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert museum in London. Copies of this register are also available for consultation in the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, the National museum of Wales in

Cardiff and the Ulster museum in Belfast. The Inland Revenue is currently carrying out a review, with the Department of National Heritage, of ways in which improvements can be made to the publicity given to this register as well as improvements to the quality of the entries and accessibility to the register. The conclusions of this review will be announced before the end of this year.

Customs Searches

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what statistics are kept on the *(a)* numbers, *(b)* sex and *(c)* racial origin of persons stripped by customs officers at Heathrow airport; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* Statistics on personal searches carried out each year by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise are published in the annual report of the commissioners. Information is collated on the type of search—rub-down, strip or intimate—goods found at the time, appeals against search, and complaints but not on the sex or racial origin of persons searched.

Trust Law

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice he has received from the Securities and Investments Board about conflicts between the Financial Services Act 1986 and trust law.

Mr. Nelson: I have looked into the recent allegations that the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation warned the Government that it could not do its job properly because of problems over the relationship between the Financial Services Act regime and trust law. Neither the Securities and Investments Board nor I have found any evidence to substantiate these allegations. IMRO and the SIB made representations to the DTI over a number of years about the legal uncertainty they believed was created by the interaction of the Financial Services Act and trust law. However, there was no suggestion that this uncertainty posed a threat to investor protection. The SIB's conclusion is that neither legal uncertainties created by the relationship between the Financial Services Act and trust law nor the existence of IMRO's special occupational pensions scheme regime made any material difference to IMRO's regulation of the Maxwell pension fund companies.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. Nelson: The average staff in post in 1991-92, the latest full year for which figures are available, was 3,192. Total pay cost were £63·1 million. In 1970 HM Treasury employed 720 full-time staff. The figure for pay costs are not available as they were not recorded separately at that time. The staff figures for 1970 and 1991-92 are not comparable due to machinery of government and other changes.

DTI Inspections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors;

(2) if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. Nelson: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. My Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Bankers (Code of Practice)

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to monitor the implementation of the British Bankers Association—BBA—code of practice.

Mr. Nelson: It is for the review committee that was established under the independent chairmanship of Sir George Blunden to monitor the implementation of the banks and building societies code of banking practice. The committee reported to the BBA in May that all major retail United Kingdom banks had agreed to adhere to the code but it was concerned that a number of smaller, mainly overseas, banks which may be conducting retail business had not adopted the code. My officials are kept informed on these and other matters through regular informal contacts with the British Bankers Association.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 9 July, how much money has so far been paid to ex-depositors of BCCI under the deposit protection scheme.

Mr. Nelson: I understand that up to close of business on 10 July 1992 payments have been made by the Deposit Protection Board to some 4,000 depositors of BCCI, involving total protection payments of some £22 million.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Green Minister

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will outline the priorities for future action of the green Minister in his Department *(a)* over the next year and *(b)* over this Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Over the next and subsequent years as green Minister for the Office of Public Service and Science, OPSS, I will have responsibility for seeing that environmental concerns are taken into account where appropriate in the policies and work of the Department. I will also be responsible for publicising environmental initiatives. The OPSS is committed to reducing its direct and indirect consumption of non-renewable resources by, for example, improving energy efficiency wherever practicable; considering the purchase of environmentally friendly products where available; minimising pollution; and adopting environmental performance as an integral part of internal audits.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance. My Department is responsible for ensuring that the principles of the citizens charter and other public service reform initiatives are implemented. These are designed to improve the standards of service that Government Departments and other public sector organisations provide to their customers, including the owners of small businesses.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. Jackson: The number of staff currently in my Department, excluding the agencies, is 542. The annual estimated total staff costs are £14·5 million. As my Department did not exist in its present form in 1970, it is not possible to provide any comparative staffing levels and staff costs.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list any advisers retained by his Department or its predecessor offices since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list any public appointments by his Department or its predecessor offices since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. My Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Asteroid Survey

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the work of the Anglo-Australian near-Earth survey on asteroids.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I am replying as the Anglo-Australian near-Earth survey on asteroids is a civil, rather than a defence, research project.

The aim of the survey, which is being carried out at the Anglo-Australian observatory at Siding Spring, Australia, is to identify any asteroids which could possibly strike the Earth. The survey is supported by Australian Research Council funds and uses photographs from the United Kingdom Schmidt telescope there.

In the two years that the project has been under way, no asteroids posing any significant threat have been discovered.

HOME DEPARTMENT

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July at column *430*.

Carl Bridgewater Murder Convictions

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to pursue regarding the completed Merseyside police report into the Carl Bridgewater murder convictions.

Mr. Jack: The report from the Merseyside police is still awaited. Once it has been received my right hon. and learned Friend will decide as soon as possible whether any action on his part is appropriate in this case.

Contracting-out Procedures

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the extent and nature of proposed openness in relation to contracting-out procedures in his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It has been and will continue to be the Home Office's practice to ensure fair and open competition in public procurement. My Department follows the advice given in administrative circulars issued by the central unit on purchasing in Her Majesty's Treasury. These incorporate best practice drawn from existing EC directives which in turn replicate United Kingdom best practice.

Procurement practice is however necessarily constrained by issues of commercial and contractual confidentiality.

Firearms

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statutory or other definitions of blank ammunition are used by him in discharging his responsibilities for the regulation of firearms.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Blank cartridges of more than one inch in diameter are subject to certificate control under section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968. Blank ammunition is not defined in the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1992, but is generally understood to be ammunition which contains no projectile.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces are currently co-operating with speed cameras.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A recent survey by the Association of Chief Police Officers' traffic committee indicated that 18 forces in England and Wales were actively considering acquiring speed cameras or traffic light cameras or both and that in addition three police forces expected to be equipped with speed cameras from 1 July.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost of installation for a speed-detecting camera and related computing equipment.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The costs vary with the type of equipment chosen. The cost for a radar speed camera is about £24,600. The related computing equipment for processing the information from the cameras costs about £5,000 to £7,000.

Prisons

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the prisons in England, giving the number of prisoners they were designed to hold and how many prisoners they currently hold.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The table shows the certified normal accommodation—CNA—and the number of prisoners for each establishment in England on 3 July 1992.

Establishment	*CNA*	*Population*
Acklington	676	600
Albany	309	291
Aldington	127	123
Ashwell	404	394
Askham Grange	129	107
Aylesbury	241	236
Bedford	170	249
Belmarsh	841	782
Birmingham	567	963
Blantyre House	95	94
Blundeston	410	338
Brinsford	336	346
Bristol	374	395
Brixton	621	779
Brockhill	160	155
Bullingdon	635	456
Bullwood Hall	126	102
Camp Hill	481	429
Canterbury	207	161
Castington	300	273
Channings Wood	594	589
Chelmsford	244	365
Coldingley	222	215
Cookham Wood	120	118
Dartmoor	599	527
Deerbolt	422	406
Dorchester	139	218
Dover	312	232
Downview	286	280
Drake Hall	261	174
Durham	542	662
East Sutton Park	90	79
Eastwood Park	134	101
Elmley	635	388
Erlestoke	218	212
Everthorpe	228	219
Exeter	317	452
Featherstone	599	547
Feltham	874	719
Finnamore Wood	112	94
Ford	536	510
Frankland	332	316
Full Sutton	624	437
Garth	512	459
Gartree	245	237
Glen Parva	854	711
Gloucester	107	195
Grendon	226	194
Guys Marsh	240	160
Haslar	110	110
Hatfield	180	168
Haverigg	315	313
Hewell Grange	136	137
Highpoint	747	719
Hindley	323	400
Hollesley Bay	569	304
Holloway	517	450
Holme House	649	331
Hull	269	372
Huntercombe	225	220
Kingston	96	94
Kirkham	632	505
Lancaster	186	258
Latchmere House	131	78
Leeds	591	890
Leicester	200	345
Lewes	301	403
Leyhill	410	404
Lincoln	392	636
Lindholme	800	744
Littlehey	543	536
Liverpool	931	1,210
Long Lartin	362	353
Low Newton	199	312
Maidstone	517	512
Manchester	350	346
Moorland	620	631
Morton Hall	168	162
The Mount	484	391
New Hall	122	135
North Sea Camp	204	194
Northallerton	148	195
Northeye	160	161
Norwich	421	369
Nottingham	218	211
Onley	460	425
Oxford	121	160
Parkhurst	286	194
Pentonville	756	774
Portland	439	430
Preston	331	422
Pucklechurch	56	56
Ranby	347	340
Reading	184	91
Risley	417	400
Rochester	306	246
Rudgate	300	292
Send	113	108
Shepton Mallet	158	201
Shrewsbury	168	265
Spring Hill	210	215
Stafford	657	718
Standford Hill	384	367
Stocken	396	392
Stoke Heath	300	270
Styal	189	196
Sudbury	506	461
Swaleside	504	487
Swinfen Hall	172	169
Thorn Cross	300	192
Thorp Arch	163	139
The Verne	580	589
Wakefield	638	620
Wandsworth	965	1,200
Wayland	580	566
Wellingborough	314	265
Werrington House	110	102
Wetherby	196	170
Whatton	204	206
Whitemoor	518	231
Winchester	458	454
The Wolds	320	117

Establishment	CNA	Population
Wormwood Scrubs	472	714
Wymott	768	760

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what latest estimate he has made of the average cost of building a new prison; and if he will give the approximate number of prisoners a prison costing this amount is designed to hold.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The cost of building a new prison varies depending on the type of prisoners it is to hold, its location, the ground conditions, the level of security required and other factors. The current estimated average cost of a new local prison for 600 prisoners is about £75 million, but in any particular case the actual cost will depend on the outcome of a competitive tendering exercise.

Wolds Prison

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the contract struck between Group 4 and the French-owned private medical firm AMI for the provision of health care at Wolds prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. This is a matter for Group 4.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the prison service charges Group 4 to keep inmates from Wolds prison in custody and to provide them with food when they are delivered to Crown court.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The prison service has responsibility for guarding and feeding prisoners at the Crown court. No question of charging arises.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Group 4 will meet the cost of damage caused by inmates as a result of the disturbance at Wolds prison on 27 June.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Yes.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to hold an inquiry into the most recent disturbance at Wolds prison; and when he expects the results to be published.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 8 July, at column *199*.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons Group 4 staff delivered two sick prisoners from Wolds prison to Doncaster crown court on 29 June.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Only one prisoner from Wolds was taken ill at Doncaster Crown court on 29 June. He had been seen by medical staff at the prison for treatment to a cut arm before leaving for court. He was prescribed antibiotic tablets and pronounced fit to travel. His illness at court was diagnosed as a reaction to the antibiotic tablets, which he was advised to stop taking.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Group 4 employees were used to deal with the disturbance which took place at the Wolds prison between Saturday 27 June and Sunday 28 June; and how many of these employees were certified prisoner custody officers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Twenty-four staff were deployed and all were certified prisoner custody officers.

Bail

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were released on bail in England in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1981 and *(c)* 1971.

Mr. Jack: Information is not yet available for 1991, and was not published in 1971. The readily available information relates to England and Wales in 1990 and 1981 and is published in table 8.5 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1990".

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will set out the current advice given to magistrates about releasing on bail someone who has been arrested for a further offence while out on bail on a previous offence;

(2) if he will set out the current advice given to magistrates on releasing persons on bail;

(3) what advice is given to magistrates as to the number of times persons should be released on bail when they have already been arrested for previous offences and been released on bail for all of those offences.

Mr. Jack: Subject to the provisions of the Bail Act 1976, as amended, the decision whether to grant bail in a particular case is a matter for the judicial discretion of the court. Decisions are taken in the light of all the available information about the defendant and the alleged offence. Magistrates have been advised about the provisions of the Act via Home Office circulars sent to clerks to justices; copies of the circulars are available in the Library. In addition, all magistrates receive training under the auspices of the Lord Chancellor's Department and this covers the bail decision-taking process. The 1976 Act specifically provides that bail may be withheld if the court is satisfied that there are substantial grounds for believing that, if released on bail, the defendant would commit an offence.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons released on bail by Harwich magistrates court, have been arrested for another offence, released on bail again, arrested for another offence, released on bail again, and been arrested and bailed for four or more offences;

(2) how many persons released on bail by Harwich magistrates court, have been arrested for another offence, released on bail, and again arrested for a third offence;

(3) how many persons released on bail by Clacton magistrates court, have been arrested for another offence, released on bail again, and arrested for a third offence;

(4) how many persons released on bail by Clacton magistrates court were arrested for another offence while still on bail in 1991, 1981 and 1971;

(5) how many persons released on bail by Harwich magistrates court, were arrested for another offence while still on bail in 1991, 1981 and 1971;

(6) how many persons released on bail by Clacton magistrates court have been arrested for another offence,

released on bail again, arrested for another offence, released on bail again, and been arrested and bailed for four or more offences.

Mr. Jack: The information is available only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of the State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about the situation in which persons on bail are arrested for a further offence and are released on bail again; and what reply he has made.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend has noted the publicly expressed concern of the Association of Chief Police Officers about offending on bail. He has received representations on the subject from a Lincolnshire county councillor and from nine hon. Members, five of whom wrote after the councillor's approach to them. In addition, it has been referred to in a number of letters which have been concerned with crime more generally. Replies to these representations have acknowledged the strength of the concerns being expressed and have referred to the various steps that either have been taken or are being taken to reduce the risk of offending on bail.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what current plans he has to review the situation under which persons released on bail are arrested for a further offence while on bail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: As part of a wider programme of work to tackle the problem of offending on bail, my Department has convened a group which is widely representative of the different organisations and agencies involved in the criminal justice system. This group is currently reviewing the bail decision taking process. In a separate forum, concerns about the arrangements for police bail are also being examined.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons were arrested for another offence while on bail *(a)* two, *(b)* three and *(c)* four or more previous offences in (i) a 1991, (ii) 1981 and (iii) 1971, in England;

(2) how many persons were re-arrested for another offence while on bail in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1981 and *(c)* 1971, in England.

Mr. Jack: The information is not collected centrally. In February this year, the Home Office published a survey of research into offending on bail—research and planning unit paper 65—a copy of which is available in the Library.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the number of reported crimes in *(a)* Harwich and *(b)* Clacton for each of the last 20 years;

(2) if he will list the number of reported crimes in Essex in each year for the last 20 years.

Mr. Jack: Information on the number of recorded offences in the Essex police force area are published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". The latest figures for 1991 are published in Home Office statistical bulletin 2/92. Copies of all these publications are available in the Library.

Separate figures for Harwich and Clacton are not collected centrally.

Prison Population

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the prison population in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales, at the latest available date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On Thursday 9 July the prison population in England was 44,831 and in Wales, 920. These figures do not include the 1,367 prisoners being held in police cells on that day.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners on remand exercised their right to vote in the last general election.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No record was kept by the Prison Service of the number of prisoners who voted in the last general election.

Prison Mother and Baby Units

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places are currently available in mother and baby units in prisons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are 38 places currently available in prison mother and baby units.

Police Cells

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were held in police cells in each of the police forces in England and Wales on the last convenient date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The position on 9 July was as follows:

Police force	*Number of prisoners*
Avon and Somerset	37
Bedfordshire	24
Cambridgeshire	21
Cheshire	38
Cleveland	7
Cumbria	15
Derbyshire	23
Devon and Cornwall	6
Durham	3
Dyfed	19
Essex	42
Gloucestershire	9
Greater Manchester	263
Gwent	17
Hampshire	7
Hertfordshire	24
Humberside	27
Lancashire	74
Leicestershire	23
Lincolnshire	5
Merseyside	85
Metropolitan	140
North Wales	10
North Yorkshire	21
Northamptonshire	27
Northumbria	56
Nottinghamshire	20
South Wales	68
South Yorkshire	34
Staffordshire	10

Police force	Number of prisoners
Suffolk	15
Surrey	9
Sussex	15
Thames Valley	20
Warwickshire	8
West Mercia	28
West Midlands	31
West Yorkshire	81
Wiltshire	5

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department paid each police force for holding people in police cells in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The amounts paid to each police force holding prisoners in police cells during 1990 and 1991 are shown in the table.

Police force	1990-91 £	1991-92 £
Avon and Somerset	—	2,992,791
Bedfordshire	—	596,010
Cambridgeshire	—	1,673,619
Cheshire	1,843,386	2,658,450
City of London	38,818	225,689
Cleveland	421,101	376,773
Cumbria	288,643	181,300
Derbyshire	528,641	691,645
Devon and Cornwall	—	687,452
Durham	237,793	802,560
Dyfed	—	1,437,798
Essex	350,560	1,176,095
Gloucester	62,001	453,446
Greater Manchester	15,931,767	20,522,278
Gwent	—	1,236,786
Hampshire	—	1,252,012
Hertfordshire	156,124	3,562,244
Humberside	3,309,716	3,309,549
Kent	160,984	1,843,171
Lancashire	3,785,273	6,127,386
Leicestershire	570,304	1,997,202
Lincolnshire	753,405	637,272
Merseyside	2,936,037	2,683,711
Metropolitan	4,786,233	11,316,943
North Wales	303,878	496,536
North Yorkshire	—	1,676,589
Norfolk	—	634,553
Northamptonshire	237,479	602,855
Northumbria	2,496,433	2,730,444
Nottinghamshire	447,112	610,263
South Wales	624,067	3,138,284
South Yorkshire	2,784,105	3,110,568
Suffolk	—	542,205
Surrey	—	433,548
Sussex	—	320,430
Thames Valley	153,368	1,620,820
Warwickshire	729,730	596,031
West Mercia	386,300	1,294,179
West Midlands	1,812,584	2,823,517
West Yorkshire	6,591,246	5,425,886
Wiltshire	—	241,072

Camera Technology

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Government's estimate of the potential of new camera technology to reduce road accidents.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is too early to evaluate from road accident statistics the contribution to any reduction that may be made by the new camera technology. But inappropriate speed is a factor in about one third of all fatal road traffic accidents and 13 per cent. of injury accidents at junctions in urban areas are associated with jumping red traffic lights. The new camera technology can be expected to have a beneficial effect in both of these areas.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects all police authorities to be co-operating in speed camera technology;

(2) what steps he is taking to encourage the use of speed cameras on roads.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The decision to equip police forces with speed camera equipment rests with the chief officers and their police authorities. We will be monitoring that position and ensuring that the effectiveness of the equipment is known to chief officers.

Wratness Mine Depot

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what price the Wratness former Royal Naval mine depot was sold earlier this year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Negotiations are still in progress with a prospective purchaser of this site.

Armley Prison

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were held under rule 43 (GOAD and own protection) in Armley prison, Leeds during May.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of 216 prisoners were held under prison rule 43 at Her Majesty's prison Leeds during May. Of these, 209 were held for their own protection and seven were for the maintenance of good order or discipline.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether mentally ill people are held in solitary confinement in Armley prison, Leeds.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No prisoners in England or Wales are kept in solitary confinement. This is a type of punishment designed to deprive a prisoner of all human contact and is not available under the prison rules. At HM prison Armley, Leeds all mentally ill inmates are held in the health care centre in single rooms or on an open ward. Those allocated a single room spend the normal daytime hours in association with other inmates.

Air Guns

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to increase the regulation and control of the ownership or use of air guns.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) on 22 May 1992, at column *312*.

Pregnant Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners at Holloway were pregnant on the last date for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 9 July there were 25 pregnant women detained in Holloway.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were pregnant on the last date for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A survey on 10 July 1992 indicated that 52 prisoners in establishments in England and Wales were known by health care staff to be pregnant.

Speeding Offences

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many speeding offences there were in 1991.

Mr. Jack: Provisional figures for 1990 show that, in England and Wales, 633,828 alleged speeding offences were dealt with by the police. These comprise 12,285 written warnings, 448,380 fixed penalty notices and 173,163 court proceedings. Statistics for 1991 are not yet available.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what efforts are made to ensure that remand prisoners may exercise their right to vote.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Only unconvicted prisoners, including civil prisoners and fine defaulters, who are at least 18 years of age and who are registered as electors can vote, by means of a postal vote. An instruction to prison service establishments includes guidance on prisoners' eligibility to vote, and on handling applications for postal votes from prisoners. Consideration is now being given to supplementing this with a reference in the prisoners' information pack, which is given to prisoners on reception into prison, about the right of unconvicted prisoners to vote.

Custodial Sentences

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice is given to magistrates and judges about the extent to which they should have regard to the number of places in the prison system when considering whether to impose a custodial sentence.

Mr. Jack: No such advice has been issued.

Women Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications are outstanding from women prisoners who seek a place for their children in mother and baby units.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Applications for a place on a mother and baby unit are considered by a multi-disciplinary team at a case conference. There are seven very recent applications which are awaiting consideration.

Animal Research

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's role in the Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods in relation to animal research.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods is a new body established by the European Commission, and is concerned with the validation of alternatives to the use of animals in research.

The United Kingdom remains committed to the search for ways of refining, reducing or replacing the use of living animals in scientific procedures. It stands ready to play a full part in the work of the centre.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors;

(2) if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: From the information available to us, we have no knowledge of any appointments made by my Department of persons criticised by DTI inspectors.

Identity Cards

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further consideration has been given to the introduction of identity cards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ravensbourne (Sir J. Hunt) on 18 June, at column 1022.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Home Office currently employs 46,303 non-industrial staff and 3,050 industrial staff. This includes those staff working in agencies. The forecast staffing costs for the year 1992-93 are £951,688,000.

In January 1970 the Home Office employed 16,889 non-industrial staff and 3,975 industrials. These figures are taken from the 1970 publication of "Civil Service Statistics". Figures are not available for staffing costs.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) of 30 June, *Official Report*, column *517*, how many and what proportion of his Department's employees were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In 1989, 143 members of staff in the Home Office were registered disabled, representing 0·3 per cent. of all staff. In 1990, the number was 147·5, again approximately 0·3 per cent. No record has been kept of staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

Mass Trespass

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 to deal with the criminal offence of mass trespass.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to his question on 10 July 1992, at column *372*.

Primary Purpose Rules

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make changes in the primary purpose rules following the recent judgment of the European Court.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I see no reason to do so.

Primates

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the standards set out in the code of practice for the housing and care of animals used in scientific procedures with regard to primates.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Home Office code of practice for the housing and care of animals used in scientific procedures is based closely on guidelines drawn up jointly by the Royal Society and the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare. The code of practice contains a section on the special considerations which should be taken into account in the housing and care of primates. We have no plans to amend the code.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of remand prisoners brought to trial since 30 September 1991 *(a)* in magistrates courts had spent more than 56 days in custody since their first appearance and *(b)* in the Crown court had spent more than 70 days from first appearance before magistrates to committal in the Crown court.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not readily available centrally. According to the February 1992 time interval survey of magistrates courts, 34 per cent. of custodial remands for indictable offences—that is, no bail —took more than 56 days from first listing to completion at the magistrates courts.

Criminal Justice Act 1991

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish information pursuant to section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Under section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 I am required to publish each year information to enable those engaged in the administration of criminal justice to become aware of the financial implications of their decisions, and to assist them in the performance of their duty to avoid discrimination on the grounds of race, sex or any other improper ground.

To fulfil this requirement, I propose to publish in mid-September information on race and gender. In mid-October I propose to publish a third set of information on finance. In all three cases this material will be widely disseminated among the judiciary, stipendiary and lay benches and lawyers; and to members of the Crown prosecution service and magistrates courts, police and probation services.

I shall place copies of each of these publications in the Library.

The publications this year will provide broad brush information in respect of race, gender and finance issues. As required by section 95 of the Act, I will publish further material on these subjects on an annual basis. In the light of comments from the recipients of this year's information, and of improvements in our own monitoring arrangements, future publications will add more detail.

Naturalisation

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time taken to process applications for *(a)* registration and *(b)* naturalisation; and how long those applying in both of those categories in December 1991 can expect to wait.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The average time taken in June 1992 to grant applications for registration and naturalisation was 15 and 27 months respectively.

Those who applied in December 1991 for registration can expect on average to wait nine months for a decision and for naturalisation between 15 and 18 months.

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of *(a)* Jamaica, *(b)* Turkey, *(c)* Morocco, *(d)* the USA, *(e)* Australia, *(f)* Malaysia, *(g)* Hong Kong, *(h)* Guyana, *(i)* Trinidad, *(j)* Colombia and *(k)* Algeria were (i) granted and (ii) refused permission to enter the United Kingdom at ports of entry in each quarter since January 1991 to the nearest available date.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Passenger admissions and persons refused leave to enter and removed, for selected nationalities

	1st quarter 1991		2nd quarter 1991		3rd quarter 1991		4th quarter 1991		Year 1991		1st quarter 1992	
	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions[1]	Refused and removed
Jamaica	4,700	102	6,640	102	9,220	90	5,470	98	26,000	392	4,700	100
Turkey	13,800	80	18,700	86	24,200	75	17,400	85	74,100	326	13,900	57
Morocco	2,720	36	3,790	47	6,640	92	3,890	59	17,000	234	3,150	21
USA	341,000	286	670,000	270	778,000	315	555,000	291	2,340,000	1,162	475,000	228
Australia	71,500	74	118,000	59	136,000	68	93,400	49	419,000	250	64,000	65
Malaysia	11,400	126	20,700	375	29,200	157	21,000	140	82,200	798	11,300	70

	1st quarter 1991		2nd quarter 1991		3rd quarter 1991		4th quarter 1991		Year 1991		1st quarter 1992	
	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions[1]	Refused and removed
Hong Kong (BDTCs and BN(O)s)	14,200	35	16,900	70	35,200	60	13,700	58	79,900	223	12,500	34
Guyana	990	13	1,280	14	2,070	14	1,280	16	5,630	57	920	9
Trinidad and Tobago	3,030	27	4,050	16	5,910	9	3,510	18	16,500	70	2,500	13
Colombia	3,450	103	5,010	148	5,900	109	4,130	119	18,500	479	3,290	102
Algeria	2,140	47	3,620	51	5,660	48	3,160	80	14,600	226	2,260	60

[1] Provisional figures.

Returning Residents

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people, by nationality, have requested entry to the United Kingdom as returning residents, in each quarter since May 1990; how many have been *(a)* readmitted as such, *(b)* been readmitted for a limited period and *(c)* been refused entry to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The available information is given in the tables. Information is not available on persons seeking admission as returning residents who were found not to satisfy the relevant requirements of the immigration rules but who were admitted for a limited period under another category.

Table 1
Persons[1] admitted as returning residents

Number of admissions

Nationality	*2nd quarter 1991*	*3rd quarter 1991*	*4th quarter 1991*	*1st quarter 1992*
Europe	26,990	38,160	24,420	26,600
Austria	2,360	2,840	2,100	2,370
Bulgaria	70	110	70	100
Cyprus	1,390	2,580	1,190	1,280
Czechoslovakia	150	190	120	190
Finland	1,630	2,400	1,390	1,650
Germany (Democratic Republic)	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Hungary	260	560	250	300
Malta	1,670	3,140	1,610	1,740
Norway	3,020	3,720	2,620	2,930
Poland	1,880	3,340	1,500	1,880
Romania	80	120	70	90
Sweden	6,760	7,600	6,110	6,510
Switzerland	4,260	5,003	3,840	3,920
Turkey	2,110	4,610	2,470	2,280
USSR	170	310	260	260
Yugoslavia	1,190	1,640	830	1,110
Americas	49,480	57,140	43,400	46,960
Argentina	330	340	280	340
Barbados	520	570	430	380
Brazil	780	1,000	700	890
Canada	8,520	10,620	7,540	7,700
Chile	450	620	390	530
Colombia	640	750	410	620
Cuba	—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Guyana	290	400	250	270
Jamaica	1,730	2,160	1,550	1,940
Mexico	310	370	270	330
Peru	190	250	160	220
Trinidad and Tobago	880	1,100	660	1,000
USA	34,550	38,660	30,530	32,420
Uruguay	60	50	30	60
Venezuela	220	250	180	250
Africa	13,280	19,890	12,650	15,820
Algeria	440	720	370	330
Egypt	930	1,240	740	870
Ethiopia	50	70	70	90
Ghana	1,650	2,270	1,740	2,060
Kenya	1,070	1,510	910	1,000
Libya	220	380	180	140
Mauritius	1,040	1,460	780	1,040
Morocco	790	2,460	1,000	1,010
Nigeria	2,600	4,010	3,150	4,400
Sierra Leone	220	280	220	320
Somalia	40	30	20	40
South Africa	2,460	2,790	1,840	2,560
Sudan	170	280	150	170
Tanzania	390	701	360	380

Nationality	2nd quarter 1991	3rd quarter 1991	4th quarter 1991	1st quarter 1992
Tunisia	260	490	260	270
Uganda	140	230	130	180
Zambia	240	300	230	270
Zimbabwe	570	660	504	680
Asia	41,950	50,170	35,450	46,330
Bangladesh	1,880	2,580	1,520	2,200
China	190	200	160	230
Hong Kong BDTC	1,040	1,350	800	1,220
India	13,290	14,230	11,170	16,460
Indonesia	180	200	120	140
Iran	3,440	5,220	3,210	3,340
Iraq	310	640	480	440
Israel	1,750	2,070	1,510	1,690
Japan	5,710	6,770	4,980	5,550
Jordan	420	560	360	390
Kuwait	110	150	140	110
Lebanon	1,420	1,720	1,180	1,290
Malaysia	2,520	3,200	2,110	2,800
Pakistan	4,600	4,960	3,770	5,450
Philippines	1,630	1,590	1,160	1,620
Saudi Arabia	200	320	190	230
Singapore	670	810	600	730
Sri Lanka	1,600	2,370	1,210	1,350
Syria	200	350	180	220
Thailand	800	880	600	850
Australasia	19,460	21,490	16,690	17,930
Australia	12,170	13,400	10,210	11,250
New Zealand	7,280	8,090	6,480	6,680
Others	6,690	9,580	5,660	6,560
British Overseas Citizens	950	1,300	840	1,090
Other countries not elsewhere specified	2,400	3,600	2,200	2,790
Stateless	3,340	4,680	2,620	2,680
All Nationalities	157,840	196,440	138,270	160,180

[1] Excluding EC nationals to whom the immigration rules on returning residents do not apply.
[2] Ceased to be a separate nationality following the unification of Germany.
[3] 5 or fewer.

Table 2

Persons[1] seeking admission as returning residents who were refused and removed

Number of persons

Nationality	2nd quarter 1991	3rd quarter 1991	4th quarter 1991	1st quarter 1992[3]
Europe				
Austria	—	1	1	1
Bulgaria	—	—	—	—
Cyprus	—	1	—	—
Czechoslovakia	—	—	—	—
Finland	—	—	—	—
Germany (Democratic Republic)	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Hungary	—	—	—	—
Malta	—	—	—	—
Norway	—	—	—	—
Poland	—	—	1	—
Romania	—	—	—	—
Sweden	—	—	—	—
Switzerland	—	—	—	—
Turkey	—	—	—	—
USSR	—	—	—	—
Yugoslavia	—	—	—	1
Americas	3	2	3	1
Argentina	—	—	—	—
Barbados	—	—	—	—
Brazil	—	—	1	—
Canada	—	—	—	—
Chile	—	—	—	—
Colombia	—	—	—	—
Cuba	—	—	—	—
Guyana	—	—	—	—
Jamaica	—	—	1	1

Nationality	*2nd quarter 1991*	*3rd quarter 1991*	*4th quarter 1991*	*1st quarter 1992*[3]
Mexico	—	—	—	—
Peru	—	—	—	—
Trinidad and Tobago	—	—	—	—
USA	2	2	1	—
Uruguay	—	—	—	—
Venezuela	1	—	—	—
Africa	4	4	6	2
Algeria	—	—	1	—
Egypt	—	—	1	—
Ethiopia	—	—	—	—
Ghana	—	—	—	—
Kenya	1	1	—	—
Libya	—	—	—	—
Mauritius	2	—	—	—
Morocco	—	—	—	—
Nigeria	1	3	2	2
Sierra Leone	—	—	—	—
Somalia	—	—	—	—
South Africa	—	—	2	—
Sudan	—	—	—	—
Tanzania	—	—	—	—
Tunisia	—	—	—	—
Uganda	—	—	—	—
Zambia	—	—	—	—
Zimbabwe	—	—	—	—
Asia	5	7	6	5
Bangladesh	1	4	2	2
China	—	—	—	—
Hong Kong BDTC	—	1	1	—
India	1	1	2	—
Indonesia	—	—	—	—
Iran	—	—	—	—
Iraq	—	—	1	—
Israel	—	—	—	—
Japan	—	—	—	—
Jordan	—	—	—	—
Kuwait	—	—	—	—
Lebanon	—	—	—	—
Malaysia	—	—	—	1
Pakistan	2	1	—	1
Philippines	—	—	—	—
Saudia Arabia	—	—	—	—
Singapore	—	—	—	—
Sri Lanka	1	—	—	—
Syria	—	—	—	—
Thailand	—	—	—	1
Australasia	1	1	—	—
Australia	—	—	—	—
New Zealand	—	1	—	—
Others	1	1	—	—
British Overseas Citizens	—	—	—	—
Other countries not elsewhere specified	1	—	—	—
Stateless	—	1	—	—
All Nationalities	13	16	16	9

[1] Excluding EC nationals to whom the immigration rules on returning residents do not apply.
[2] Ceased to be a separate nationality following the unification of Germany.
[3] Provisional.

Table 3

Persons[1] *admitted as returning residents*

Number of admissions

Nationality	*2nd quarter 1990*	*3rd quarter 1990*	*4th quarter 1990*	*1st quarter 1991*
Europe	27,000	38,1000	24,000	22,600
Austria	2,320	2,700	1,860	1,970
Bulgaria	40	150	50	40
Cyprus	1,380	2,870	1,290	1,020
Czechoslovakia	110	160	120	110
Finland	1,600	2,310	1,400	1,450

Nationality	2nd quarter 1990	3rd quarter 1990	4th quarter 1990	1st quarter 1991
Germany (Dem. Rep)	20	70	[2]—	[2]—
Hungary	160	420	180	220
Malta	1,870	3,300	1,650	1,470
Norway	3,120	3,700	2,560	2,460
Poland	1,550	2,840	1,280	1,420
Romania	60	80	40	50
Sweden	6,690	7,330	6,100	5,590
Switzerland	4,420	4,920	3,770	3,500
Turkey	2,060	4,840	2,330	2,040
USSR	130	220	160	140
Yugoslavia	1,350	2,220	1,230	1,090
Americas	51,200	57,900	40,300	41,800
Argentina	280	330	260	270
Barbados	580	810	440	430
Brazil	770	940	660	750
Canada	9,060	10,800	7,370	7,000
Chile	440	570	390	480
Colombia	660	760	450	710
Cuba	—	+	+	+
Guyana	340	440	290	290
Jamaica	2,030	2,640	1,840	2,010
Mexico	320	370	230	280
Peru	190	210	140	160
Trinidad and Tobago	940	1,180	690	1,010
United States of America	35,300	38,500	27,300	28,200
Uruguay	50	50	50	50
Venezuela	230	260	160	200
Africa	12,800	18,300	11,700	13,100
Algeria	370	580	400	280
Egypt	880	1,220	730	740
Ethiopia	90	90	50	60
Ghana	1,690	2,110	1,640	1,840
Kenya	1,200	1,460	910	1,020
Libya	170	210	130	120
Mauritius	1,120	1,570	890	900
Morocco	630	2,540	920	730
Nigeria	2,180	2,990	2,460	3,140
Sierra Leone	240	260	190	340
Somalia	40	60	30	20
South Africa	2,320	2,530	1,750	2,230
Sudan	190	270	140	160
Tanzania	360	580	350	350
Tunisia	260	450	280	210
Uganda	160	240	100	130
Zambia	260	280	205	240
Zimbabwe	690	880	530	650
Asia	44,700	49,600	33,500	39,900
Bangladesh	2,480	3,020	1,500	2,000
China	130	160	160	150
Hong Kong BDTC	950	1,370	810	1,220
India	14,600	14,100	10,600	14,700
Indonesia	160	180	100	110
Iran	3,340	4,600	3,060	2,780
Iraq	910	840	260	110
Israel	1,620	1,930	1,350	1,170
Japan	5,480	6,180	4,500	3,950
Jordan	500	550	320	230
Kuwait	110	120	100	70
Lebanon	1,440	1,690	1,230	1,070
Malaysia	2,430	2,960	2,090	2,560
Pakistan	5,080	5,700	3,650	5,080
Philippines	1,740	1,530	1,060	1,540
Saudi Arabia	260	270	170	200
Singapore	610	730	550	600
Sri Lanka	1,950	2,660	1,260	1,480
Syria	190	300	170	180
Thailand	680	730	530	680
Australasia	22,100	22,400	17,400	17,000
Australia	13,900	14,100	10,600	10,400
New Zealand	8,210	8,350	6,790	6,600
Others	6,760	9,080	5,760	5,840
British Overseas Citizens	910	1,240	800	740

Nationality	2nd quarter 1990	3rd quarter 1990	4th quarter 1990	1st quarter 1991
Other countries not elsewhere specified	2,400	3,210	2,110	2,360
Stateless	3,450	4,620	2,850	2,740
All Nationalities	164,000	195,000	133,000	140,000

Table 4

Persons[1] seeking admission as returning residents who were refused and removed

Number of persons

Nationality	2nd quarter 1990	3rd quarter 1990	4th quarter 1990	1st quarter 1991
Europe	—	—	3	1
Austria	—	—	1	—
Bulgaria	—	—	—	—
Cyprus	—	—	1	—
Czechoslovakia	—	—	—	—
Finland	—	—	—	—
Germany (Democratic Republic)	—	—	[2]—	[2]—
Hungary	—	—	—	—
Malta	—	—	—	1
Norway	—	—	—	—
Poland	—	—	—	—
Romania	—	—	—	—
Sweden	—	—	—	—
Switzerland	—	—	—	—
Turkey	—	—	1	—
USSR	—	—	—	—
Yugoslavia	—	—	—	—
Americas	3	2	2	2
Argentina	—	—	—	—
Barbados	—	—	—	—
Brazil	—	—	1	—
Canada	—	—	—	—
Chile	—	—	—	—
Colombia	—	—	—	1
Cuba	—	—	—	—
Guyana	—	—	—	—
Jamaica	3	1	—	—
Mexico	—	—	—	—
Peru	—	—	1	—
Trinidad and Tobago	—	—	—	—
USA	—	1	—	1
Uruguay	—	—	—	—
Venuzuela	—	—	—	—
Africa	2	2	3	2
Algeria	—	—	—	—
Egypt	—	—	—	—
Ethiopia	—	—	—	—
Ghana	—	1	1	1
Kenya	—	—	—	—
Libya	—	1	—	—
Mauritius	—	—	—	—
Morocco	1	—	—	—
Nigeria	1	—	2	—
Sierra Leone	—	—	—	—
Somalia	—	—	—	—
South Africa	—	—	—	1
Sudan	—	—	—	—
Tanzania	—	—	—	—
Tunisia	—	—	—	—
Uganda	—	—	—	—
Zambia	—	—	—	—
Zimbabwe	—	—	—	—
Asia	6	9	10	8
Bangladesh	3	5	4	2
China	—	—	—	—
Hong Kong BDTC	—	—	2	2
India	—	1	1	—
Indonesia	—	—	—	—
Iran	—	—	—	—
Iraq	—	—	—	2
Israel	—	—	—	—

Nationality	2nd quarter 1990	3rd quarter 1990	4th quarter 1990	1st quarter 1991
Japan	—	—	—	—
Jordan	—	—	—	—
Kuwait	—	—	—	—
Lebanon	—	—	—	—
Malaysia	2	—	2	1
Pakistan	1	3	1	—
Philippines	—	—	—	—
Saudi Arabia	—	—	—	—
Singapore	—	—	—	—
Sri Lanka	—	—	—	1
Syria	—	—	—	—
Thailand	—	—	—	—
Australasia	—	—	—	1
Australia	—	—	—	1
New Zealand	—	—	—	—
Others	4	—	—	—
British Overseas Citizens	—	—	—	—
Other countries not elsewhere specified	1	—	—	—
Stateless	3	—	—	—
ALL NATIONALITIES	15	13	18	14

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Select Committees

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, when the firm responsible for preparing verbatim reports of minutes of evidence taken before Select Committees was appointed; what opportunities have been given to other firms to provide this service; and on what basis the charges payable to the firm are determined.

Mr. Beith: The appointment of a shorthand writer to the Houses of Parliament is made by the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Clerk of the House of Commons pursuant to Resolutions agreed to by both Houses in 1813. The present incumbent, like her predecessors since that time, is the senior partner in the firm of W. B. Gurney and Sons. The structure of charges for parliamentary work is renegotiated periodically: such a review took place in 1989, and a further one, initiated by the Clerks of both Houses, is currently in progress. These reviews take into account the likely cost and efficiency of alternative suppliers of this service. Interim adjustments to the level of charges are made by reference to the fees negotiated by the Institute of Shortland Writers with Her Majesty's Treasury for Government work.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Key: The Department of National Heritage was formed in April 1992 and covers the arts, formerly the responsibility of the Office of Arts and Libraries; broadcasting, formerly the responsibility of the Home Office; film, formerly the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry; tourism, formerly the responsibility of the Department of Employment; heritage, formerly the responsibility of the Department of the Environment; and sport, formerly the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science. There are, therefore, no statistics covering the Department of National Heritage for the period in question.

The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programes of support and assistance. Although the Department of National Heritage has no programmes aimed specifically at small businesses, the Department is fully committed to the Government's deregulation initiative and will seek to ensure that regulatory burdens within its areas of responsibility are kept to the minimum that is necessary.

Radio 3

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will raise with the chairman of the BBC his proposals for improving the reception quality of Radio 3 in the area of North Wiltshire.

Mr. Key: I will draw my hon. Friend's concern to the attention of the chairman of the BBC.

The BBC has an extensive programme for building new FM radio transmitters to extend the coverage of its national services. It has recently introduced new transmitters for Wiltshire listeners at Calne, Chippenham and Westwood and aims to bring a transmitter at Marlborough on the air early next year. But the rate and order in which the BBC proceeds with this programme is for the BBC to determine in the light of its other engineering priorities and competing demands upon its financial and technical resources.

Naze Tower

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what aspects of the Naze tower on the Naze at Walton-on-the-Naze, a listed building, he is responsible for.

Mr. Key: My right hon. and learned Friend's responsibilities in relation to listed buildings were outlined in a reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 19 May 1992, *Official Report*, column *110*. A circular giving further details will be issued shortly.

Pitchford Hall

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what discussions he has had with English Heritage with regard to Pitchford hall, Shrewsbury; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he has taken to save Pitchford hall, Shrewsbury for the nation;

(3) what discussions he has had with the National Heritage Memorial Fund with regard to Pitchford hall, Shrewsbury; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what representations he has had from the National Trust with regard to Pitchford hall, Shrewsbury; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* Neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor I have had any discussions with either English Heritage or the National Heritage Memorial Fund—NHMF—or representations from the National Trust specifically with regard to Pitchford hall, Shrewsbury. However, I am aware that the National Trust is in discussion with the NHMF about the substantial funds which would be needed to enable them to acquire and endow Pitchford hall, its contents and lands. It is for the trustees of the NHMF to decide on the merits of the proposal and whether they are able to offer assistance from the funds available to them.

South Yorkshire Arts

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has for encouraging the arts in South Yorkshire.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* This year's allocation of central Government funding, through the Arts Council, to the Yorkshire and Humberside Arts Board is £4·5 million and represents a 13·9 per cent. increase over 1991-92.

The Government's urban programme has contributed to the cultural industries quarter in Sheffield, which is a model of urban regeneration. This has contributed to a lively arts scene, which includes the refurbished Lyceum theatre, the Crucible theatre and the Ruskin gallery.

Yorkshire and Humberside Arts is presently working with the local authority in Barnsley on the preparation of a Barnsley arts plan. Opera North's community outreach programme already has strong links with the Barnsley arts group and has undertaken several projects in the town.

EDUCATION

School Inspectors

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what formula will be used for the withdrawal of money from the standard spending assessment of local authorities to be allocated to Her Majesty's inspectorate for the inspection of schools under the terms of the Education (Schools) Act 1992.

Mr. Forth: The Government are considering the expenditure needs of local education authorities next year and are currently taking the views of the local authority associations on the range of factors bearing on local education authorities' spending, including the new arrangements for school inspection. We have estimated the funds to be transferred from local government finance for 1993-94 in respect of school inspections beginning in September 1993 at £19 million—1992-93 prices. Details of the local authority finance settlement for 1993-94, including education's share of total standard spending and individual authorities' standard spending assessments, will be announced in the autumn.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much money his Department has provided in its budget to raise awareness and advertise the new system of inspection of schools; and if he will list the actual expenditure items and any proposed expenditure.

Mr. Forth: Professor Sutherland will be responsible for the new inspection system from 1 September 1992. Budgeted expenditure in this financial year for which my Department is responsible up to that date is as follows:

National advertising campaign—£105,000;
Leaflets and related promotional material—£10,000.

The new system was announced in the citizens charter, and sample copies of the parents charter were sent to all schools in September 1991 at a cost of just under £2 million.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Forman: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses through improvements in the business climate, deregulation, and specific programmes of support and assistance. My Department encourages small firms to tender for contracts; each contract also includes a requirement to pay sub-contractors promptly. In the first three months of 1992-93 the Department placed contracts with small firms amounting to 39 per cent. of total departmental expenditure on goods and services, a slightly higher percentage than for a comparable period in 1991-92.

Training Grants

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 23 June, *Official Report*, column *126*, if he will list *(a)* the local education

authorities who have confirmed that their claims have been based on the correct criteria and *(b)* those authorities who have been unable to confirm that their claims have been made on the correct criteria.

Mr. Forth: Local education authorities in list A have indicated that their claims for grants for education support and training included only eligible expenditure they themselves incurred. Those in list B have not yet responded, or have indicated that claims may have included other expenditure. The Department is seeking replies or clarification from LEAs in list B. It has issued clear guidance to all LEAs, and has asked auditors to check that claims have been prepared on the correct basis.

List A
City of London
Camden
Greenwich
Hackney
Hammersmith and Fulham
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Lambeth
Wandsworth
Barking and Dagenham
Barnet
Bromley
Croydon
Ealing
Enfield
Haringey
Harrow
Wirral
Bury
Manchester
Oldham
Rochdale
Salford
Stockport
Tameside
Trafford
Wigan
Barnsley
Doncaster
Rotherham
Sheffield
Bradford
Leeds
Wakefield
Newcastle upon Tyne
North Tyneside
Sunderland
Avon
Bedfordshire
Berkshire
Buckinghamshire
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
Cleveland
Cornwall
Cumbria
Havering
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Kingston upon Thames
Merton
Newham
Redbridge
Richmond upon Thames
Sutton
Waltham Forest
Birmingham
Dudley
Sandwell
Walsall
Wolverhampton
Liverpool
St. Helens
Sefton
Derbyshire
Devon
Dorset
Durham
East Sussex
Essex
Gloucestershire
Hampshire
Hereford and Worcester
Hertfordshire
Humberside
Isle of Wight
Kent
Leicestershire
Lincolnshire
Norfolk
North Yorkshire
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
Nottinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Shropshire
Somerset
Staffordshire
Suffolk
Surrey
Warwickshire
Wiltshire

List B
Lewisham
Southwark
Tower Hamlets
Westminster
Bexley
Brent
Coventry
Solihull
Knowsley
Bolton
Calderdale
Kirklees
Gateshead
South Tyneside
Isles of Scilly
Lancashire
West Sussex

School Administration

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has had about the administrative burden placed on head teachers *(a)* under current grant-maintained school arrangements and *(b)* under current local management of schools arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The feedback I have received suggests that head teachers welcome the greater flexibility which the new arrangements bring and the increased responsibilities they now have. Managing budgets should not place an unacceptable burden on head teachers' time.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the current initiatives and reforms being undertaken by grant-maintained schools for raising education standards; and what legal obstacles exist which would prevent non-grant-maintained schools from undertaking similar initiatives and reforms.

Mr. Forth: The National Curriculum and assessment provisions together with the new arrangements for school inspections are designed to raise standards in all maintained schools. GM schools enjoy greater flexibility to channel expenditure away from administration and into teaching. The Government believe that this, coupled with an increased sense of independence and ownership, gives GM school heads and governors additional opportunities to raise standards.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what figures he has for the average pupil-teacher ratio during 1991-92 for schools which had achieved grant-maintained status by 1 April 1991.

Mr. Forth: The figures requested by my hon. Friend are not yet available. We hope to be able to publish figures in the spring. Recently published figures show that, in January 1991, when 50 secondary schools were GM, there were 36,450 pupils and 2,385 full-time equivalent teachers at GM schools, which gives a pupil-teacher ratio of 15.3.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is *(a)* the total number of ballots held on grant-maintained status, *(b)* in how many the proportion of parents voting yes has been more than 50 per cent. of the number of parents eligible to vote, *(c)* in how many the margin between the percentage voting yes and that voting no has been 60:40 or closer and *(d)* how many of those in *(b)* and *(c)* have been approved for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Forth: The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

(a) There have been 504 ballots on grant-maintained status.

(b) In 200 of these the proportion of parents voting yes has been more than 50 per cent. of the number of parents eligible to vote.

(c) In 56 the margin between those voting yes and those voting no has been 60:40 or closer.

(d) 132 of the schools detailed at *(b)* and 44 of the schools detailed at *(c)* have been approved or are currently minded to approve.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many ballots on grant-maintained status have been conducted over or during a school holiday period; and how many ballots have been held during each school term since September 1988.

Mr. Forth: The dates of school holidays vary from institution to institution. The information requested is not therefore held centrally. However, out of a total of 504 ballots on GM status to date, five have closed in the month of August.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list *(a)* the number of schools in each education authority which have obtained grant-maintained status and *(b)* the number of such applications which he is still considering.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows:

(a)

	Number
Kent	33
Essex	23
Lincolnshire	22
Norfolk	16
Surrey	14
Gloucestershire	13
Bromley	10
Berkshire	9
Hertfordshire	8
Hillingdon	8
Cumbria	7
Dorset	7
Northamptonshire	7
Hampshire	6
Lancashire	6
Warwickshire	6
Cambridgeshire	5
Ealing	5
Sutton	5
Birmingham	4
Buckinghamshire	4
Derbyshire	4
Wandsworth	4
Bedfordshire	3
Calderdale	3
Wiltshire	3
Avon	2
Barnet	2
Bexley	2
Bolton	2
Brent	2
Cheshire	2
Kirklees	2
Somerset	2
Walsall	2
Wolverhampton	2
Bradford	1
Croydon	1
Devon	1
Dudley	1
Hammersmith and Fulham	1
Humberside	1
Kensington and Chelsea	1
Lambeth	1
Leicestershire	1
Liverpool	1
Newham	1
Nottinghamshire	1
Rochdale	1
Sandwell	1
Sheffield	1
Shropshire	1
Southwark	1
Tameside	1
Tower Hamlets	1
Waltham Forest	1
Total	275

The table includes 217 schools that are operating as GM; 56 that have been approved but are not yet open; and two that are "minded to approve" for GM status.

(b)

There are 39 applications still under consideration.

Music

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give an estimate of the number of school hours devoted to music in state schools and the total number of music teachers for each year since 1981; and if he will make a statement on the future of music teaching in state schools.

Mr. Forth: Information is not available in the form requested.

A primary school staffing survey was undertaken in 1987 and secondary school staffing surveys in 1984 and in 1988. These surveys indicated that there were 15,200 full-time teachers with a post A-level qualification in music in maintained nursery and primary schools in England in 1987. In maintained secondary schools in England, there were 9,300 music teachers in 1984, and 7,100 music teachers in 1988. In maintained primary schools in 1987, 4·8 per cent. of time in junior classes was devoted to music. In maintained secondary schools in England in 1988, the proportion of pupil periods devoted to music varied by year group as follows:

Year group	*Percentage of pupil periods devoted to music*
7	5·1
8	4·5
9	3·4
10	0·9
11	0·7
12-13	0·8

A further secondary schools staffing survey was undertaken in 1992. It is hoped to publish the findings early in 1993.

The introduction from autumn 1992 of statutory attainment targets and programmes of study for music will provide a rigorous and challenging framework for the teaching of music in maintained schools, within which aspirations and standards will be raised and the range of skills, knowledge and understanding widened.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993, the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July 1992, at columns *430-31*.

Primary Schools (Funding)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received over the funding arrangements for primary schools, in connection with developments in the curriculum and teaching methods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations commenting on the report, "Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools", and in particular on the issue raised in the report of the current disparity between levels of funding for pupils at the upper end of primary education and pupils at the lower end of secondary education.

This is a matter for local education authorities, which may themselves suggest amendments to the age-weighted allowances in their formulae for the distribution of resources under local management of schools. I am glad to say that some authorities are examining this question, and I would encourage more to do so.

Student Rents

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the average rents paid by students in Wales, both on and off campus.

Mr. Forman: Information about the average cost of student accommodation in university institutions in Wales is set out in the table. This information is taken from the results of a survey carried out by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals based on data provided by individual institutions. Comparable information for other institutions in the higher education sector and institutions in the further education sector is not collected centrally.

Academic year 1991-92	*Cost per week £ exclusive of all meals*
Undergraduates	
University halls of residence	27·90
Other university owned accommodation	27·65
Other non-university owned accommodation	30·45
Postgraduates	
University halls of residence	27·40
Other university owned accommodation	27·20
Other non-university owned accommodation	30·05

School Buildings

Sir Malcolm Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many primary and secondary schools in England and Wales were built before *(a)* 1914, *(b)* 1939 and *(c)* 1960; and what estimate his Department has made of renovation costs to modernise such schools.

Mr. Forth: "A Study of School Building", a report by an interdepartmental group of the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, assisted by local government officers using information from a school building survey of maintained schools, was published by HMSO in 1977 and gives the latest information on the age of the school building stock. On the basis of a 10 per cent. survey of primary and secondary schools in England and 10 per cent. of primary schools and 20 per cent. of secondary schools in Wales, there were in 1976 8,300 schools built before 1903, 10,200 schools built before 1918 and 12,600 schools built before 1946. A further 10,600 schools were built between 1946 and 1976, in which one third of the places were completed by 1960.

The survey of school buildings published by the Department in 1987, based upon a survey of one in 30 county and voluntary controlled primary and one in six secondary schools in England only, reported estimated national costs, at November 1986 prices, of about £2,000 million to bring buildings up to a defined standard for 1991 projected pupil numbers. Some of these costs will have been met from recurrent expenditure and from capital investment on county, controlled and aided schools of £3,300 million since the survey.

Student Grants

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the value of a mandatory student grant for 1992-93; and what was the value in 1972-73 at current prices.

Mr. Forman: The basic mandatory grant for students living away from the parental home and studying outside London in the academic year 1992-93 will be £2,265. Students in those circumstances will be able to take out loans from the Student Loans Company of up to £715, making a total of £2,980. In 1972-73 the value of the corresponding mandatory grant was £2,723 at 1991-92 prices.

School Examination Results

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many responses were received to his Department's letter of 10 January consulting on the further implications of the parents charter; and how many of these responses were in favour of his Department analysing data and publishing performance tables in schools' comparative examination performance;

(2) to whom the work to analyse and produce comparative tables of school examination results has been contracted out;

(3) what estimate has been made of the cost of centrally managing the task of analysing and publishing comparative tables of school examination results; and what provision was made for this expenditure in the original estimate of his Department.

Mr. Forth: Ninety-five responses were received to the consultation letter on the phased implementation of parents charter proposals. The consultation letter did not propose that the Department should itself undertake the task of producing comparative tables of schools' examination performance; that decision was taken in the light of the consultation responses.

Information respecting departmental contracts is normally treated as commercial in confidence.

We estimate that some £650,000 will be required to compile, publish and distribute the comparative tables this year. The money will be found from within the Department's existing allocation.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984 have been taken into account in determining the method by which information will be obtained in order to produce comparative tables of school examination results;

(2) by what legal authority he will be given access to personal machine-readable data being held by examination boards of individual candidates' examination results in order to produce comparative tables of school examination results.

Mr. Forth: The terms under which both the Department for Education and the examining bodies are

registered under the Data Protection Act allow for the examining bodies to pass examination results data to the Department for the purpose of calculating and publishing aggregate examination results, as has been done in recent years. The comparative tables themselves will consist of aggregated data only for each school.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how a late regrading of an individual's examination paper will be taken into account in the publication of comparative tables of school examination results;

(2) what account the comparative tables he intends to publish on school examination performance will take of the differential performance of boys and girls.

Mr. Forth: All examinations data relating to pupils registered at a particular school will be sent to that school in October for checking. Schools will therefore have an opportunity to notify the contractor preparing the tables of any changes to grades on appeal which are known by the time of the deadline for return of the information.

The comparative tables will not distinguish between the performance of boys and girls. Examinations data in school prospectuses will, however, continue to show results of boys and girls separately, alongside national averages.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Forman: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. My Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Assisted Places Scheme

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many people are employed on the management of the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Forth: A total of 7·7 full-time equivalent staff are directly engaged in the management of the assisted places scheme in the current financial year.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much has been spent on the assisted places scheme and for how many pupils for each year since 1989, in cash and constant prices.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is shown in the following table and relates to England only:

Year	*Pupil numbers (Academic Year)*	*Cash cost (£ million)*	*In real terms[1] (£ million—constant 1991-92 prices*
1989-90	27,008	56·5	64·4
1990-91	26,740	63·4	67·2
1991-92	27,641	78·9	78·9

[1] The real terms series has been derived on the basis of the GDP deflator assumptions published in the Budget with the most recent year as the price base.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the schools involved in the assisted places scheme, with *(a)* the total number of pupils on rolls and *(b)* the number of assisted pupils, and the percentage which *(b)* bears to *(a)* in each school for the latest year which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: The information is as follows. The latest year for which complete details are available is the academic year—AY—1990-91.

Assisted places scheme: numbers of pupils in APS schools in AY 1990-91

School name	*Number of pupils on roll*	*Number of assisted pupils*	*Percentage of assisted pupils to pupils on roll*
Abbey school, Reading	920	53	5·76
Abingdon school	730	84	11·51
Ackworth school, Pontefract	460	10	2·17
Aldenham school, Elstree	370	26	7·03
Alice Ottley school, Worcester	670	81	12·09
Alleyns school, Dulwich	920	197	21·41
Ardingley college, Haywards Heath	480	8	1·67
Arnold school, Blackpool	800	73	9·13
Ashford school, Kent	700	42	6·00
Ashville college	670	3	0·45
Austin Friars school	310	3	0·97
Bancrofts school, Woodford	710	78	10·99
Barnard Castle school	610	3	0·49
Bath high school GPDST	590	97	16·44
Batley grammar school	630	240	38·10
Bedales school, Petersfield	410	9	2·20
Bedford group:			
Bedford high school	1,030	103	10·00
Bedford modern school	1,200	151	12·58
Bedford school	1,120	96	8·57
Dame Alice Harpur school	1,030	138	13·40
Belvedere school GPDST Liverpool	550	171	31·09
Berkhamsted school	800	27	3·38
Berkhamsted school for girls	560	19	3·39
Birkenhead high school GPDST	950	261	27·47
Birkenhead school	990	235	23·74
Bishop's Stortford college	360	44	12·22
Blackheath high school GPDST	570	93	16·32
Bloxham school, Banbury	370	8	2·16

School name	Number of pupils on roll	Number of assisted pupils	Percentage of assisted pupils to pupils on roll
Bolton school (Boys)	1,000	246	24·60
Bolton school (Girls)	1,100	237	21·55
Bootham school, York	320	10	3·13
Bradfield college, Reading	530	3	0·57
Bradford girls grammar	900	53	5·89
Bradford grammar school	1,150	219	19·04
Brentwood school	1,080	82	7·59
Brighton and Hove high school GPDST	740	133	17·97
Brighton college	500	107	21·40
Bristol Cathedral school	460	143	31·09
Bristol grammar school	1,200	254	21·17
Bromley high school GPDST	690	90	13·04
Bromsgrove school, Worcestershire	560	9	1·61
Bruton school for girls	580	115	19·83
Burgess Hill school for girls	580	6	1·03
Bury grammar school (Boys)	750	191	25·47
Bury grammar school (Girls)	1,120	235	20·98
Canford school, Wimborne	530	28	5·28
Carmel college, Wallingford	290	84	28·97
Casterton school, Cumbria	380	38	10·00
Caterham school	720	107	14·86
Central Newcastle high school GPDST	780	107	13·72
Charterhouse, near Godalming	700	10	1·43
Cheadle Hulme school	1,000	131	13·10
Cheltenham ladies college	840	6	0·71
Chigwell school	620	65	10·48
Christ's hospital	830	10	1·20
Churchers college, Petersfield	460	115	25·00
City of London school	850	136	16·00
City of London school for girls	660	105	15·91
City of London Freemans school, Ashtead	650	4	0·62
Clifton college, Bristol	700	64	9·14
Clifton high school, Bristol	750	37	4·93
Colfes school, London SE12	860	175	20·35
Colston's school, Bristol	340	77	22·65
Colston's girls school	660	162	24·55
Coventry school, Bablake	2,750	256	9·31
Cranleigh school	570	37	6·49
Croham Hurst school, Croydon	590	9	1·53
Croydon high school, GPDST	1,040	89	8·56
Culford school, Bury St. Edmunds	710	49	6·90
Dame Allans boys school, Newcastle upon Tyne	440	118	26·82
Dame Allans girls school	420	134	31·90
Dauntseys school, Devizes	590	50	8·47
Denstone college, Uttoxeter	360	106	29·44
Derby high school	500	5	1·00
Douai school, Reading	300	6	2·00
Dover college	310	10	3·23
Downe House school, Newbury	460	3	0·65
Dulwich college	1,430	277	19·37
Durham school	380	10	2·63
Edgbaston C of E college for girls	470	9	1·91
Edgehill college, Bideford	500	138	27·60
Ellerslie school, Worcestershire	250	10	4·00
Ellesmere college	370	3	0·81
Eltham college, London SE9	700	86	12·29
Emanuel school, London SW11	760	269	35·39
Epsom college	650	20	3·08
Exeter school	680	169	24·85
Farnborough hill school	520	146	28·08
Felixstowe college	320	10	3·13
Felsted school, Dunmow	500	40	8·00
Forest school, London E17	450	130	28·89
Framlingham college	680	3	0·44
Francis Holland school, London NW1	360	9	2·50
Friends school, Saffron Walden	270	77	28·52
Giggleswick school, Settle	300	3	1·00
Godolphin school, Salisbury	320	10	3·13
Godolphin and Latymer school, London W6	700	165	23·57
Greshams school, Norfolk	480	10	2·08
Guildford High school for girls	580	7	1·21
Haberdashers' Aske's school, Elstree	1,300	208	16·00
Haberdashers' Aske's schools for girls, Elstree	1,100	112	10·18
Haileybury and Imperial Service college	690	4	0·58
Hampton school	870	179	20·57
Harrogate college	400	17	4·25

School name	Number of pupils on roll	Number of assisted pupils	Percentage of assisted pupils to pupils on roll
Headington school, Oxford	680	3	0·44
Hereford Cathedral school	600	217	36·17
Highgate school	300	31	10·33
Hipperholme grammar school	370	3	0·81
Holy Child school	370	5	1·35
Hulme grammar, boys, Oldham	860	207	24·07
Hulme grammar, girls, Oldham	590	183	31·02
Hurstpierpoint college, Hassocks	570	8	1·40
Hymers college, Hull	870	144	16·55
Ipswich high school GPDST	600	106	17·67
Ipswich school	630	77	12·22
James Allens girls school	850	156	18·35
John Lyons school, Harrow	490	90	18·37
Kent college, Canterbury	650	82	12·62
Kimbolton schools, Cambridge	690	10	1·45
King Edwards school at Bath	690	112	16·23
King Edwards school, Birmingham	780	213	27·31
King Edward VI High school, Birmingham	560	118	21·07
King Edward VII school, Lytham	650	222	34·15
King Edward VI school, Norwich	760	110	14·47
King Edward VI school, Southampton	940	225	23·94
King Edwards school, Witley	520	70	13·46
Kings college school, Wimbledon	650	79	12·15
Kings high school for girls, Warwick	990	140	14·14
Kingsley school	550	5	0·91
Kings school, Bruton	330	7	2·12
Kings school, Chester	560	88	15·71
Kings school, Macclesfield	1,040	145	13·94
Kings school, Rochester	440	50	11·36
Kings school, Tynemouth	910	3	0·33
Kings, school, Worcester	860	167	19·42
Kingston grammar school	570	157	27·54
Kingswood school, Bath	480	40	8·33
Kirkham grammar school	510	78	15·29
Lady Eleanor Holles school, Hampton	810	50	6·17
La Sagesse convent school, Newcastle upon Tyne	340	139	40·88
Latymer upper school, London W6	1,030	319	30·97
Laxton school	150	2	1·33
Leeds girls high school	950	86	9·05
Leeds grammar school	1,180	188	15·93
Leicester grammar school	550	13	2·36
Leighton park school, Reading	360	10	2·78
Leys school, Cambridge	380	34	8·95
Liverpool college	700	181	25·86
Lord Wandsworth college, Basingstoke	440	81	18·41
Loreto convent grammar school, Altrincham	820	50	6·10
Loughborough grammar	880	124	14·09
Loughborough high school	520	95	18·27
Magdalen college school, Oxford	500	113	22·60
Malvern college group	600	57	9·50
Manchester grammar school	1,460	261	17·88
Manchester high school	970	163	16·80
Marist convent senior school, Ascot	500	3	0·60
Maynard school, Exeter	530	150	28·30
Merchant Taylors, Liverpool	770	206	26·75
Merchant Taylors girls, Liverpool	810	180	22·22
Merchant Taylors, Northwood	700	59	8·43
Mill Hill school	540	60	11·11
Monkton Combe school, Bath	340	38	11·18
Mount Carmel school, Cheshire	590	10	1·69
Mount St. Mary's college, Nr. Sheffield	280	53	18·93
Mount school, York	290	10	3·45
Newcastle under Lyme school, Staffordshire	1,350	437	32·37
Newcastle upon Tyne church high school	610	10	1·64
Northampton high school	770	155	20·13
North London collegiate school, Edgware	850	88	10·35
Norwich high school GPDST	840	152	18·10
Nottingham girls high school GPDST	1,050	182	17·33
Nottingham high school	830	146	17·59
Notting Hill and Ealing high GPDST	770	114	14·81
Oakham school, Rutland	986	10	1·01
Old Palace school, Croydon	760	183	24·08
Oxford high school GPDST	650	86	13·23
Pangbourne college, Reading	330	8	2·42
Perse school for boys, Cambridge	490	60	12·24
Perse school for girls	710	58	8·17

School name	Number of pupils on roll	Number of assisted pupils	Percentage of assisted pupils to pupils on roll
Plymouth college	700	186	26·57
Pocklington school, near York	710	129	18·17
Polam hall school, Darlington	470	13	2·77
Portsmouth grammar school	1,020	186	18·24
Portsmouth high school GPDST	670	130	19·40
Prior park college, Bath	390	10	2·56
Putney high school GPDST	830	86	10·36
Queen Elizabeth grammar, Blackburn	1,200	255	21·25
Queen Elizabeth grammar, Wakefield	980	144	14·69
Queen Elizabeth hospital school, Bristol	480	167	34·79
Queen Mary school, Lytham	700	240	34·29
Queens college Taunton	610	63	10·33
Queens college, London W1	400	67	16·75
Queens school, Chester	580	71	12·24
Ratcliffe college, Leicestershire	420	68	16·19
Redland high school, Bristol	630	80	12·70
Red Maids school, Bristol	480	157	32·71
Reed's school, Cobham	350	10	2·86
Reigate grammar school	870	99	11·38
Rendcomb college, Cirencester	280	10	3·57
Repton school, near Derby	560	49	8·75
Rossall school, Fleetwood	480	43	8·96
Royal grammar school, Guildford	800	105	13·13
Royal grammar school, Newcastle upon Tyne	1,130	254	22·48
Royal grammar school, Worcester	870	263	30·23
Ryde school	620	3	0·48
St. Albans school	670	110	16·42
St. Albans high school for girls	690	56	8·12
St. Ambrose college, Altrincham	640	73	11·41
St. Anselms college, Birkenhead	850	190	22·35
St. Bede's college, Manchester	870	220	25·29
St. Bees school, Cumbria	370	75	20·27
St. Benedict's school, Ealing	590	74	12·54
St. Catherine's school, Bramley	620	34	5·48
St. Dunstan's college, Catford	830	151	18·19
St. Edmund's college, Ware	460	69	15·00
St. Edward's college, Liverpool	850	395	46·47
St. Felix school, Southwold	360	6	1·67
St. George's college, Weybridge	600	31	5·17
St. Helen's school, Northwood	880	33	3·75
St. John's college, Southsea	860	163	18·95
St. John's school, Leatherhead	460	11	2·39
St. Joseph's college, Ipswich	740	72	9·73
St. Joseph's convent, Reading	530	113	21·32
St. Joseph's college, Stoke-on-Trent	480	5	1·04
St. Lawrence college, Ramsgate	360	10	2·78
St. Margaret's school, Bushey	460	8	1·74
St. Margaret's school, Exeter	450	7	1·56
St. Mary's college, Crosby	800	239	29·88
St. Mary's convent, Cambridge	550	101	18·36
St. Mary's hall, Brighton	390	65	16·67
St. Maur's convent, Weybridge	470	49	10·43
St. Paul's school, Barnes	640	82	12·81
St. Paul's girls school, Hammersmith	630	59	9·37
St. Peter's school, York	480	126	26·25
St. Swithun's school, Winchester	410	0	0·00
Salesian college, Farnborough	450	52	11·56
Scarborough college	390	10	2·56
School of St. Helen and St. Katherine, Abingdon	520	80	15·38
School of St. Mary and St. Anne	270	5	1·85
Sedbergh school	680	40	5·88
Sevenoaks school, Kent	920	4	0·43
Sheffield high school GPDST	680	76	11·18
Shrewsbury high school GPDST	570	77	13·51
Silcoates school	570	1	0·18
Sir William Perkins school, Chertsey	490	83	16·94
Solihull school	980	12	1·22
South Hampstead high school GPDST	670	61	9·10
Stafford independent grammar school	290	5	1·72
Stamford school	950	75	7·89
Stamford high school	1,010	80	7·92
Stockport grammar school	1,270	243	19·13
Stoneyhurst college, near Blackburn	430	27	6·28
Stowe school, near Buckingham	610	4	0·66
Streatham Hill and Clapham high GPDST	500	148	29·60
Surbiton high school	600	9	1·50

School name	Number of pupils on roll	Number of assisted pupils	Percentage of assisted pupils to pupils on roll
Sutton high school GPDST	820	64	7·80
Sutton Valence school, near Maidstone	410	65	15·85
Sydenham high school GPDST	650	115	17·69
Talbot Heath school, Bournemouth	600	134	22·33
Taunton school	590	50	8·47
Teesside high school	540	2	0·37
Tonbridge school	660	1	0·15
Tormead school, Guildford	550	6	1·09
Trent college, Derbyshire	610	122	20·00
Trinity school of John Whitgift, Croydon	800	140	17·50
Truro school	860	115	13·37
Truro high school	500	59	11·80
University College school, London NW3	770	63	8·18
Upton Hall Convent school	600	158	26·33
Ursuline Convent school, Kent	330	10	3·03
Ursuline high school, Ilford	410	124	30·24
Wakefield high school	760	135	17·76
Walthamstow Hall, Sevenoaks	530	67	12·64
Warwick school	990	129	13·03
Wellingborough school	830	58	6·99
Wellington college, Berkshire	830	34	4·01
Wellington school, Somerset	800	207	25·88
Wells Cathedral school	590	68	11·53
West Buckland school, Barnstaple	530	78	14·72
Westholme school, Blackburn	950	10	1·05
Westminster school	600	46	7·67
Whitgift school, Croydon	900	108	12·00
William Hulme grammar school, Manchester	790	220	27·85
Wimbledon high school GPDST	700	68	9·71
Winchester college	660	21	3·18
Wisbech grammar school	600	297	49·50
Withington girls school, Manchester	560	71	12·68
Wolverhampton grammar school	640	260	40·62
Woodbridge school, Suffolk	540	112	20·74
Woodhouse Grove school, Bradford	410	135	32·93
Worksop college, Nottingham	390	10	2·56
Wrekin college	380	2	0·53
Wycliffe college, Stonehouse	330	41	12·42
Yarm school, Cleveland	420	13	3·10
		Average proportion	13·08

[1]Numbers of pupils on roll are rounded to the nearest 10 pupils.
[2]Numbers of Assisted Pupils at start of school year 1990-91.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list, for each year since 1989, the number of assisted places available, the number taken up and the percentage of those taken up which were free places.

Mr. Forth: The information is given in the following table:

School year	Places available	Places taken up	Percentage of free places
1989-90	33,280	27,008	31
1990-91	33,289	26,740	32
1991-92	33,296	27,641	35

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average cost per pupil of an assisted place for each year since 1989.

Mr. Forth: The average cost of an assisted place in the academic year 1989-90 and the two following years was £2,364, £2,691 and £3,100 respectively.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for placing the management of the assisted places scheme in private hands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) on 1 July 1992, at column *570*.

Residential Properties

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham are owned by his Department; if he will publish a list of such residential properties which are currently empty, giving the type of accomodation available, the length of time each property has been vacant, and the intended future use.

Mr. Forman: None.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. Forman: The Department currently employs 2,723 civil servants. This figure includes 385 Her Majesty's inspectors of whom the majority together with their support staff will transfer to the office of Her Majesty's chief inspector—OHMCI—which is to be constituted as a

separate non-ministerial department from 1 September. The figure also includes 323 civil servants based in the Teachers Pensions Agency. The total net running costs for the DFE and OHMCI for 1992-93 are expected to be in the region of £103 million.

On 1 July 1970 the Department employed 3,195 civil servants. The total net running costs for 1969-70 were £6,549,000.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Forman: None of the advisers retained by this Department has been criticised in reports by DTI inspectors published since 1982.

Schools Branch 4

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many staff are now employed in schools branch 4, division B; and what was the cost of this branch in 1990-91 and 1991-92 and the budgeted cost for 1992-93.

Mr. Forth: As of 13 July, there were 69 civil servants employed in schools branch 4 division B. The running costs of the division for the years in question is as follows:

	£
1990-91 outturn	372,000
1991-92 outturn	706,000
1992-93 budget	1,375,000

Surplus School Places

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for each year from 1986 what has been the number of surplus school places proposed to be removed as a result of local education authority reorganisation plans *(a)* submitted to the Secretary of State and *(b)* (i) approved by the Secretary of State and (ii) rejected by the Secretary of State as a consequence of a parallel proposal for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows:

	(a)[1]	*(b)(i)*[1]
1986	74,691	62,828
1987	54,951	45,326
1988	56,474	27,170
1989	57,297	41,831
1990	157,735	145,748
1991	101,605	79,814

[1] These figures include proposals determined by LEAs.

To date, 43 proposals have been rejected where there was an associated grant-maintained application, but it is not possible to say without disproportionate cost how many places would have been removed.

Admission Limits, Birmingham

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the primary schools in Birmingham where his Department has increased the admission limit for September; if he will detail how many will have class sizes above 30 pupils as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: From September 1992 all primary schools will be required to admit children up to their "standard number", a minimum admission number designed to reflect the capacity of the school. We are aware that certain primary schools in Birmingham will have higher admission numbers in 1992 than in 1991 as a result of this requirement, by virtue of the fact that proposals by Birmingham LEA to reduce the standard numbers for these schools have been rejected by my right hon. Friend. These schools are listed in the table.

The proposals to reduce the standard numbers at these schools were rejected in each case either because the school is already accommodating the total number of pupils implied by the existing standard number or because the standard number has been set on the basis of a simple assessment of the school's physical capacity. This assessment assumes that a maximum of 30 pupils can be accommodated in each standard size classroom with an appropriately smaller number in smaller rooms.

Actual class sizes reflect decisions about staffing levels by individual schools, taken in the light of the resources available to them. The average pupil teacher ratio in Birmingham in 1990-91 was 23·5:1, slightly higher than the national average. The total budget for education set by Birmingham LEA for 1992-93 is £52 million less than the total allowed for by the Government under the standard spending assessment mechanism.

School	*Admission limit September 1991*	*Standard number (minimum number of admissions for September 1992)*
Adderley JI School	60	68
Anglesey Infant School	90	91
Anglesey Junior School	90	96
Arden JI School	60	74
Aston Tower JI School	60	61
Barford JI School	60	62
Bellfield Junior School	60	70
Billesley Junior School	90	92
Birches Green Infant School	60	61
Birches Green Junior School	60	62
Blakesley Hall JI School	90	92
Broadmeadow Infant School	90	98
Brownmead JI School	30	32
Calshot Infant School	60	69
Calshot Junior School	60	65
Chilcote JI School	60	69
Christchurch CE JI School	30	33
City Road JI School	60	64
Colmers Farm Infant School	60	64
Colmers Farm Junior School	60	64
Colmore Infant School	90	91
Colmore Junior School	90	92
Conway JI School	60	63
Cottesbrooke Junior School	90	93
Elms Farm JI School	30	61
Erdington Hall JI School	60	64
Firs Infant School	60	67
Firs Junior School	60	62
Great Barr JI School	60	69
Green Meadow JI School	60	64

School	Admission limit September 1991	Standard number (minimum number of admissions for September 1992)
Grendon JI School	60	61
Grove Infant School	90	105
Hall Green Infant School	90	93
Harborne Junior School	90	91
Hawthorn JI School	30	32
James Watt Infant School	60	61
James Watt Junior School	60	65
Leigh JI School	60	64
Manor Park JI School	60	76
Mapledene Junior School	60	68
Marlborough Junior School	90	110
Meadows JI School	60	65
Moseley CE JI School	30	34
Nelson JI School	30	33
Nonsuch JI School	60	62
Northfield Manor JI School	60	62
Park Hill JI School	60	70
Percy Shurmer JI School	60	64
Perry Beeches Infant School	90	109
Prince Albert JI School	90	99
Raddlebarn JI School	60	61
Rednal Hill Infant School	90	101
Shaw Hill JI School	60	73
Shirestone JI School	60	66
Springfield Junior School	90	110
Stechford JI School	30	32
Stirchley JI School	30	32
Timberley JI School	60	72
Twickenham JI School	60	65
Wattville Junior School	90	109
West Heath Infant School	90	98
West Heath Junior School	90	100
Westminster Infant School	60	86
Westminster Junior School	60	89
Wheelers Lane Junior School	90	93
Wilkes Green Junior School	90	96
Woodthorpe JI School	30	32
Wychall Farm Infant School	60	68
Yardley Junior School	90	93
Yew Tree JI School	60	62

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) of 30 June 1992, *Official Report*, columns *452-53*, how many and what proportion of his Department's employees were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Forman: The number and percentage of the Department's full-time equivalent staff who were registered disabled on 1 June in 1989 and 1990 were:

	Number of RDPs	Per cent. of total staff
1989	66·0	2·6
1990	65·5	2·6

There were other staff in the Department with disabilities who chose not to register and are not therefore included in the figures.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list local education authorities in rank order of expenditure per pupil on secondary education for the last year for which figures are available, giving in each case *(a)* the number of (i) secondary and (ii) primary schools which have held ballots on grant-maintained status and *(b)* the number of (i) secondary and (ii) primary schools which have voted to apply for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Forth: The tables rank LEAs by school based spending per secondary pupil in 1989-90, the latest year for which information on actual spending is available. Table 1 lists the number of secondary and primary schools per LEA which have held ballots on grant-maintained status and table 2 lists the number which have voted for grant-maintained status.

Table 1

Local education authority	Net institutional expenditure[1] per secondary pupil[2] 1989-90 (£)	Number of schools which have balloted on grant maintained status[3] Secondary	Primary
Inner London	2,745	12	7
Waltham Forest	2,490	1	0
Ealing	2,345	8	2
Newham	2,310	1	0
Brent	2,225	4	0
Barking	2,200	0	0
Coventry	2,180	0	0
Salford	2,140	0	0
Kingston Upon Thames	2,120	1	0
Sandwell	2,115	2	0
Liverpool	2,110	2	0
Knowsley	2,105	1	0
Rochdale	2,050	2	1
Hillingdon	2,010	10	2
South Tyneside	2,010	0	0
Wigan	2,000	1	0
Walsall	1,995	6	1

Local education authority	Net institutional expenditure[1] per secondary pupil[2] 1989-90 (£)	Number of schools which have balloted on grant maintained status[3] Secondary	Primary
Havering	1,990	1	0
Newcastle Upon Tyne	1,980	0	0
Harrow	1,975	1	0
Wirral	1,975	1	0
Derbyshire	1,975	6	4
Wolverhampton	1,975	2	1
St. Helens	1,970	0	0
Bromley	1,955	13	2
Dudley	1,955	3	0
Nottinghamshire	1,955	3	0
Barnet	1,945	2	1
Croydon	1,935	2	0
Merton	1,925	0	0
Trafford	1,920	1	0
Sheffield	1,920	2	5
Cleveland	1,915	0	0
Hertfordshire	1,900	10	5
Leicestershire	1,900	3	0
Gateshead	1,865	1	0
Stockport	1,860	0	0
Bury	1,860	0	0
Shropshire	1,855	1	2
Redbridge	1,855	1	0
Buckinghamshire	1,850	4	3
Cumbria	1,845	6	3
Sunderland	1,845	0	0
Sutton	1,840	5	0
Bolton	1,840	1	1
Solihull	1,835	2	1
Tameside	1,835	2	0
Birmingham	1,835	5	0
Bexley	1,820	1	2
Lancashire	1,820	10	1
Suffolk	1,820	0	0
Enfield	1,815	0	0
Bedfordshire	1,815	3	1
Oxfordshire	1,810	1	0
Rotherham	1,810	0	0
Kirklees	1,810	3	2
Norfolk	1,810	11	12
Doncaster	1,805	1	0
Essex	1,800	33	9
Avon	1,800	2	1
Barnsley	1,795	2	1
Richmond upon Thames	1,790	0	0
Hampshire	1,790	8	9
Staffordshire	1,790	2	0
Warwickshire	1,770	7	0
East Sussex	1,765	0	0
Oldham	1,765	1	0
North Yorkshire	1,760	1	1
Humberside	1,760	1	1
West Sussex	1,745	1	0
Somerset	1,745	1	2
Gloucestershire	1,735	22	1
Berkshire	1,735	9	3
Durham	1,735	1	0
Cheshire	1,725	5	3
Sefton	1,715	0	0
Leeds	1,715	0	0
Devon	1,710	4	1
Cornwall (including Scilly Isles)	1,700	0	1
Wiltshire	1,700	4	1
Northamptonshire	1,685	13	4
Lincolnshire	1,680	21	7
Surrey	1,675	10	10
Calderdale	1,665	2	1
Northumberland	1,645	0	0
Cambridgeshire	1,640	7	8
Hereford and Worcester	1,635	1	0
Dorset	1,635	11	1
Bradford	1,635	1	0
Isle of Wight	1,575	0	0
Kent	1,570	44	6
North Tyneside	n/a	0	0

Local education authority	Net institutional expenditure[1] per secondary pupil[2] 1989-90 (£)	Number of schools which have balloted on grant maintained status[3] Secondary	Primary
Hounslow	n/a	0	0
Wakefield	n/a	0	1
Manchester	n/a	0	0
Haringey	n/a	0	0

Table 2

LEA	Net institutional expenditure[1] per secondary pupil[2] 1989-90 £	[3]Number of schools which voted to apply for grant maintained status Secondary	Primary
Inner London	2,745	9	5
Waltham Forest	2,490	1	0
Ealing	2,345	6	2
Newham	2,310	1	0
Brent	2,225	3	0
Barking	2,200	0	0
Coventry	2,180	0	0
Salford	2,140	0	0
Kingston Upon Thames	2,120	1	0
Sandwell	2,115	1	0
Liverpool	2,110	1	0
Knowsley	2,105	0	0
Rochdale	2,050	0	1
Hillingdon	2,010	10	2
South Tyneside	2,010	0	0
Wigan	2,000	1	0
Walsall	1,995	2	0
Havering	1,990	0	0
Newcastle Upon Tyne	1,980	0	0
Harrow	1,975	0	0
Wirral	1,975	1	0
Derbyshire	1,975	3	2
Wolverhampton	1,975	2	0
St. Helens	1,970	0	0
Bromley	1,955	12	2
Dudley	1,955	2	0
Nottinghamshire	1,955	1	0
Barnet	1,945	2	0
Croydon	1,935	1	0
Merton	1,925	0	0
Trafford	1,920	0	0
Sheffield	1,920	1	4
Cleveland	1,915	0	0
Hertfordshire	1,900	7	4
Leicestershire	1,900	2	0
Gateshead	1,865	0	0
Stockport	1,860	0	0
Bury	1,860	0	0
Shropshire	1,855	1	2
Redbridge	1,855	0	0
Buckinghamshire	1,850	4	2
Cumbria	1,845	6	3
Sunderland	1,845	0	0
Sutton	1,840	5	0
Bolton	1,840	1	1
Solihull	1,835	1	1
Tameside	1,835	1	0

LEA	Net institutional expenditure[1] per secondary pupil[2] 1989-90 £	[3]Number of schools which voted to apply for grant maintained status: Secondary	Primary
Birmingham	1,835	4	0
Bexley	1,820	0	2
Lancashire	1,820	6	1
Suffolk	1,820	0	0
Enfield	1,815	0	0
Bedfordshire	1,815	2	1
Oxfordshire	1,810	0	0
Rotherham	1,810	0	0
Kirklees	1,810	3	0
Norfolk	1,810	8	10
Doncaster	1,805	0	0
Essex	1,800	30	7
Avon	1,800	2	0
Barnsley	1,795	0	1
Richmond Upon Thames	1,790	0	0
Hampshire	1,790	6	7
Staffordshire	1,790	1	0
Warwickshire	1,770	6	0
East Sussex	1,765	0	0
Oldham	1,765	0	0
North Yorkshire	1,760	0	0
Humberside	1,760	0	1
West Sussex	1,745	0	0
Somerset	1,745	1	1
Gloucestershire	1,735	16	1
Berkshire	1,735	9	3
Durham	1,735	0	0
Cheshire	1,725	1	3
Sefton	1,715	0	0
Leeds	1,715	0	0
Devon	1,710	2	0
Cornwall including Scilly	1,700	0	1
Wiltshire	1,700	3	1
Northamptonshire	1,685	10	3
Lincolnshire	1,680	21	5
Surrey	1,675	10	8
Calderdale	1,665	2	1
Northumberland	1,645	0	0
Cambridgeshire	1,640	5	7
Hereford and Worcester	1,635	0	0
Dorset	1,635	11	0
Bradford	1,635	1	0
Isle of Wight	1,575	0	0
Kent	1,570	40	5
North Tyneside	n/a	0	0
Hounslow	n/a	0	0
Wakefield	n/a	0	1
Manchester	n/a	0	0
Haringey	n/a	0	0

[1] Net institutional expenditure covers spending on salaries and wages, recurrent premises costs, books and equipment, and certain other supplies and services. It excludes spending on LEA administration, home to school transport, school meals and financing costs of capital expenditure.
[2] Per pupil expenditure figures are derived from LEA's returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment and their pupil numbers to the Department for Education. Figures are for 1989-90, the latest year for which actual spending information is available.
[3] Figures include all ballots on grant-maintained status up to 13 July 1992.
[4] n/a indicates that a return was not received from the LEA.

University Staff (Pay Agreement)

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will ratify the 1992 pay agreement between the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Association of University Teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forman: The proposal for a pay settlement for university academic staff, made by the parties to committee A of the negotiating machinery, will be considered at a meeting of committee B—which includes officials from my Department—on Thursday 16 July. It would not be appropriate for the Government to comment on the proposal in advance of that meeting.

Access Funds

Mr. John Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what resources will be available for the access funds in 1992-93.

Mr. Forman: A total of £26·2 million will be available for the access funds in Great Britain for the 1992-93 academic year.

My Department's share will be £23·37 million. This sum is being allocated between the three access funds; allocations for the 1991-92 academic year are shown in parenthesis:

	£ million	£ million
Undergraduate Fund	13·27	(13·00)
Postgraduate Fund	5·90	(5·84)
Further Education Fund	4·20	(4·17)

Visits

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many education establishments he, the Minister of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), have visited since 9th April.

Mr. Patten: I, my noble Friend the Minister of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) have visited the following schools so far during our periods in office:

17 primary schools, including one middle school;

22 secondary schools, including three grant-maintained schools;

Two special schools;

Three CTCs; and

One sixth form college.

PRIME MINISTER

Construction Industry

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Prime Minister if he will transfer responsibility for the construction industry from the Department of the Environment to the Department of Trade and Industry.

The Prime Minister: No. The Department of the Environment is also responsible for housing and planning and for property holding. The interactions between all these responsibilities mean it makes sense to leave sponsorship of the construction industry where it is.

Earth Summit

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to ensure that the "Agenda 21" agreement at the Earth summit is given equal status in legal terms to the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

The Prime Minister: Governments agreed agenda 21 as a dynamic framework for action reflecting political commitment at the highest level. It is not, however, intended to be a legally binding document. My EC and G7 colleagues have endorsed my plan for ensuring that agenda 21 and the other Rio agreements are implemented effectively, including through the preparation of national reports for the UN Sustainable Development Commission.

Homelessness

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration he has given to establishing the ministerial interdepartmental committee to address the issue of homelessness.

The Prime Minister: I am satisfied that the present arrangements provide for appropriate interdepartmental discussions of homelessness as necessary.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

The Prime Minister: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. My Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Chazanfer Ali

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Bradford, West concerning Mr. Chazanfer Ali if he will give an assurance that Mr. Ali will be given every assistance to return to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Any entry clearance application from Mr. Ali will be considered on its merits and in accordance with the immigration rules.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister what information he has received from the British post in Islamabad about Mr. Chazanfer Ali.

The Prime Minister: On 29 June the British High Commission in Islamabad made inquiries of the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Mr. Chazanfer Ali's circumstances. Once a substantive response has been received I will write to the hon. Member.

Babcock and Wilcox

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 29 June, *Official Report*, column 593, about the European Council in Lisbon what discussions he had with the Italian Prime Minister on the letter from Babcock and Wilcox.

The Prime Minister: I am pursuing the matter with the Italian Prime Minister. The sanctions imposed by the United Nations against Libya consist of a ban on air links and an embargo on trade in arms and in aircraft and aircraft components. There has been no suggestion that Italy is not applying those sanctions. I am aware of the concern expressed in the letter from Babcock that British companies risk losing trading opportunities in Libya. But we cannot allow the promise of commercial favours to deflect us from our determination to ensure that the Libyans comply in full with United Nations Security Council resolutions 731 and 748.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 July.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 July.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Convention for a Democratic South Africa

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what are the criteria which determine with which Convention for a Democratic South Africa participants he or his officials have contact;

(2) if he will list those CODESA participants with which he or his officials have had no contact; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for this;

(3) with which CODESA participants he or his officials have had contact since the beginning of the process.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are 19 bodies represented at CODESA. We have had contact with many of them informally in the margins of the negotiations. Our policy on formal contacts within South Africa remains unchanged.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993, the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July, at columns *430-31*.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Duncan-Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy on the use of challenges before the European Court of Justice on measures taken by the European Commission or the Council of Ministers which in the opinion of Her Majesty's Government are contrary to the principle of subsidiarity, following the treaty of Maastricht.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Lisbon European Council conclusions invited the Commission and the Council to undertake urgent work on the procedural and practical steps to implement the principle of subsidiarity. We hope that these steps will help to ensure that measures adopted by the Community in future will fully comply with the principle of subsidiarity. When the Maastricht treaty enters into force it will be open to any member state, or the Commission, to challenge a member state, or the Commission, to challenge a measure on the grounds that it violates article 3b.

The Government anticipate that the principle will have its intended effect upon the legislative process, but do not rule out challenges before the court if necessary.

Iraq (Hostages)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made by Her Majesty's Government of the psychological and economic effects upon the British citizens caught up in Kuwait and Iraq in August 1990 and subsequently held hostage by Iraq.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Following advertisements in the national press in October 1990, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been gathering information on loss, damage, or injury, including mental pain and anguish, suffered by British nationals and companies as a direct result of Iraq's unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait. The first submission of British claims will be made to the United Nations compensation commission in early August. The Maudsley and Middlesex hospitals have provided special counselling facilities.

Nuclear Proliferation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new initiatives on nuclear proliferation in European Political Co-operation are planned for the United Kingdom presidency of the European Council.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Preventing nuclear proliferation is high among our foreign policy objectives. During our presidency of EPC—European Political Co-operation—we shall work with partners to extend and reinforce the nuclear non-proliferation regime, in particular by working for further accessions to the non-proliferation treaty—NPT—and an indefinite extension to the treaty at the 1995 extension conference; a strengthened International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards regime; and stricter supplier controls on nuclear material and technology.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new initiatives are planned by (i) Her Majesty's Government and (ii) European political co-operation under the United Kingdom presidency of the European Council, in support of the declaration made at the Munich Group of Seven summit to combat nuclear proliferation and enhance safeguards on nuclear materials.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We welcome the prominence given to non-proliferation in the political declaration of the Munich summit. During our presidency of EPC we shall work with other EC member states and with Group of Seven members to extend and reinforce the nuclear non-proliferation regime, in particular by working for further accessions to the NPT and an indefinite extension to the treaty at the 1995 extension conference; a strengthened IAEA safeguards regime; and stricter supplier controls on nuclear material and technology.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which states agreed upon the common list of nuclear goods and nuclear-related dual-use goods to be controlled by member states, when exported, referred to in paragraph 15 of the conclusions of the presidency on the European Council in Lisbon; and how long ago European Political Co-operation began its comparison of national policies on arms exports.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The 12 member states of the European Community agreed the common list of nuclear goods and nuclear-related dual-use goods. European Political Co-operation began its work on comparing national policies on arms exports during the first half of 1991.

Drapchi Prison, Tibet

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received about ill-treatment of women in Drapchi prison, Tibet in March; and what representations he has made.

Mr. Goodlad: We have no independent corroboration of these disturbing reports, though British diplomats attempted to visit Drapchi prison in May. We take every opportunity to express to the Chinese our deep concern about human rights abuses in Tibet and indeed throughout China, most recently to the Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister in London last week.

Foreign Forces (Training)

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy not to provide training to foreign forces known to be in breach of international human rights.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We see the provision of military training as an opportunity to increase awareness of the

importance of good government, democracy, self-discipline and respect for human rights. Governments sending students recognise this.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in achieving accession to the non-proliferation treaty and application of International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards to nuclear materials by each of the non-Russian republics and, in particular, Kazakhstan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Following extensive lobbying by a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, all of the republics of the former Soviet Union have now undertaken to accede to the NPT as non-nuclear weapons states. Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus recently made a formal undertaking in signing the protocol to the strategic arms reduction talks. We have emphasised to them that it is important that they act on these commitments as soon as possible.

Lhasa

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about demonstrations in Lhasa, Tibet, since the beginning of May, including the number of persons detained and injured, respectively, on each occasion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Much of the information of this kind comes from the findings of organisations such as Amnesty International and the Tibet Information Network. Two British diplomats visited Tibet in May. They reported that demonstrations had occurred earlier that month but were unable to obtain details.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. Goodlad: The information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. Goodlad: The information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) of 29 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *409*, how many and what proportion of his Department's employees were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Goodlad: In 1989, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office employed 45 registered disabled persons: 25 in the diplomatic wing—0·48 per cent. of its work force—and 20 in the Overseas Development Administration—1·29 per cent. of its work force. The figure for 1990 was 46·5: 23 full-time and one part-time member of staff in the diplomatic wing—0·4 per cent. of its work force—and 23 in the ODA—1·47 per cent. of its work force.

United Nations HQ

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those right hon. and hon. Members who have participated in the annual visit to United Nations headquarters in each of the past five years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The following right hon. and hon. Members have participated in the annual all-party visits to the United Nations in New York in the last five years:

1987:
Mr. Robert Boscawen (C)
Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (C)
Mr. Tim Smith (C)
Mr. Michael Jack (C)
Mr. Barry Jones (La)
Mr. Frank Haynes (La)
Mr. Charles Kennedy (SD)

1988:
Mr. David Lightbown (C)
Mr. Greg Knight (C)
Mr. Jacques Arnold (C)
Mr. Tim Rathbone (C)
Mr. Allen Mckay (La)
Mr. Jim Cousins (La)
Mr. Alex Carlile (SLD)

1989:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad (C)
Mr. Peter Viggers (C)
Mr. Alistair Burt (C)
Mr. Ian Gow (C)
Mr. John Battle (La)
Mr. Tony Banks (La)
Mr. Menzies Campbell (SLD)

1990:
Mr. Sydney Chapman (C)
Mr. Ian Taylor (C)
Mr. Jeremy Hanley (C)
Mr. Gwilym Jones (C)
Mr. Jeff Rooker (La)
Dr. Norman Godman (La)
Rev. Martin Smyth (UUP)

1991:
Mr. John M. Taylor (C)
Mr. Michael Irvine (C)
Mr. Barry Field (C)
Mr. Phillip Oppenheim
Mr. Don Dixon (La)
Mr. Frank Haynes (La)
Mr. Archie Kirkwood (Lib Dem)

India

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning human rights in India.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* As I made clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) on 1 July 1992, at column *587* there are a number of areas of concern and we have regularly raised these with the Indian Government.

Cameroon

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by his Department concerning democratic elections in Cameroon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* We have consistently made clear to the Government of the Cameroon our support for the introduction of a multi party democracy. As a result of constant pressure, President Biya agreed to multi-party national elections which took place in Cameroon on 1 March 1992, contested by 32 of the 48 registered opposition parties in Cameroon. Presidential elections are to be held in April 1993.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid and Human Rights

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the relationship between the provision of United Kingdom aid and the recipient country's human rights record.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Respect for human rights is a part of good government and therefore among the important factors which we take into account in providing aid.

UN Agencies

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list Overseas Development Administration contributions to United Nations agencies for the years 1979 to 1991 in real terms.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Contributions at 1991 prices were as follows:

ODA contributions to United Nation organisations real terms 1979 to 1991 (1991 prices)

(£ thousands)

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
World Food Programme[1]	16,788	4,981	3,330	5,665	1,314	1,576	717	693	13,725	5,631	18,137	4,325	14,140
Food and Agricultural Organisation	5,938	6,441	6,498	9,339	9,829	12,371	9,727	10,201	7,608	10,560	9,964	10,332	10,096
United Nations Development Programme	68,265	30,033	31,449	30,897	29,352	28,829	30,131	29,115	30,378	30,372	30,085	29,101	28,560
United Nations Childrens Fund[2]	17,661	9,993	13,219	9,992	9,629	9,142	12,052	11,519	15,849	15,153	14,117	9,966	9,019
United Nations Relief and Works Agency	10,527	9,010	8,985	6,680	7,933	9,104	7,174	6,932	6,934	6,508	6,525	6,053	6,000
United Nations High Commission for Refugees	21,501	13,963	10,526	10,413	5,903	10,765	24,191	19,438	19,548	24,137	22,351	20,924	23,475
International Fund for Agricultural Development	—	—	1,583	3,524	5,636	6,438	7,820	4,865	4,332	3,179	3,718	2,817	2,381
United Nations Fund for Population Activities	9,271	4,004	4,043	4,426	4,284	4,552	6,457	6,239	6,604	6,508	3,364	3,220	10,500
United Nations Industrial Development Organisation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,306	2,533	2,597	2,402	2,704	2,469
World Health Organisation Research Programmes	5,340	3,574	1,731	2,338	3,165	3,710	4,061	4,997	4,794	14,141	6,988	12,813	10,965
Other United Nations development agencies[3]	4,316	3,059	2,104	2,455	2,494	1,848	2,302	2,663	3,198	2,797	1,699	3,130	1,007

[1] Contributions to the World Food Programme include subscription payments, commodity purchase and, from 1987, food aid. Prior to 1987 the food aid channelled through WFP could not be distinguished from other food aid, and therefore is not included in this table.

[2] The UNICEF figures do not include payments to UNICEF for emergency relief (e.g. £4·608 million in 1991-92).

[3] Other United Nations development agencies include:
United Nations University Endowment Fund
United Nations Drug Control Pakistan
United Nations Fund for Volunteers
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
United Nations Development Fund for Women
United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
United Nations Border Relief Operation
United Nations Education and Training Programme (South Africa)

Source: British Aid Statistics.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer by the President of the Board of Trade to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *237*, if he will make a statement on how *(a)* the recommendation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the Commonwealth Development Corporation that its financial structure be changed and *(b)* the other recommendations, will affect his Department's quinquennial review of the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All the recommendations of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the Commonwealth Development Corporation will be considered as part of the quinquennial review.

Iraq

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he intends to respond to the representations he has received from Save the Children concerning the situation in Iraq.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has written to Save the Children on this matter. We deplore threats to the safety of United Nations personnel and other relief workers in Iraq, and my right hon. and noble Friend raised our concerns with the United Nations in New York last week. We will continue to monitor events in Baghdad and New York very closely. We support the United Nations in its efforts to negotiate a new memorandum of understanding.

Population Control

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *578*, what steps he has taken to ensure that grants given to the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations Population Fund do not result in the encouragement of forced abortion or sterilisation in *(a)* China and *(b)* Tibet.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* Neither the UNFPA nor the IPPF nor the British Government support population activities in which there is any element of coercion of individuals to practise family planning, or to accept any particular type of contraception. The UNFPA and IPPF provide no support for forced abortion or sterilisation in China or Tibet. It is the established policy of both agencies that their programmes fully accord with the human rights principles set out in the world population plan of action, that

"population policies should be consistent with internationally and nationally recognised human rights, and that all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so".

The ODA is an active member of UNFPA's governing council and participates fully in the IPPF's annual donors meeting. These fora enable donors to examine closely the policies and activities of both organisations. Through such bodies and regular contacts with UNFPA and IPPF officials, the ODA and other donors satisfy themselves that the UNFPA and IPPF continue to maintain the principles of the world population plan of action.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Investment Companies

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what representation has been made to the Government of the Irish Republic to protect future investors from Northern Ireland who invest in companies in the Irish Republic which have links with investment companies in jurisdictions outside the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic;

(2) what discussions have taken place with the authorities of the Irish Republic about International Investments Ltd. (Gibraltar);

(3) whether he will request the Government of the Irish Republic to investigate the International Investment Ltd. fraud.

Mr. Mates: No discussions have taken place with, or representations made to, the Government of the Irish Republic in respect of International Investments Limited. As I understand the position, this company was registered in Gibraltar and not in the United Kingdom and is now in liquidation. The liquidation is, therefore, a matter for the Gibraltar authorities and the responsibility for making representations to other Governments regarding International Investments Ltd. does not lie with Her Majesty's Government.

Prison Population

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the prison population in Northern Ireland at the latest available date.

Mr. Mates: The total prison population in Northern Ireland on 8 July 1992 was 1,834. This figure was compiled as follows:

HM prison, Belfast—511 prisoners
HM prison, Maghaberry—351 prisoners, including 42 females
HM prison, Magilligan—311 prisoners
HM prison, Maze—483 prisoners
HM young offenders centre—178 inmates including 28 on remand

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. Mates: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. Mates: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

WALES

Special Needs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications for placements have been made by people with special needs to each training and enterprise council in Wales in each year since the establishment of the councils; and how many have successfully received placements in each instance.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to issue guidelines to local education authorities requiring them to issue specific statements for children with special educational needs.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Welsh Office circular 54/89 and its addendum issued in March 1992 give detailed guidance to local education authorities on the form and content of statements of special educational needs. These advise that, if an authority considers a statement to be warranted, it should specify in detail each of a child's needs and the appropriate provision to meet those needs.

The Government have announced their proposal to issue further guidance on the criteria to which authorities should have regard in considering whether to start assessment procedures which may, in the light of the information received, lead to a statement.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to issue guidelines requiring all training and enterprise councils in Wales to establish special needs advisory groups.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Training and enterprise councils in Wales have established a variety of mechanisms for

consulting their local communities about special training needs. Training and enterprise councils are required to set out in their corporate and business plans how they will cater for people with special needs.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what improvements he will initiate to enhance access to schools by children who suffer disabilities.

Mr. David Hunt: Local education authorities are responsible for educational buildings, and for questions of access to them by disabled persons. Advice and guidance is available to authorities in Design No. 18 "Access for Disabled People to Educational Buildings" and in Building Bulletin 61 "Designing for Children with Special Educational Needs" issued by the Department for Education.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes to cater for special educational needs in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State will be making an announcement very shortly.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he intends to introduce proposals for shortening the procedure in Wales for assessing special educational needs; what is the average cost of producing a statement of special educational needs in Wales; and what is the average length of time it takes to produce a statement of special educational needs in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The responsibility for carrying out assessments and preparing statements of special education needs rests with individual local education authorities. Information on the time taken on these processes and the associated costs is not available centrally; practice varies between authorities. The Government have announced proposals to ensure that these procedures are conducted within specific timescales, which will extend to Wales as well as England.

Dentistry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many salaried dentists there are in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest figures available, as at 30 September 1990, show that there were 292 salaried dentists employed by district health authorities in the hospital and community service.

There are no salaried dentists employed by family health service authorities in Wales at present.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advisory criteria his Department issues to family health service authorities in Wales by which cross-infection rates in dental surgeries are measured in both absolute and selective terms.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. The Department issues guidance on cross-infection control from time to time and I refer to the answer given to the hon. Gentleman on 10 July 1991, *Official Report*, column *388*.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning NHS dental patients in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government are committed to maintaining a comprehensive NHS dental service. It is for family health services authorities, in consultation with district health authorities, to manage general dental services in their areas. Should a family health services authority experience difficulty in securing adequate NHS provision from independent contractors to meet the needs of local residents, it can apply to my Department for approval to employ salaried dentists.

Any unregistered patient seeking NHS dental treatment can contact the local family health services authority for advice and assistance. Community dental services also provide a safety net for those patients who are unable to obtain treatment under the general dental services.

Trainees

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of trainees currently on *(a)* youth training schemes and *(b)* employment training schemes in Wales; and, of these trainees, how many are in receipt of (i) communication services for deaf or blind people, (ii) essential taxi fare payments, (iii) adaptations to premises and equipment and (iv) loans of special equipment as part of their traineeships.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The number of trainees at 24 May 1992 on youth training schemes and employment training schemes in Wales was:

Training scheme	*Number*
Youth	15,906
Employment	9,585

Support for people with disabilities is provided as an integral part of the Government's training programmes. Separate figures are therefore not available on the numbers of people with disabilities in receipt of special assistance.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sheltered training places are offered to trainees with special needs by each training and enterprise council in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Support for people with disabilities is provided as an integral part of the Government's training programmes.

The detailed information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to issue guidelines requiring all training and enterprise councils in Wales to offer further assessment programmes and pre-vocational training facilities to trainees with special needs.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Training and enterprise councils are under a contractual obligation to ensure that individual needs are assessed prior to entry to training programmes and that people receive training that is tailored to those needs. They are also under a specific obligation to ensure that suitable high-quality training shall be available for all trainees who are shown by assessment to have special training needs. Guidance has been issued to training and enterprise councils highlighting best practice in assessment and pre-vocational training. There are no plans to issue further guidelines at this stage.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total cost of providing *(a)* communication services for deaf or blind trainees, *(b)* essential taxi fare assistance, *(c)* adaptation of premises and equipment and *(d)* loans of special equipment for trainees on (i) youth training schemes and (ii) employment training schemes for each training and enterprise council in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Support for people with disabilities is provided as an integral part of the Government's training programmes. Separate figures for the cost of such support is not held centrally.

General Medical Practitioners

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ask general medical practitioners in Wales to seek to place their annual reports in the local public library.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The terms of service for doctors require GPs to provide family health services authorities (FHSAs) an annual report relating to the provision of personnel medical services. This is a confidential report to the FHSA which is not empowered to disclose its contents to any other person.

I see no merit in seeking an amendment to this arrangement which would, in any case, require to be negotiated with the representative body of the profession.

Caravan Sites

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to ensure that grant aid given to councils which have yet to fulfil obligations under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 are not reclaimed by his Department.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No, if the circumstances require recovery, then grant will be reclaimed.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the total cost to each district council in Wales of abortive attempts to locate gipsy sites within the council area during each of the last five years;

(2) what was the total cost incurred by West Glamorgan county council in the abortive attempt to locate a gipsy site at Velindre.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which district councils in Wales have yet to fulfil their obligations under the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Section 6 of the Caravan Sites Act 1968 places a continuing obligation on county councils to determine the need for gipsy sites and so far as may be necessary to provide adequate accommodation for gipsies residing in or resorting to their area.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many district councils have been designated under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 concerning travellers.

Mr. David Hunt: One—Arfon borough council.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to review the Caravan Sites Act 1968; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) on 30 June, *Official Report*, column *498*.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local authorities in Wales are considering designation matters in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not held centrally. No applications for designation under section 12 of the Caravan Sites Act 1968 are before me at this time.

Housing Development, Clwyd

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from residents concerning a proposed housing development at Drury, Clwyd.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received representations from one resident regarding a proposed housing development on land at Drury new road, Drury.

Green Belts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the need for green belts in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received letters from various organisations about the need for green belts in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the effectiveness or otherwise of green barriers as opposed to green belts as they might apply to Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I am not aware of any monitoring or evaluation of the effectiveness or otherwise of green barriers as opposed to green belts. I have invited the Assembly of Welsh Counties, as part of its review of strategic planning guidance in Wales, to consider the potential contribution of green belts to the proper planning and development of Wales. When I receive its advice later this year, I will give it careful consideration.

Psychotherapy

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his answer of 22 June, *Official Report*, column *68*, if he will publish details of the numbers of staff allocated for the provision of psychotherapy in Gwynedd and their location.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There is no specified psychotherapy service available in Gwynedd. However, a number of experts within the various mental health disciplines are able to provide psychotherapy as part of the NHS's general psychiatric services in Gwynedd.

Valleys Initiative

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the projects which have been funded to date through the valleys initiative; how much funding has been provided in each case; and which projects have been brought to an end prematurely.

Mr. David Hunt: The detailed information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what monitoring procedures are used by his Department to ensure that money allocated to local authorities under the valleys initiative to fund local authority-led initiatives is actually spent on such initiatives; and if he will list the incidents where money has been allocated to local authority-led schemes under the valleys initiative but the local authority has later withdrawn from the scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: Funding for projects which contribute to the programme for the valleys is channelled to local authorities through various grant schemes, each of which is subject to monitoring arrangements. In some cases, funding has been switched from one project to another. The achievement of objectives is monitored at six-monthly intervals. Reports are published regularly, most recently on 19 February 1992.

Breast Feeding

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to provide additional ring-fenced allowances to midwives to help them attain set targets on numbers of breast-feeding mothers.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No, but it is our policy aim that pay arrangements for all NHS staff groups should become more flexible and more explicitly related to performance as measured in terms of deliverable objectives and quality of service to patients.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the current targets set by midwives in Wales for numbers of mothers undertaking breast feeding; and what financial support is currently granted by his Department to assist in the attainment of such targets.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I am aware of no targets set by midwives in Wales for numbers of mothers breast feeding. However, one the health gain targets of the "Protocol for Investment in Health Gain: Maternal and Early Child Health", published in August 1991 by the Welsh Office's NHS directorate, was that each district should reduce to 20 per cent. by 1997 the failure rate among women choosing to breast feed and to 5 per cent. by 2002.

The Government are committed to encouraging mothers to breastfeed. In the current financial year, the Welsh Office is giving a grant of £16,400 to fund a Welsh co-ordinator for the joint breast-feeding initiative. The aims of the initiative are to improve support for breast-feeding mothers and to stimulate a wish to continue breast feeding.

Tobacco

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the effects upon health of smoking and tobacco advertising.

Mr. David Hunt: I am very concerned about the damage that smoking can do. This has been reflected in the protocols for investment in health gain in the areas of cancers, cardiovascular disease and respiratory diseases and in the Health Promotion Authority for Wales' strategy documents which I have endorsed. I am determined that we should reach the targets proposed in these documents.

The Government have consistently taken the view that the best way to control the promotion and advertising of cigarettes is through a continuation of the successful and recently enhanced system of voluntary agreements between the Government and the tobacco industry. Although complex, the system is comprehensive in its coverage. It is designed to ensure that tobacco advertising is not aimed specifically at the young and, combined as it is with a total ban on television advertising of all tobacco products, the Government believe it is effective.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy to set a target for Wales of a 40 per cent. reduction in the number of people who smoke by the year 2000.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Health Promotion Authority for Wales has recently published targets for reductions in smoking in its document "The Agenda for 1992-94".

This includes a target reduction of 43 per cent. in adult women smokers—from 30 per cent. in 1985 to 17 per cent. by the year 2000—and a reduction of 43 per cent. in adult men smokers—from 35 per cent. in 1985 to 20 per cent. by the year 2000.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost to date of preparing the application for trust status by *(a)* Clwyd community and mental health services, *(b)* Glan Clwyd district general hospital and associated hospitals and *(c)* Wrexham Maelor hospital; and, in each case, who is meeting the cost of the application.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not held centrally, but the Department has made a financial contribution towards the costs incurred in the application process.

Health Authority Chairmen

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will name his nominee for the posts of chairmen of the Clwyd, Mid Glamorgan, South Glamorgan and West Glamorgan family health service authorities from 31 August together with the qualifications and experience of each candidate that is relevant to the post;

(2) if he will name his nominees for the posts of chairman of the East Dyfed, Gwynedd, Mid-Glamorgan and South Glamorgan health authorities from 31 July, together with the qualifications and experience of each candidate that is relevant to the post.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The names of individuals nominated for public appointment are private and confidential: the information requested cannot therefore be given. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to announce shortly the names of those who have accepted invitations to serve as chairmen of the eight authorities to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 9 July, *Official Report*, column *328*, if he will specify the form of the congratulation that he has bestowed on the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority for the professionalism of presentation of waiting times policy; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Secretary of State applauded South Glamorgan's efforts to involve the public in eliminating its two-year waiting list at his meeting with chairmen on 7 July.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. David Hunt: In 1991-92 the average number of staff employed by my Department was 2,399, at a total pay cost of some £40 million. In 1969-70 the average number of staff in post was 766: the total pay cost cannot be disaggregated from departmental running costs for this period.

The staff numbers are not directly comparable due to machinery of Government changes which have occurred in the intervening period.

Education White Paper

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to issue a White Paper on education in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Shortly.

Pupil Testing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the streamlined package of tests for seven-year-olds in schools in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: This year's national tests for seven-year-olds have recently been conducted in all schools in Wales. Results for individual pupils will be made available to parents as part of the pupil's annual school report. National aggregate data for each subject covered by the tests will be published in the autumn. As with the 1991 tests, this year's exercise will be fully evaluated by the School Examinations and Assessment Council.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 6 July, *Official Report*, column 8, if he will list *(a)* the 12 recommendations contained in the Sports Council for Wales report on the management and administration of the Welsh team in Auckland in 1990 which have not been implemented in full and *(b)* the three recommendations which have been implemented in full.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 7 July, *Official Report*, column *136*. This is a matter for the Sports Council for Wales.

Obesity

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy to set a target for Wales to reduce the proportion of overweight people to 6 per cent. of men and 8 per cent. of women by the year 2005.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The English strategy has set targets for the small number of people who are clinically obese. However, in Wales we have concentrated on the larger number of people who are either overweight or obese, and have set targets for reducing the mean body weight of the population as a whole as well as addressing the numbers of those overweight or obese.

Education Funding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the levels of resourcing for education in Wales; and if he will make it his policy to establish guaranteed minimum levels of funding to assist in the establishment of the national curriculum and local management of schools.

Mr. David Hunt: The local government finance settlement for 1992-93, approved by the House on 12 February, enables all local authorities in Wales to maintain and develop services for which they are responsible to an acceptable standard. The settlement is supplemented by the grants for education, support and training and Welsh language grant programmes under which specific grants are available to local education authorities for the support of the national curriculum and local management of schools.

Religious Education

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools feature religious education for the 14 to 16-year-olds' timetables; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Under the Education Reform Act 1988 the curriculum for every maintained school must include provision for religious education for all registered pupils at the school.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to obtain the advice of the Audit Commission on the restructuring of local government in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The Audit Commission has received copies of the consultation papers I have issued, and has submitted comments.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has asked the Audit Commission to undertake a full assessment of the costs and benefits of all the different options in regard to the reorganisation of local government in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Independent consultants have made an assessment of the financial implications of a unitary authority structure in Wales. A copy of their report is in the Library of the House. An Audit Commission representative attended meetings between my officials and officials representing the Assembly of Welsh Counties and the Council of Welsh Districts at which the methodology for this work was considered.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish all the responses he has received on the subject of the internal management of local authorities in Wales since November 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: Copies of these responses were placed in the Library of the House last February.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester West, (Mr. Janner) 30 June, *Official Report*, columns *498-99*, *(a)* how many of his Department's employees and *(b)* what proportion of his Department's employees, were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. David Hunt: The details, based on staff in post at 1 June, are given in the table:

	Number of registered disabled people	*Percentage of Departmental total*
1989	26	1·2
1990	32	1·3

Notes:
(1) Includes equivalent and professional grades.
(2) Includes industrial staff.
(3) Part-time staff count as one unit.

Health Service Data Collection

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 9 July, *Official Report*, column *328*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter DGM(90)123 regarding the commencement of separate data collection on patient episodes, inclusive of separate enumeration of tertiary and cross-specialty referrals.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have placed a copy of the letter DGM(90)123 in the Library of the House.

Health Gain Protocols

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish the protocols for health gain during 1992 as promised in his Department's "Agenda for Action 2".

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The protocols for cancer; cardiovascular diseases; maternal and early child health; physical disability and discomfort: physical and sensory disability; and respiratory diseases have already been published. The remaining protocols are those for injuries; learning disabilities; physical disability and discomfort: discomfort and pain management; physical disability and discomfort: oral health; mental distress and illness; emotional health and relationships; and healthy environments. All but the last two should be published during 1992. The last two will be published in early 1993.

Departmental Appointments

Mr. Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors;

(2) If he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. David Hunt: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Port Talbot Office

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will quantify the savings arising from the transfer of processing staff from his Port Talbot office to Bridgend for each of the next three years.

Mr. Burt: The resourcing of offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security why the visit of Sir Michael Partridge to the Port Talbot offices of the DSS was cancelled; and what cost was incurred, directly or indirectly, in the cancellation.

Mr. Burt: Sir Michael Partridge had to defer his visit to the Department of Social Security office in Port Talbot because he was required by his other duties to remain in London on that day. No direct costs were incurred. Indirect costs are estimated to be in the region of £10.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for his Department to celebrate the European Year of the Elderly in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July at column *430-31*.

Benefit Take-up Rates

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what figures are available on the proportion of social security benefits actually claimed by people eligible to receive them; and what are the comparable figures for the previous years for which information is available.

Mr. Burt: The latest available information is contained in the estimates of take-up of income-related benefits for 1987; these relate to housing benefit, family income supplement and supplementary benefit. Comparisons with previous years are included. Copies are available in the Library.

Post Office Payments

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his latest estimate of the number of persons receiving payment of child benefit through the Post Office;

(2) what is his latest estimate of the number of pensioners receiving their pensions through the Post Office.

Mr. Burt: The administration of child benefit, widows benefits and retirement pensions are a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Residential Care Homes

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will indicate the extent to which his Department's budget will be altered to reflect the transfer to local councils of responsibility for people in nursing and residential homes.

Mr. Burt: The transfer of responsibility will be matched by a transfer of resources from this Department for distribution to local authorities. The amount of the transfer has not been decided.

Mortgage Interest Payments Information

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the provisions by which information on benefit recipients affected by the consequences of the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Act 1992 is exempted from the Data Protection Act 1984.

Mr. Burt: Disclosure is required by the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Act 1992 which provides for income support for mortgage interest to be paid direct to qualifying lenders. The consequential regulations also specify information about income support recipients' mortgages to be provided by qualifying lenders in order to ensure that the correct amount of benefit is paid direct to them.

These enactments provide exemption from the non-disclosure provisions through section 34(5) of the Data Protection Act 1984.

The Department of Social Security registration under the Data Protection Act in respect of its benefits provides for disclosure of information to qualifying mortgage lenders.

Pensioners (London Weighting)

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce proposals to amend the Social Security Pensions Act 1975 to introduce London weighting for pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to introduce London weighting to the state retirement pension. Retirement pensions and other contributory benefits are part of a national scheme of contributions and benefits.

Benefit Recoupments

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money has been recovered by his Department in the first year of the recoupment of benefits under section 22 and schedule 4 of the Social Security Act 1989.

Miss Widdecombe: In the year to 31 August 1991 the compensation recovery unit recovered £11·4 million.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost to his Department of recouping benefits under section 22 and schedule 4 of the Social Security Act 1989.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 15 June at col. *387*.

Benefits Service Targets

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what national targets for benefits services have been published since July; and what reports have been published by the Benefits Agency on how it performed against these targets.

Mr. Burt: The publication of national targets for benefits services and reports on performance against them are matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Local Offices (Hours)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of benefits offices have adopted more flexible opening hours since July 1991.

Mr. Burt: The opening hours of Benefits Agency offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Contributions Agency Conference

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Social Security Contributions Agency held its 1991-92 annual conference; how national insurance contributors were informed of this event; and how many national insurance contributors attended it.

Miss Widdecombe: Questions concerning the Contributions Agency's annual conference are matters for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors;

(2) if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Burt: Information is not held centrally in the form requested. The Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and if he will calculate the staffing level of the Social Security section of the former Department of Health and Social Security and the associated personnel costs, immediately before its separation.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table:

	DHSS 1988-89 £ million	DSS 1991-92 £ million
Staff in Post	[1]84,667 (March 1989)	78,277 (April 1992)
Personnel Costs	923·570	1,117·481

Notes:
1. Included in personnel costs are salary costs of both permanent and casual staff, overtime as well as employers National Insurance costs.
2. The 1991 figures are the latest available as personnel costs for 1992-93 are not yet available.
3. The staff in post data is based on manual returns.
4. Separation of the Departments of Health and Social Security took place April 1989.
[1] DSS staff only

Pension Age

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish the outcome of the discussion document, "Options for Equality in State Pension Age."

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on 2 July at column *700-1*.

Pension Funds

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will propose legislation under which the administrator of a pension fund would be required to *(a)* send a summary of the fund's accounts, as soon as they are available, to all beneficiaries and *(b)* notify all beneficiaries as to how to obtain a copy of the latest year's accounts;

(2) what plans his Department has to make the Occupational Pensions Board the main supervisory body for the pensions industry;

(3) if he will draw up proposals under which pension fund investment assets would *(a)* be held by independent custodian trustees and *(b)* have their ownership clearly designated upon them;

(4) what proposals he has to strengthen the role of the Occupational Pensions Board to enable it to carry out the task of running any pensions compensation scheme that may be recommended by the pensions law review committee;

(5) if he will draw up proposals under which letters of representation obtained in pensions fund audits would be required to leave the directors and trustees of those funds in no doubt as to their responsibilities with regard to the ownership, appropriateness, valuation and custody of investments;

(6) if he will make it Government policy to ensure that beneficiaries of pension funds have an annual opportunity of questioning the trustees on their administration of those funds;

(7) if he will propose legislation which would establish a pension compensation fund;

(8) whether the pensions law review committee under the chairmanship of Professor Goode QC intends to examine the practicalities of the idea that each pensioner should have the annual right of transferring his entire assets from his pension scheme into another recognised financial institution;

(9) if he will make it his policy to ensure the Occupational Pensions Board monitors *(a)* the appointment of pension fund trustees, *(b)* the winding-up of pension funds and the division of their assets and *(c)* the annual reports and accounts of pension funds lodged with the board;

(10) if he will issue guidelines codifying *(a)* the specific obligations of pension fund trustees to maintain proper accounting and *(b)* the form which auditors' reports to pension fund trustees should follow so that future areas of risk are qualified and explained;

(11) if he will make a statement as to how the Government consider the Inland Revenue can best fit in the work of the superannuation funds office in monitoring pension funds with the work of the Occupational Pensions Board in policing those funds;

(12) if he will make it his policy to issue guidelines to actuaries of pension funds advising them on what is their role in ensuring the nation's pension funds are safe, secure and run in a fit and proper manner;

(13) if he will instruct the Occupational Pensions Board to begin urgent discussions with the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation to discover how many pension funds entrust assets to managements whose ultimate control lies outside the jurisdiction of Great Britain;

(14) what steps he intends to take to bring about a co-ordination of *(a)* pensions industry regulatory bodies and *(b)* the checks carried out on pension funds by the different professional advisers.

Miss Widdecombe: In accordance with their manifesto promise the Government set up a Pension Law review committee on 8 June under the chairmanship of Professor Goode QC. The wide terms of reference given to the review committee will enable it to look at the overall framework of occupational pensions. The recommendations will form the basis for the Government to bring forward any detailed changes which are found to be necessary in order to give added protection to occupational pension schemes. The conclusions of the Select Committee report and points raised by the hon. Member and others will be among the issues the review committee will wish to take into account in deciding on its recommendations.

Working Hours Rule

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many new claimants have been disallowed income support because the weekly working hours regulation has been reduced from 24 hours to 16 hours;

(2) if he will review the regulation that disallows claimants income support and therefore mortgage interest payment because their partner works more than 16 hours per week;

(3) how many claimants have been refused income support and mortgage interest payments from his Department because their partners work between 16 and 24 hours per week; and how many have subsequently re-applied and been allowed benefit because *(a)* their partners have stopped work or *(b)* work less than 16 hours per week;

(4) how many home owners are *(a)* having their homes repossessed or *(b)* in arrears of more than two months

with their mortgage because they are not in receipt of mortgage interest payments from his Department because their partners work more than 16 hours per week.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available. The change in the income support hours rule from 24 to 16 hours a week was made in April 1992 as part of a package of measures aimed at helping working families with children, and lone parents in particular. By reducing the number of hours it is necessary to work in order to qualify for family credit, many more families are able to claim that benefit and many will be better-off than they would have been on income support, even after paying for their mortgage.

Those people who were working, or whose partners were working, between 16 and 24 hours a week and receiving income support at the point of change were able to continue to receive income support including any help with their mortgage interest.

It is too soon to say how the rule is working in practice but we are monitoring its effects.

Disabled Employers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) of 30 June, *Official Report*, column *503*, how many and what proportion of his Department's employees were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Burt: The information for the Department and its executive agencies is in the tables:

Grade	*Total*	*Registered disabled*	*Percentage*
As at 1 June 1989			
1 to 7	703·0	1·0	0·1
Others	81,751·0	1,262·0	1·5
TOTAL	82,454·0	1,263·0	1·5
As at 1 June 1990			
1 to 7	730·5	2·0	0·3
Others	79,377·0	1,374·5	1·7
TOTAL	80,750·5	1,376·5	1·7

Notes:

1. The figures do not include staff with disabilities who choose not to register or chose not to disclose their registration.
2. The figures do not include registered disabled people employed under the sheltered placement scheme.
3. For each grade, all non-industrial staff in equivalent grades are included.
4. The figures for grades 1 to 7 have been grouped together as the numbers of registered disabled staff in these grades are very small and they risk identifying an individual.
5. All figures are full-time equivalents.

Social Fund

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 29 June, *Official Report*, column *433*, of the 65 applications for discretionary social fund awards which were refused by the Lewisham and Brixton office, how many applicants lived in Lewisham, Deptford.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the members of the disability living allowance advisory board; how often the board has met; whether it has yet given any advice to Ministers; when it expects to issue its first report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The names of the members of the disability living allowance advisory board are in the table. It has met four times in full and nine times in quorum. So far, the board has given Ministers valuable advice on the content of the disability handbook—all of which has been acted upon. The board is due to produce its first report in April 1993.

Members of the disability living allowance advisory board

Professor J. Marshall CBE, DSc, MD, FRCP, DPM
Mrs. J. Allen-King MBE
Mrs. J. Ashcroft
Mrs. P. Case CBE, BA
Dr. A. K. Clarke BSc, MBBS, FRCP
Miss E. Fanshawe OBE, DipCOT
Mrs. J. Franklin CQSW
Mr. S. R. Gallop MA
Mrs. C. Henry RGN
Dr. C. F. Herridge MA, MB, BChir, FRCPsych, DPM
Dr. J. A. Hunter BSc, MBChB, FRCP
Miss S. Knibbs CQSW
Mr. P. Large CBE
Dr. I. McKinlay BSc, MBChB, FRCP
Dr. T. J. G. Phillips MBBS, FRFPS, MRCP, MFOM
Mrs. S. A. Philbrook
Dr. M. Piper MB, BS, FRCP
Dr. M. Richards BSc, MB, BCh, FRCGP
Professor H. Simpson MD, FRCP, DCH, DRCOG
Mr. A. Williamson LLB, MA(Ed), CQSW

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of claims for A8 and A4 prescribed diseases for each of the last five years.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to implement the recommendation of the May 1992 report of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (Cm. 1936).

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) on 21 May at column *241*.

Unemployment

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the average cost to the Exchequer over 12 months of an unemployed former civilian Ministry of Defence employee in unemployment benefit, income support, mortgage interest payments or housing benefits, free dentistry and prescriptions and poll tax rebates.

Mr. Burt: A reliable estimate is not possible.

SCOTLAND

DNA Information

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on the provision of DNA information about patients to insurance companies.

Mr. Stewart: Information obtained from DNA testing is confidential and should be treated in the same way as other personal health information. It should not be disclosed to insurance companies without the prior consent of the patient.

Genetics

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what policy conclusions have been drawn in relation to genetic therapy and genetic counselling from the conference "Our Genetic Future" held at BMA house on 30 June.

Mr. Stewart: The conference was an important contribution to the debate about the issues surrounding developments in genetic research. The Government recognise the importance of counselling for both sufferers and their families and are currently considering their response to the report of the Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy, Cm 1788.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses are currently trained in the detection and treatment of genetic disorders; and what plans he has to increase the numbers.

Mr. Stewart: *(a)* The information collected centrally records only the main specialty of a doctor. The numbers —whole-time equivalent—of doctors in the specialty of medical genetics at 30 September 1991, the latest date for which information is available, are given in the table.

	Whole time equivalent
Consultants	4·2
Associate specialists	1·0
Senior registrars	3·2
Registrars	4·4
Total	12·8

(b) Information on nurses trained in medical genetics is not available centrally.

The numbers of doctors in the training grades of registrar and senior registrar reflect health boards' plans for staffing the specialty.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to promote the early adoption of new techniques of diagnosis management, and treatment of the effect of genetic disease, including proven gene therapy;

(2) what strategy he has to use new molecular knowledge in surgery and treatment; and what training is given to those who use manipulative techniques in this field.

Mr. Stewart: The Government consider that it is important that applications of new molecular biological techniques to the diagnosis, management and treatment of patients should be subjected to stringent evaluation before they are adopted for use in clinical practice. In Scotland, new techniques are kept under close review by the Scottish Molecular Genetics Consortium, established in 1984, one of whose purposes is the co-ordination of approaches towards the diagnosis of genetic disorders.

The committee on the ethics of gene therapy was set up in 1989 to provide advice to the United Kingdom Health Ministers on scientific and medical developments which have a bearing on the safety and efficiency of human gene modification. The committee's report was published in January this year and a public consultation on its recommendations ended on 18 May. The Government are currently considering their response to the report.

Each of the royal colleges and faculties takes the lead on professional training within its own speciality. Training in molecular biological techniques is available for clinicians in training programmes organised by the Medical Research Council, the Wellcome Trust and other bodies.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision he is making to provide genetic counselling for *(a)* individual patients, *(b)* family groups and *(c)* relatives of victims of genetic disorders.

Mr. Stewart: Specialist genetic counselling is provided by clinical geneticists based in the four genetic advisory centres in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen. In addition, other clinicians, including obstetricians, paediatricians and GPs play an important role in counselling those suffering from genetic disorders, their families and those whose future children may suffer from such disorders.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what study he has made of the practice of payment from one health authority to another in paying for tests relating to genetic disorders.

Mr. Stewart: No such study has been undertaken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the need of central laboratories for clinical geneticists.

Mr. Stewart: A review last year of the four laboratories which comprise the Scottish Molecular Genetics Consortium identified a need for two additional consultant clinical geneticist posts. Both should be filled in the near future. The need for any further increase is under discussion with the consortium.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for the provision of genetic registers, and enabling such registers to play a role in the elimination of potential carriers of disease.

Mr. Stewart: The first computerised genetic register in the United Kingdom, RAPID—Register for the Ascertainment and Prevention of Genetic Disease—was developed and established in the department of human genetics at Edinburgh university in 1970. All four of the major medical centres in Scotland now have such registers.

Thalassaemia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision is made for those suffering from thalassaemia.

Mr. Stewart: Thalassaemia can be detected by pre-natal tests, and the Scottish Molecular Genetics Consortium

offers such a service. Individuals suffering from thalassaemia major are treated mainly by blood transfusion coupled with iron-reducing drugs.

Community Charge

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discretion local authorities have over the collection of small amounts of outstanding community charge debt where costs of collection are greater than the amount due.

Mr. Stewart: Local authorities must consider each case on its merits and be prepared to explain the reasonableness of their approach to their auditors if necessary.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give figures showing, for each local authority, the number of cases of community charge collection where the amount collected was less than the costs of collection;

(2) if he will give figures showing the costs for each Scottish local authority of enforcement action for the recovery of community charge debt and the amounts so recovered;

(3) if he will give figures showing the costs for each Scottish local authority of enforcement action for the recovery of community charge debt in cases where the costs of collection are greater than the amount due.

Mr. Stewart: The information is not held centrally.

Speech Therapy

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much of the speech therapy provision announced on 24 February is to be distributed to *(a)* under-fives, *(b)* children in mainstream education and *(c)* children with mental handicaps;

(2) what is the estimated cost of speech therapy provision for children with records of needs in each of the regional council areas; and how many such children there are in each.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As soon as the information is available I will reply to the hon. Member in writing.

Sheriff Ewen Stewart

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has now considered the findings of the investigation undertaken by the Lord President and Lord Justice Clerk of the fitness for office of Sheriff Ewen Stewart; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make a decision on the case of Sheriff Ewen Stewart before 16 July.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* As I announced last year, following representations, including representations from Members of this House, and in the light of the observations of Sheriff Principal R. A. Bennet QC in a particular case, I concluded that it would be appropriate for an investigation to be undertaken of the fitness for office of Sheriff Ewen Stewart. I therefore asked the Lord President and Lord Justice Clerk to carry out such an investigation under the provisions of section 12 of the Sheriff Courts (Scotland) Act 1971. I received their report on 10 February 1992.

In the report, their lordships noted that this was the third occasion that an investigation had been undertaken into the fitness for office of Sheriff Stewart. Their lordships concluded that a general investigation would be appropriate into the sheriff's conduct since the date of the last report. Following preliminary inquiries, their lordships provided Sheriff Stewart with a list of the cases relevant to his conduct which they were to investigate and invited him to answer specific questions relating to these cases as well as to offer any general observations which he cared to make. On receipt of the sheriff's responses, further inquiries were made and their lordships interviewed Sheriff Stewart before completing their report.

The conclusion of their lordships' very detailed report was that Sheriff Stewart was unfit for office by reason of inability to perform the judicial functions which are expected of a sheriff by virtue of his office and in terms of his judicial oath. On receipt of their lordships' report I arranged for a copy to be sent to Sheriff Stewart and invited him to comment on its findings. I have given very careful consideration to Sheriff Stewart's detailed response which he submitted to me on 4 May 1992, but I have decided, in all the circumstances, to bring forward an order removing him from office.

I am arranging, to be placed in the Library of both Houses of Parliament, their lordships' letter of 10 February 1992, together with appendix A and appendix C thereto, under deletion from appendix A of two cases which their lordships decided, having considered Sheriff Stewart's response, did not merit further investigation. Appendix B, which contains Sheriff Stewart's responses to their lordships, has not been placed in the Library. As indicated by their lordships in appendix C to their letter, much of what is said by Sheriff Stewart is irrelevant to the cases which were under investigation. In addition, some parts of appendix B appear to be potentially defamatory.

DEFENCE

Sexual Harassment and Assault

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of complaints by British service women of alleged sexual harassment and sexual assault against British service men for the latest year for which information is available; what action was taken as a result; and what procedures exist for reporting and investigating such instances.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The number of complaints made by British service women about alleged sexual harassment and assault involving British service men could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All complaints by service personnel of harassment of any nature are dealt with under normal redress of grievance procedures and, if substantiated, appropriate action would be taken against the offender. Normally, a complaint is dealt with by the commanding officer, but if it cannot be resolved at that level or the complainant is dissatisfied, it may be referred up the chain of command and ultimately to the Navy, Army, or Air Force board.

If a service woman wishes to make a complaint of sexual assault, she should report the incident to her superior officer for action through the chain of command.

Depending on the seriousness of the offence, the matter would then be dealt with by the military authorities or civil police.

Port of Dartmouth Royal Regatta

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the guardships which attended the Port of Dartmouth royal regatta in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement as to which ship will be present at the 1992 regatta, to be held between 26 and 30 August.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

1982—HMS Alfriston
1983—HMS Achilles
1984—HMS Euryalus
1985—HMS Diomede
1986—HMS Hermione
1987—HMS Plymouth
1988—HMS Avenger
1989—HMS Cardiff
1990—HMS Active
1991—HMS Battleaxe

HMS Sirius is currently scheduled to attend the 1992 regatta.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will arrange for *(a)* HMS Alacrity or *(b)* HMS Gloucester to attend the 1992 Port of Dartmouth royal regatta as guardship between Wednesday 26 August and Sunday 30 August.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The provision of a guardship for the Dartmouth royal regatta depends on the availability of a suitable vessel after taking account of operational training commitments which must take precedence. Neither HMS Alacrity nor HMS Gloucester will be available; HMS Sirius is currently scheduled to attend the regatta.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department will be represented at the session on restoration of militarily contaminated lands of the United Nation's conference on indigenous peoples in Geneva at the end of July.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Korea

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current United Kingdom military commitment in Korea, its present annual cost and the cost for each year since it began, both in actual and current prices.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom's military presence in Korea comprises two defence attaches, a first secretary (defence supply) and their supporting staff in the British embassy in Seoul; members of the Commonwealth Liaison Mission to the United Nations Command, headed by the British defence attache; and a platoon of infantry as part of the United Nations honour guard. The full costs of the commitment are not normally separately identified within the Defence budget, but it is estimated that in 1991-92 they amounted to £1·9 million at 1991-92 outturn prices. Figures for previous years could not be made available without disproportionate effort.

Armaments (Dumping at Sea)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make it his policy to set a target date for the banning of the practice of dumping armaments at sea around the coast of the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will publish a list of all the sites utilised for dumping surplus armaments in the sea around the coast of the United Kingdom at present;

(3) what mechanisms are utilised by his Department to monitor sites used for the dumping of armaments at sea, including environmental effects;

(4) if he will publish a list of the materials contained in surplus armaments dumped around the coast of the United Kingdom over the last 10 years.

Mr. Aitken: Ministry of Defence will terminate all sea dumping of redundant ammunition and explosive stocks by 1 January 1993. This is in line with the Government's general policy that where safe and practicable waste should be disposed of on land, in preference to dumping at sea. Dumping is carried out in a strictly controlled manner to ensure that it does not cause damage to the marine environment, or interfere with fishing, or other legitimate uses of the sea. Preparation of stores for dumping includes the removal of components containing toxic heavy metals which are not permitted to be disposed of in this manner. There has been no sea dumping of redundant ammunition and explosive stocks around the coast of the United Kingdom during the last 10 years. The only dump site in use is some 400 miles off Lands End in the Atlantic at a depth of some 4,500 m. The depth of this site precludes effective monitoring but there is no evidence to suggest that controlled dumping of conventional ammunition and explosives in this manner constitutes a risk to the marine environment.

Overseas Equipment Sales

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role British military attaches play in the sale of British defence equipment overseas.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his earlier question on British military attaches, *Official Report* column *671*.

Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 July to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), *Official Report*, column *656*, what additional costs are incurred by his Department from preparing separate forms of statistics on defence expenditures for the annual statement on the defence estimates and the United Nations report on military expenditures.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information on defence expenditure provided to the United Nations and that contained within the annual statement on the Defence estimates are both based on information collected within the MoD for financial management purposes. It is not possible to quantify any additional costs.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a table of expenditure on equipment purchased by his Department, cross-referenced to

standard regions, showing Greater London as a separate region, for each year since 1987-88 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1987-88 prices.

Mr. Aitken: My Department's expenditure on equipment between 1985-86 and 1990-91 broken down by region, together with estimates of the associated direct employment, is published in table 1.11 of the 1992 edition of "Defence Statistics". Separate figures for Greater London could be provided only at disproportionate cost and effort. The published figures may be recast to the price base desired by the use of published indices.

Residential Properties

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham are owned by his Department; if he will publish a list of such residential properties which are currently empty, giving the type of accommodation available, the length of time each property has been vacant, and the intended future use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence currently owns 12 residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham, all of which are occupied.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr Aitken: Following is the information:

Full time equivalent Civil servants (Number)

	United Kingdom	*Locally employed overseas*	*Cost at 1991-92 price £ million*
1 April 1970	257,906	68,400	4,140
1 April 1992	139,454	27,000	2,853

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors;

(2) if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Aitken: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. My Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering public appointments and the engagement of advisers.

RAF Brawdy

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate of the number of civilian employees who will lose their jobs when fast jet training ceases at RAF Brawdy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have issued 42 redundancy notices so far, with a further four to follow. In addition, a total of 10 employees are to be transferred either to other Government Departments or within MoD.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to his Department of redundancy and other linked payments to those civilian employees who will lose their jobs when tactical weapons training ceases at RAF Brawdy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The total cost to the Department is estimated to be in the region of £440,000.

Redundancy

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his best estimate of the average cost to the Exchequer for redundancy and related payments including any enhancements and payments in lieu of notice for a civilian Ministry of Defence employee.

Mr. Aitken: Civil service redundancy payments are paid under the compulsory early retirement terms of the principal civil service pension scheme and are based on an individual's age, length of service and rate of pay at the time of leaving. It is, therefore, not possible to give a meaningful average figure.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column 688, to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), *(a)* how many of his Department's employees, and *(b)* what proportion of his Department's employees, were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Aitken: The Ministry of Defence employed 1,202 and 1,210 registered disabled persons in 1989 and 1990 respectively. This represented 1 per cent. and 0·9 per cent. of the total civilian work force.

Departmental Property (Extensions)

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on consultations with the appropriate local parliamentary representatives when extensions to his Department's property are proposed which may have detrimental consequences for the area concerned.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Except where security considerations are over-riding, it is my Department's policy to consult fully with local planning authorities (or, in Northern Ireland, the planning service) about any development proposals. Only in exceptional circumstances would it be our practice to notify the constituency MP.

RAF Regiment

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has for the future organisation of the RAF regiment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As part of our programme to create a more efficient structure for the RAF, studies have been made into the future size and shape of the RAF regiment.

The restructuring of RAF Germany removed the requirement for two of the United Kingdom based RAF regiment light armoured squadrons (LAS), which in time of war would have provided ground defence of forward operating bases in Germany. Following the disbandment

of 58 squadron LAS at Catterick earlier this year, 51 squadron LAS—also at Catterick—will disband with effect from 31 March 1993. This will leave the RAF regiment with three light armoured squadrons and a field squadron. Further economies will be achieved by replacing the armoured vehicles with soft-skinned wheeled vehicles, scaled with mortars for fire support. The new field role for the squadrons will provide them with greater operational flexibility than hitherto. The Queen's Colour squadron will also assume additional operational duties as a war-roled field squadron.

These changes, together with the reduction in the number of Rapier squadrons from 10 to eight earlier this year, will reduce the need for the existing level of the RAF regiment's headquarters organisations. With effect from 1 October 1992, therefore, HQ 3 wing at Catterick and HQ 33 wing at Gutersloh will be disbanded.

Our studies have looked carefully into rationalisation of the RAF regiment bases in the United Kingdom. The results have shown that cost savings and greater efficiency can be achieved through the maximum degree of collocation possible of the regiment's activity in the United Kingdom. In early 1994, HQ 6 wing RAF regiment, No. 66 sqn RAF regiment and the Rapier training unit will move from RAF West Raynham to Honington, involving the relocation of just over 200 service men. This is in line with the rationalisation measures announced in the 1991 Defence White Paper. No final decision has yet been made about the West Raynham base. Apart from a short term requirement for married quarters and domestic accommodation, the RAF has no future requirement for the base. Other possible defence uses for West Raynham are being considered.

It is further proposed that the RAF regiment depot and No. 2 sqn RAF regiment will move from Catterick to Honington. The move is planned to take place in late 1993/early 1994 and would involve the relocation of about 500 service men.

Everything possible would be done to avoid redundancies of the civilian work force employed at the bases affected by these changes. Army use of RAF Catterick could provide job opportunities for the existing civilian employees. There may also be opportunities for alternative employment at Catterick garrison. In the absence of a future defence requirement for West Raynham some redundancies are likely to be necessary. Anyone made redundant would be compensated under the terms of the appropriate pension scheme. The MoD would establish close contact with employers in the areas affected, including other Government Departments, and any staff leaving prematurely under voluntary or compulsory redundancy terms would be eligible for the services provided by the MoD counselling and outplacement service. The trade unions will be consulted in the usual way.

Army Static Workshop Organisation

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the Army Static Workshop Organisation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The changes in the size and shape of the Army following from "Options for Change" will result in a considerable reduction in the volume of repair work undertaken by the Army's base and district workshops. Accordingly, a wide ranging review has been undertaken to assess the numbers and locations of workshops which will be required to support the Army in the future from the financial, engineering and operational viewpoints.

The main recommendations of that review are that 39 district workshop, Bridgend, 41 district workshop, York, and 42 district workshop, Liverpool, should close by 31 March 1993; and that 23 base workshop at Wetter in Germany should close by 31 March 1994. These closures will remove surplus capacity from the organisation and they will also lead to a substantial increase in the volume of contract repair undertaken by British industry. Overall, they are expected to achieve savings in operating costs of some £7 million per year.

The German authorities have been informed of our intention to close 23 base workshop. We will consult with them fully throughout the closure process and we will follow normal procedures with the Works Council. In the United Kingdom we are about to start a full period of consultation with the relevant trade unions over all the proposed closures. A final decision will be taken in the light of any representations.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fish Catches

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the figures showing the landings in tonnes of *(a)* cod, *(b)* sole and *(c)* haddock in each year from 1970 onwards.

Mr. Curry: The information requested relating to all landings into the United Kingdom is given in the table.

Landings into the United Kingdom by British and foreign fishing vessels (tonnes landed weight). The figures include landings from fishing grounds in the North Atlantic which have, over the period, been closed to British fishermen

Year	*Cod*	*Sole*	*Haddock*
1970	366,674	1,624	179,527
1971	326,034	1,372	183,642
1972	323,545	1,372	157,988
1973	290,424	1,473	154,991
1974	290,576	1,168	132,690
1975	272,344	1,312	116,064
1976	260,809	1,588	130,639
1977	175,380	1,490	124,229
1978	168,970	1,804	87,606
1979	160,271	2,133	82,542
1980	148,024	1,937	94,664
1981	147,988	1,865	106,864
1982	141,610	2,271	134,371
1983	135,959	2,383	126,989
1984	113,816	2,596	109,741
1985	112,447	2,980	135,113
1986	94,422	3,426	133,628
1987	108,866	3,560	105,378
1988	94,396	3,372	100,885
1989	84,941	3,401	75,184
1990[1]	74,526	3,612	52,115

[1] The figures for 1990 have not yet been published but have been finalised.

Source: Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what efforts are currently being undertaken by his Department to eliminate the practice of discarding unwanted fish by fishermen.

Mr. Curry: The increase in mesh sizes and the use of square mesh panels which formed important parts of the

EC and United Kingdom conservation measures introduced on 1 June 1992 are designed to lead to a reduction in discards by allowing more juvenile fish to escape from nets. Following discussion in the Community the EC Commission are preparing detailed proposals to tackle aspects of the problem further. In addition most of the gear research work funded by United Kingdom fisheries departments is concerned with gear selectivity.

Fisheries

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what figures he has of the number of fisheries inspectors employed, at the latest available date, by each relevant European Community country, apart from the United Kingdom;

(2) what figures he has of the number of fishing protection vessels deployed at the latest available date in each relevant country in the European Community, other than the United Kingdom; and how many personnel were engaged on such vessels of each such authority.

Mr. Curry: The Commission's report on the common fisheries policy, dated 6 December 1990—reference SEC(90) 2244 final—includes the following information

	Number of land based inspection staff	*Inspection vessels longer than 15 metres*
Belgium	3	6
Denmark	200	7
Germany	20	10
Spain	12	23
France	20	9
Ireland	7	7
Netherlands	180	12
Portugal	12	26

The report notes that the resources which some member states devote to control and enforcement are inadequate, and the Government will be pressing for improvements as part of the mid-term review of the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 25 June, *Official Report*, column *387*, if he will set out the information available to his Ministry on the performance by private contracted vessels of the maritime fishery protection service in Scotland.

Mr. Curry: Surface fishery protection duties in Scotland are carried out partly by the Royal Navy and partly by the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency using civilian vessels. The SFPA will shortly publish its first annual report. This will analyse performance and the effectiveness of the fisheries protection services provided. A key indicator of fisheries protection performance is the number of boardings achieved. The number of boardings of fishing vessels by civilian-manned vessels of the SFPA has increased from 1,125 in 1985-86 to 2,100 in 1991-92.

Renderers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of licensed renderers in each year since 1987.

Mr. Soames: The statutory requirement for renderers to register their premises with this Department was introduced in 1989 in the Processed Animal Protein Order 1989.

The number of renderers premises registered under that requirement in each year since then has been:

	Number
1989	67
1990	63
1991	67
1992	57

Bare Fallow Option

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether a bare fallow option will be allowed to farmers, under the set-aside rules, so as to cultivate weeds out.

Mr. Curry: We will consider the scope for some form of bare summer fallow once the Commission implementing regulations, on which national scheme rules must be based, have been adopted, are, however, likely to require a winter green.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what latest estimate he has made of the percentage of United Kingdom fish quotas which are caught by vessels on the United Kingdom fishing register which are beneficially non-British owned; and if he will list such percentages by fish stock.

Mr. Curry: I regret that the information requested cannot be extracted except at disproportionate cost.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the percentage cut in the number of fishing vessels to be required of all relevant European Community countries, other than the United Kingdom, under the same requirement as requires the United Kingdom to cut its number by 30 per cent; and if he will make a statement on what requirements each relevant European Community country, other than the United Kingdom, is placing on its fishing fleet parallel to the measures proposed in the Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill.

Mr. Curry: Negotiations between member states and the Commission on the targets to be set in the 1993-96 multiannual guidance programme are not yet complete. The Commission has, however, indicated that targets will be comparable between member states and will involve a combination of capacity and effort reductions. Targets will also be segmented with more severe reductions set for those sections of the fleet prosecuting the more heavily exploited fisheries and the lighter reductions for sectors where the stock position is relatively satisfactory. No figure has been agreed yet for the United Kingdom.

Drift Nets

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what efforts have been undertaken by his Department to enforce the United Nations ban on the use of large-scale drift nets.

Mr. Curry: From 1 June 1992 the United Kingdom, in common with other European Community states, applied Communitywide measures which, with certain exceptions not relevant to the British fishing fleet, prohibit the use by EC vessels of drift nets longer than 2·5km wherever they fish. These measures go further than the United Nations resolution which only dealt with drift nets used on the high seas.

Sea Mammals

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what efforts are currently being undertaken by his Department to monitor the number of dolphins and other non-target animals killed in fishing gear, and to control fisheries with a high incidence of kills; and if he will make it his policy to set a target date for the reduction of by-catch non-target species to zero.

Mr. Curry: A voluntary reporting scheme was introduced on 1 January 1992. On information available whilst accidental catches occur in our waters these are limited and not of the substantial numbers as have been seen in the east Pacific yellow fin tuna fishery. Our policy is that accidental catches should be avoided as far as possible. Further research to assist this is in hand.

The Naze

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list what European Community financial aid, under what headings, will be available for the prevention of erosion of the Naze at Walton-on-the-Naze.

Mr. Curry: Essex is not an area eligible for assistance from the European regional development fund. However, actions to protect soil damaged by coastal erosion may be eligible for support under EC's LIFE programme, the Community's financial instrument for the environment.

Earth Summit

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what matters arising from the decisions taken at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development are due to be discussed at the European Agriculture Council on 13 and 14 July.

Mr. Curry: None at this Council. However, the integration of environmental considerations into agricultural policy will be a priority for the United Kingdom presidency in line with UNCED conclusions.

Livestock (Minerals)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment has been made of the impact of the withdrawal of calcium, magnesium, phosphate and dextrose on the welfare of livestock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A number of medicinal products containing calcium in combination with these other substances are currently being examined by the Veterinary Products Committee as part of a review of pharmaceutical products licensed before 1 January 1984, to ensure that they meet modern day standards of safety, quality and efficacy. It is for the individual pharmaceutical companies involved to make a commercial decision whether or not to provide the data to support their products through the review process. If such data demonstrates that the necessary scientific criteria have been met, then a licence may be granted.

Such calcium combination products continue to be available, but the Veterinary Medicines Directorate maintains regular contact with the British Veterinary Association and the National Office of Animal Health, to ensure that it receives an early warning where a loss of products in any group might lead to a problem with animal welfare.

Badger Culling

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration he has given to ordering an immediate moratorium on badger culling as a way of eradicating cattle tuberculosis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This idea has been closely examined, notably within the Ministry's consultative panel on badgers and tuberculosis. There are at present no plans to introduce a moratorium.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Curry: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. The Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Organic Foods

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to make representations to the European Commission calling for a postponement of any decision relating to the EC directive on organic foods at the Commission's meeting on 23 July.

Mr. Curry: The Council of Agriculture Ministers agreed at its meeting on 13 and 14 July to postpone the effective starting date of the regulation on organic foods, from 23 July 1992 to 1 January 1993.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to seek amendments to the European directive on organic foods to ensure that permanent safeguards for small shops and operators are built into the directive.

Mr. Curry: The EC regulation on organic foods applies to anyone engaged in the growing, processing and importing from countries outside the Community, of food to be labelled as "organic". The regulation will provide safeguards to consumers, as well as to bona fide growers and processors, that food sold as organic has been grown according to a recognised standard. We have no plans to seek special arrangements for any group.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline Government funding of organic farming and conversion schemes for the last two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: No specific schemes are currently available for organic farmers although of course they can make full use of support schemes available to farmers generally. The agri-environment part of the CAP reform agreement will provide a framework within which aid could be given to existing organic farmers and those wishing to convert. Proposals for such scheme are currently under consideration.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Curry: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. The Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. Curry: The total staff employed by the Department is as follows:

	Number
1 April 1970	16,246
1 July 1992	10,583

The total pay provision for 1992-93 is £210·7 million. The comparable figure for 1970 could be determined only at disproportionate cost.

Cormorants

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 19 June, *Official Report*, column *683*, if he has yet obtained figures from his Ministry's north-east regional service centre regarding the number of licences for the killing or taking of cormorants in each of the past five years.

Mr. Soames: I have now received the required details from the Ministry's north-east regional service centre. No applications have been received and no licences issued for the killing or taking of cormorants in this region in the last five years. The table provided in my previous reply therefore remains unchanged.

Year	*Applications received*	*Licences issued*
1987	6	3
1988	4	2
1989	3	2
1990	9	4
1991	8	3

Milk Marketing

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy that all interested buyers of milk and dairy products, including secondary users, will be fully consulted on proposals to change the current United Kingdom milk marketing arrangements and to supply details of the planned timetable for consultations.

Mr. Curry: The Government are currently considering the milk marketing boards' proposals for its transformation into non-statutory structures. We intend to introduce legislation to facilitate this change this parliamentary Session. We are committed to full consultation of all interests affected beforehand.

Lobsters

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to European Commissioner Marin to challenge the imposition on British shell fishermen of an EC change in the method of measuring lobsters from carapace length to overall length, resulting in a reduction in minimum landing size; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Our industry was consulted about the change in the EC rule for measuring lobsters, designed to remove ambiguity in the original EC regulation and to help fishermen by generally only requiring one measurement. We have already alerted the Commission to our concerns and have now prepared data to press the case for further and urgent modification of the rule to remove the inadvertent effect of allowing smaller lobsters to be landed than under the original regulation.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) on 1 July, *Official Report*, column *643 (a)* how many of his Department's employees, and *(b)* what proportion of his Department's employees, were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Curry: Counting part time staff as half units, MAFF and its agencies employed 140·5 registered disabled staff in 1989 and 139·5 in 1990. These figures represent 1·4 per cent. of total staff, but do not take into account staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

Apple and Pear Research Council

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has completed his consultation on the future of the Apple and Pear Research Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased to announce that, having consulted the council and representative organisations in England and Wales, I have decided that the Apple and Pear Research Council should continue with its present constitution and functions for a further five years.

Our consultations with the industry have clearly demonstrated that the Apple and Pear Research Council is held in high esteem by it and that it commands a high level of confidence from the levy paying growers. This unequivocal response from the industry ensures that the council will be in the strongest possible position to take forward the research and development role which is so vital to the industry's needs.

I have decided that when a suitable opportunity occurs one change should be made to the Apple and Pear Research Council Order 1989 which has been endorsed by the council and the industry's representative bodies. The maximum levy the council is empowered to collect will be increased from £25 to £30 per hectare of orchard area. Although the current levy rate is below the permitted maximum, I believe that it is sensible to allow for developments over the new life of the council.

EMPLOYMENT

Special Needs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications for placements have been made by people with special needs to each training and enterprise council in England in each year since the establishment of the councils; and how many have successfully received placements in each instance.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is not held centrally.

Wages Councils

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish a range of estimates of the economic effects of wages councils on levels of payment, employment, unemployment and economic activity.

Mr. McLoughlin: A number of studies which estimate the economic effects of wages councils have been published. They are based on differing research methods and have been conducted at different times, so their results may not be directly comparable. For this reason it is not sensible to present a range of estimates.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether she proposes to issue a consultation paper on the roles, functions and operations of wages councils.

Mr. McLoughlin: No.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she has commissioned a survey of opinion on wages councils among *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees in wage council industries.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are no plans to carry out a further consultation exercise. Full public consultation took place in 1988.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the cost to her Department of *(a)* wages councils and *(b)* enforcement of minimum pay rates.

Mr. McLoughlin: For the financial year ended 31 March 1992 the cost of administering the wages councils was £197,000 and the cost of enforcement of minimum pay rates was £2,080,000.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who has been consulted on the future of wages councils.

Mr. McLoughlin: Full public consultation took place in 1988.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Government last announced a reassessment of their policy on wages councils; and when it became her policy to abolish all wages councils.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend, the previous Secretary of State, announced on 6 March 1990 that, following the last consultation exercise, the wages councils' system has no permanent place in the labour market and their operation would be kept under close review. This remains the Government's policy.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has for her Department to celebrate in 1993, the European Year of the Elderly; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July 1992 *Official Report*, columns *430-31*.

Job Vacancies (Wages)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether jobcentres accept vacancies from employers where the wages offered fall below the relevant wages council minimum.

Mr. McLoughlin: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance has been given to training and enterprise councils to enter into short-term contracts, and on what basis, and with what criteria, that guidance is to be applied.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend has not issued any guidance to training and enterprise councils about entering into short-term contracts.

Employment Service

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what proportion of Employment Service local offices displayed an up-to-date list of all services offered by their office on 1 April;

(2) what percentage of the population was served by an Employment Service one-stop shop; and what percentage was served by separate employment and benefit offices at 1 April;

(3) what percentage of local offices offered freephone services for job seekers on 1 April.

Mr.McLoughlin: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred these questions for reply.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff her Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel cost in 1970.

Mr. McLoughlin: The total number of staff employed by the Department at 1 July 1992 was 59,684 at a total salary cost provision for 1992-93 of £1,037·2 million. The staffing level in 1970-71 was 27,872 at an annual salary cost of £41·8 million.

DTI Inspections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if she will list any public appointments by her Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors;

(2) if she will list any advisers retained by her Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. The Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Residential Properties

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham are owned by her Department; if she will publish a list of such residential properties which are currently empty, giving the type of accommodation available, the length of time each property has been vacant, and the intended future use.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department does not own any residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham.

Hazardous Substances

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers have been prosecuted under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 since 1 January 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: Prosecutions under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 may be taken against employers, employees or the self-employed. Details of the number of employers prosecuted are not held centrally. However, during the period 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1991 the Health and Safety Executive's factory and agricultural inspectorates initiated proceedings which resulted in 55 informations laid or complaints taken in England, Wales and Scotland during this period. This is the latest figure available.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many incidents of exposure to or contact with harmful substances occurred in workplaces registered with *(a)* the factory inspectorate, *(b)* the quarries inspectorate, *(c)* the agricultural inspectorate, *(d)* the nuclear inspectorate and *(e)* the mines inspectorate in each year since 1989;

(2) how many incidents of exposure to or contact with harmful substances occurred in workplaces registered with the railway inspectorate in each year since 1989;

(3) how many people were reported to have been exposed to or in contact with a harmful substance in each year between 1986 and 1991;

(4) how many fatal accidents have been associated with exposure to or contact with hazardous substances in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: Fatalities arising from accidents involving contact with or exposure to a harmful substance reported to all Health and Safety Commission enforcing authorities under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1985 for 1989-90 and 1990-91 are given in the table:

	[1] *1989-90*	[1] *1990-91*
Employees	7	8
Self-employed	1	3
Members of public[2]	3	1
TOTAL	11	12

[1] Years commencing 1 April.
[2] Members of the public killed as a result of someone else's work activity.

Occupational injuries arising from exposure to, or contact with a harmful substance reported to HSE's factory and agricultural inspectorates and to local authorities, for years[1] between 1986 to 1991 are given in the table.

Year[2]	*Fatal*	*Major*[3]	*Over 3 day*[4]	*Total*
1986-87	7	535	1,198	1,740
1987-88	11	421	1,307	1,739
1988-89	7	397	1,167	1,571
1989-90	11	452	1,312	1,775
1990-91[5]	12	499	1,250	1,761

[1] Injuries at work to employees, self-employed persons and members of the public injured as a result of someone else's work activity reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1985 (RIDDOR).
[2] Years commencing 1 April.
[3] As defined under RIDDOR.
[4] An injury causing incapacity for work for more than three days and reportable for employed persons only.
[5] Includes reports made to the HSE's Quarries Inspectorate.

Apart from a small number of specific dangerous occurrences, the RIDDOR require injuries rather than incidents to be reported. Information on the number of incidents involving exposure to or contact with a harmful substance is therefore not available.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment she has made of the quality of the suppliers' information on hazardous substances; and what measures the Health and Safety Executive is planning to improve the quality of manufacturers' data sheets.

Mr. McLoughlin: Manufacturers are required to provide information on hazardous substances under section 6 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. Compliance with this requirement is routinely monitored by inspectors of the Health and Safety Executive during visits to manufacturers and their customers. A special survey, by HSE's inspectors, on compliance with section 6 was carried out during 1991-92. Information on this will be available by the beginning of 1993.

I am pleased to be able to say that on 13 July the Health and Safety Commission published proposals for new regulations dealing with the provision of information on hazardous chemicals. Among other requirements the proposed Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging) Regulations will, for the first time, oblige suppliers of dangerous chemicals to provide the recipient with a safety data sheet. The standard of the safety data sheet is specified in the draft regulations and is based on an EC

directive. A code of practice will accompany the regulations and give advice on the completion of the safety data sheet.

I have made arrangements for the hon. Member to be provided with a copy of the consultative document.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what groups are exempt from the requirements of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988.

Mr. McLoughlin: The duties imposed by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 do not extend to normal shipboard activities carried out by a ship's crew under the direction of the master, nor do they apply to work outside Great Britain: for example, extractive work in the North sea.

Regulations 6 to 12, which protect persons against risks to their health, do not apply to work underground in a mine.

The self-employed are exempt from the requirements for monitoring exposure and health surveillance, regulations 10 and 11.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers have been prosecuted under regulation 12 of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations for not providing adequate employee training in each year since 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: Details of the number of employers prosecuted under regulation 12 of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 are not held centrally. The only details available are for informations and complaints initiated by the Health and Safety Executive's factory and agricultural inspectorates. Their records show no informations were laid in England and Wales nor any complaints taken by procurators fiscal in Scotland under regulation 12 during April 1989 to March 1990. During April 1990 to March 1991, nine informations were laid in England and Wales or complaints taken by procurators fiscal in Scotland under this regulation.

These are the latest figures available.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average fine levied on employers in breach of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 for each year since 1 January 1989, including the latest figure for 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: Details of the number of employers prosecuted under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 1988 during the period April 1989 to March 1991 are not held centrally. However, the average fine levied per information in England and Wales or complaint taken by procurators fiscal in Scotland for breaches of COSHH during April 1989 to March 1990 was £600. During April 1990 to March 1991 the figure was £648. Figures are not available for 1992.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many different substances hazardous to health are estimated by the Health and Safety Executive to be at use in the workplace.

Mr. McLoughlin: Health and Safety Executive officials estimate that 20,000 to 30,000 pure chemicals and 50,000 to 100,000 proprietary mixtures would be hazardous to health. An accurate estimate of the number of substances hazardous to health cannot be given except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when regulation 6 of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 came into force; and what action the Health and Safety Executive is taking to ensure employers comply with the regulation.

Mr. McLoughlin: Regulation 6 of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) come into force on 1 October 1989, but compliance with the requirement for employers to make a suitable and sufficient assessment—regulation 6.1—was deferred until 1 January 1990.

The Health and Safety Executive has committed substantial resources to promoting awareness and understanding of the regulations throughout Great Britain. It has produced a wide range of guidance material, given lectures, held seminars and made site visits to promote COSHH. The HSE surveys show that over 80 per cent. of people in Great Britain work for companies aware of the regulations.

Where it has been necessary, enforcement action for breaches of the regulation 6 of COSHH has been initiated by the HSE.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *633* to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) *(a)* how many of her Department's employees, and *(b)* what proportion of her Department's employees, were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows. 1,464·5—2·7 per cent.—at 1 June 1989; and 1,544 at 1 June 1990—3·2 per cent.

Note

1. Staff working fewer than 10 hours per week are not included.
2. Staff working between 10 and 30 hours per week are counted as half staff units.

Shell Oil, Merseyside

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will place in the Library a copy of the Health and Safety Executive report on the toxic emissions at Shell Oil on Merseyside.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Executive has not prepared a report for publication on any toxic emissions at Shell Oil, Merseyside.

Factory Inspections

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many premises registered with the factory inspectorate have not been inspected in the last 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information about the number of fixed premises registered with the Health and Safety Executive's factory inspectorate that have not been inspected in the last 10 years is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member.

Mining Accidents

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information she has available about accident and injury rates in the deep mining industry broken down into those directly employed by British Coal and those employed by sub-contractors; if she will arrange to collect information on accident and injury rates which will allow comparison to be made of the relative safety of employees in the industry on an up-to-date basis; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The following information has been supplied to the Health and Safety Executive by the British Coal Corporation for the year 1991-92.

	Accident rate per 100,000 manshifts	
	British Coal "Men on Colliery Books"	*Contractors*
Fatal injuries	0·07	0·06
Major injuries	2·60	5·62
Plus 3 day injuries	18·52	23·23

Contractors normally work in the higher risk areas of the mine. A comparison between underground workers employed by British Coal Corporation and contractors' employees in similar occupations shows a major injury accident rate per 100,000 manshifts of 5·83 for contractors and 5·71 for BCC employees.

The Health and Safety Executive will continue to collect or receive information which will allow the effective direction of resources to safeguard the health and safety of all workers in the mining industry.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answers of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *243*, whether the information given for 1992-93 in her answers of 9 June, *Official Report*, column *139*, and of 23 June to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central, (Mr. Cousins) *Official Report*, column *164*, is subject to the same degree of commercial confidentiality as the comparable information for each TEC.

Mr. McLoughlin: Yes. All TECs need the assurance of commercial confidentiality to safeguard their negotiations with their providers.

Upper Limb Disorder

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, if she will list, for the most recent year for which figures are available, and for each of the five years before, the number of working days lost due to work-related upper limb disorder.

Mr. McLoughlin: The data requested is not available. However, the accident and ill-health trailer to the 1990 labour force survey will provide estimates of the number of cases for different categories of work-related illness, and of work days lost, based on individuals' reports. The results of the survey are currently being analysed and will be published later this year.

ENVIRONMENT

Derelict Land Grant

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table of expenditure on derelect land grant, cross-referenced to standard regions, showing Greater London as a separate region, for each year from 1987-88 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1987-88 prices.

Mr. Robin Squire: Derelict land grant expenditure in the period, by Department of the Environment administrative regions, is shown in the table.

(a) Derelict land grant expenditure by DOE region since 1987-88 (prices at date of approval) *£ million*

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
North	13·520	10·950	8·228	8·425	8·279
North West	21·150	17·980	15·582	11·745	18·137
Merseyside Task Force	8·330	8·000	5·989	7·813	7·504
Yorkshire and Humberside	9·750	13·660	12·052	14·499	19·109
West Midlands	16·630	16·200	12·753	14·728	17·190
East Midlands	8·230	8·280	8·457	10·475	11·417
South West	1·400	1·680	0·793	1·638	2·525
South East	0·610	0·450	0·138	0·247	0·212
Eastern	0·100	0·140	0·399	0·524	0·228
Greater London	1·050	0·770	1·042	1·248	1·633
Total	80·770	78·110	65·433	71·342	86·234

(b) Derelict land grant expenditure by DOE region since 1987-88 at 1987-88 prices *£ million*

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
North	13·520	10·212	7·200	6·814	6·258
North West	21·150	16·768	13·634	9·499	13·709
Merseyside Task Force	8·330	7·461	5·240	6·319	5·672
Yorkshire and Humberside	9·750	12·739	10·546	11·726	14·444
West Midlands	16·630	15·108	11·159	11·912	12·993
East Midlands	8·230	7·722	7·400	8·472	8·630
South West	1·400	1·567	0·694	1·325	1·909
South East	0·610	0·420	0·121	0·200	0·160
Eastern	0·100	0·131	0·349	0·424	0·172
Greater London	1·050	0·718	0·912	1·009	1·234
Total	80·770	72·846	57·255	57·699	65·181

Pollution Control

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the number of process applications received by local authorities under *(a)* block one processes, *(b)* block two processes and *(c)* block three processes to date, pursuant to the requirements of part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and what evaluation he has made of the adequacy of resources available to local authorities to carry out their new pollution control responsibilities under the Act.

Mr. Maclean: The provisional total number of block one applications made to local authorities under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 up to 31 March this year is 3,049, according to the statistical returns sent to my Department by local authorities. The total of block two applications received by local authorities up to that date will be available soon and I will write to the hon. Member with that figure as soon as I can.

The period for applications for block three processes began on 1 April this year; no statistics are yet available for these. The cost recovery charging scheme set up under section 8(2) of the Act is intended to recover the local authorities' relevant expenditure attributable to authorisations.

In reviewing the level of fees and charges for 1992-93, my Department took into account the written submissions of the local authority associations on the charging scheme, as well as the views of industry. The Department has asked the local authority associations to submit evidence on the charging scheme again for this year's annual review of the scheme.

Environmental Information

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to update pollution paper No. 23, 1986, on public access to environmental information.

Mr. Maclean: My Department will be consulting shortly on draft regulations and guidance to implement EC directive 90/313/EC on the freedom of access to information on the environment.

Ozone-depleting Substances

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals Her Majesty's Government are putting forward at the current discussions at the United Nations in Geneva to tighten the Montreal protocol on substances damaging to the ozone layer.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to press for a specific target date for the introduction of HCFCs to be included within the Montreal protocol at the forthcoming conference on the revising of the Montreal protocol in Geneva.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom, together with the EC, is proposing that the phase out dates in the Montreal protocol be brought forward to the end of 1995. This is an advance on the current phase out schedules of four years for CFCs, halons and carbon tetrachloride and nine years for 1,1,1 trichloroethane. We are also proposing that HCFCs should be included in the protocol with strict controls on their areas of use, a quantitative limit on their total consumption and a final phase out date. The details of the controls will be decided by the parties during the review of the protocol in November.

New Houses, South-West

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each year since 1986 the number of houses built in each of the districts of Somerset, Devon and Cornwall *(a)* by local authorities and *(b)* by housing associations.

Mr. Baldry: Estimates of housebuilding completions by local authorities and housing associations for each local authority area in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall are shown in the publications "Local Housing Statistics" and "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Areas". Figures for 1986 to 1988 are in tables 1·7 to 1·9 of "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Areas: 1980 to 1989". Revised 1989 figures are in table 1(b) of the April 1991 edition—issue No. 97—of "Local Housing Statistics" and figures for 1990 and 1991 are in tables 1(a) and 1(b) of the April 1992 edition—issue No. 101. Copies of all these publications are in the Library.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993, the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, [*Official Report*, columns *430-31*].

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he intends to review his policy of uniform business rate with respect to outdoor advertising companies;

(2) what representations he has received regarding the effect of the uniform business rate on outdoor advertising companies.

Mr. Robin Squire: I have received a number of representations on this subject since April 1990. Hoardings and other advertising stations constitute non-domestic property and will continue to be rateable, as they have been since the last century.

Policy Formulation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to increase the transparency in environmental policy formulation in the European Community during his presidency of the Environment Council.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom welcomes in principle proposals in the fifth environment action programme to improve consultation with environmental groups, business and others during the formulation of draft legislation. We will be asking the Council to endorse the programme during the United Kingdom presidency.

Draft EC Legislation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress made in draft environmental legislation inherited by the United Kingdom presidency of the European Council.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom assumed the presidency on 1 July. Since then the Council's environment working group has had preliminary discussions on various matters. The first meeting of the Environment Council under the United Kingdom presidency will be on 20 October.

Coalite Plant, Derbyshire

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether HM inspectorate of pollution will publish the results of air sampling in and around the Coalite plant in Derbyshire.

Mr. Maclean: Yes. The results of the air sampling being commissioned by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will be published.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will acquire for his Departmental library a copy of the articles on ozone depletion and ultra-violet radiation, details of which had been sent to him.

Mr. Maclean: The Department of the Environment Library already acquired a copy of the article when it was first published.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the level of essential use attributed to CFCs and HCFCs.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given today to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) and to the answer I gave on 16 June to my hon. Friend, the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), *Official Report* column *443*, in which I explained that the Department has commissioned a study on CFC use within the United Kingdom refrigeration and air conditioning industry. The study will identify areas of CFC use which need to continue and for which alternative technologies are not yet available. The Department of Trade and Industry has commissioned a similar study into the use of CFCs as solvents.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to quantify the use of CFCs in the United Kingdom and the extent to which current demand can be met by recycling rather than from existing production.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 June to my hon. Friend, the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), *Official Report* column *442*. In that answer I announced that the Department has commissioned a study of the use of CFCs by the United Kingdom refrigeration and air conditioning industry. This will seek to quantify the level of CFCs that the industry will need until the year 2000 and the extent to which this can be met from recycled material. The Department of Trade and Industry has commissioned a similar study into the use of CFCs as solvents.

Homelessness

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend the rough sleepers initiative beyond 1992-93.

Mr. Baldry: We are currently considering the future of the initiative. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing has had a number of useful meetings with voluntary organisations and others.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total level of poll tax arrears outstanding at the end of 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities on 7 July to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), *Official Report* column *163*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how council tax arrears will be treated within local authority financial arrangements; and whether he has any plans to treat such arrears or interest incurred on them as expenditure for the purpose of calculating capping levels.

Mr. Robin Squire: It will be the responsibility of each billing authority to collect its arrears of council tax; we intend that any costs of collection and associated interest charges incurred in a year by the authority should fall to be met from its budget for the year, which under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 will be subject to any capping regime.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all measures which a local authority may take to collect poll tax and arrears of poll tax.

Mr. Robin Squire: Once it has obtained a liability order from a court an authority may collect unpaid community charges by any of the following methods: an attachment of earnings order; distress; deductions from income support; charging orders (for collective community charges only); bankruptcy and winding up. An authority may not pursue more than one of these remedies at the same time.

If, having attempted to levy distress, an authority is unable to find any or sufficient goods to distrain, it may seek to have the chargepayer committed to prison.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the measures which a local authority may take to collect council tax and any arreas of council tax.

Mr. Robin Squire: Once it has obtained a liability order from a court an authority may collect unpaid council taxes by any of the following methods: an attachment of earnings order; distress; deductions from income support; charging orders; attachment of councillors' allowances; and bankruptcy and winding up. An authority may not pursue more than one of these remedies at the same time.

If, having attempted to levy distress, an authority is unable to find any or sufficient goods to distrain, it may seek to have the chargepayer committed to prison.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of poll tax arrears which will exist at the end of 1992-93.

Mr. Robin Squire: My Department has not made any estimate of the level of community charge arrears at the end of 1992-93.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how poll tax arrears, outstanding at the end of 1992-93 and interest incurred on them, will be treated in future financial years; and whether he has any plans to treat outstanding arrears or interest incurred on them as expenditure for the purposes of calculating capping levels.

Mr. Robin Squire: It is the responsibility of each billing authority to collect its arrears of community charges outstanding at the end of 1992-93; we intend that any costs of collection and associated interest charges incurred by the authority in 1993-94 and subsequent years should fall to be met from its budget for the year, which under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 will be subject to any capping regime.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria his Department uses to determine a council's standard spending assessment.

Mr. Robin Squire: The method by which standard spending assessments are calculated for all authorities is set out in the "Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England)" as amended by subsequent amendment reports. These are debated and approved by the House annually and copies are available in the Library.

Housing

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for private rented properties by type of housing for the last 10 years *(a)* the average rent levels, *(b)* the level of housing benefit paid, *(c)* the average benefit paid per property and *(d)* the number of properties at the year end.

Mr. Baldry: The information available is as follows:

Year	*Average weekly rent*		*Private and Housing Association*		
	Unfurnished	*Furnished*	*Housing Benefit*	*Average weekly Housing Benefit per property*	*Number of properties at 31 December (private rented only)*
	Great Britain			*England*	
	£	£	£m	£	thousands
1983-84	—	—	483	4·10	1,849
1984-85	12·30	21·00	614	5·30	1,778
1985-86	13·80	24·80	784	6·90	1,709
1986-87	19·80	30·40	875	7·90	1,641
1987-88	18·80	35·20	891	8·20	1,580
1988-89	22·50	36·90	915	8·60	1,532
1989-90	21·90	40·80	1,159	10·90	1,507
1990-91	30·50	53·30	1,360	12·50	1,507
1991-92	—	—	1,886	[1]17·10	[1]1,506

[1]Provisional.

The source of the rent information is the "Family Expenditure Survey" (FES). The rents relate to the nearest calender year to each financial year—1983 rents are shown for 1983-84, etc. As the FES is a sample survey the estimates of rent are subject to sampling error.

Information on housing benefit is available for tenants of private landlords and housing associations together but not separately.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to seek to amend legislation or regulations relating to the transfer of homes from local authority to other forms of ownership and the terms and conditions under which such transfers took place.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning on 21 May 1992 to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willets), *Official Report*, column *198*. The consultation paper will be published shortly.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for housing association properties for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the average rent levels, *(b)* the total housing benefit paid, *(c)* the average benefit paid per property and *(d)* the number of properties at the year end.

Mr. Baldry: The information available covering rent levels and stock is set out in the table. Housing benefit statistics do not identify payments to housing association tenants separately.

Year	*Average housing association rents including service charges (£/week)*		*Housing association stock at 31st December (thousands)*
	Registered rents[2]	*Assured tenancies*[3]	
1981	14	—	420
1982	16	—	428
1983	17	—	441
1984	19	—	455
1985	20	—	472
1986	21	—	482
1987	23	—	496
1988	25	—	515
1989	27	—	544
1990	30	34	589
1991	33	39	[1]619

[1]Provisional.
[2]Fair rents registered or re-registered by Rent Officers in the period.
[3]Assured tenancy rents for lettings in the period.
Source: National Federation of Housing Associations.

BNFL, Sellafield

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent information he has received from the Health and Safety Executive following its

completion of its report on the Health and Safety Executive investigation into the safety and status of radioactive waste management at British Nuclear Fuels' Sellafield plant.

Mr. Maclean: No further information has been received from the Health and Safety Executive following the publication of its report and its receipt by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Council Tenants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of council tenants have transferred their tenancy away from local authority control since July 1991.

Mr. Baldry: Approximately 7,700 local authority dwellings in England are known to have been transferred from local authority control to housing associations and other bodies between July 1991 and March 1992, the latest date for which detailed information is available. This represents about one fifth of one per cent. of local authority housing stock in England. In addition a further 14,800 dwellings were transferred in two block transfers in April 1992.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list for council housing for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the average rent levels, *(b)* the total housing benefit paid, *(c)* the average benefit paid per property and *(d)* the number of properties at the year end;

(2) if he will list for properties transferred by agreement with the tenant to other forms of ownership for all years since transfers began *(a)* the average rent levels, *(b)* the total housing benefit paid, *(c)* the average benefit paid per property and *(d)* the total number of payments at the year end.

Mr. Baldry: The available information is as follows:

(a) Year	*(b)* Average weekly unrebated rent £	*(c)* Total housing benefit paid £ million	*(d)* Average weekly benefit per property £	*(e)* Number of properties at 31 December 000s
1983-84	14·03	1,659	6·66	4,788
1984-85	14·79	1,789	7·31	4,705
1985-86	15·63	1,902	7·91	4,627
1986-87	16·48	1,980	8·36	4,556
1987-88	17·40	2,029	8·74	4,465
1988-89	19·01	2,172	9·66	4,325
1989-90	20·86	2,351	10·87	4,161
1990-91	23·94	2,586	12·33	4,034
1991-92	27·41	2,687	[1]12·91	[1]4,004

[1] Provisional.

Corresponding information on properties transferred by agreement to other forms of ownership is not available.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new rights have been introduced for council tenants since July 1991 to simplify and strengthen their ability to get minor repairs affecting health, safety or crime prevention carried out by their landlord.

Mr. Baldry: Subject to enactment of the necessary legislation, we propose to introduce a new right to repair scheme. Details will be published later this year. The new scheme will enable council tenants to get small urgent repairs, affecting health, safety and security, done quickly.

Departmental Properties

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham are owned by his Department; and if he will publish a list of such residential properties which are currently empty, giving the type of accommodation available, the length of time each property has been vacant, and the intended future use.

Mr. Baldry: No residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham are managed by the Department of the Environment. Information in respect of any of residential properties in the borough held and managed by other Departments as part of their departmental estate is for Departments themselves to list.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households in the network installer area containing the Bridgend constituency have benefited from home energy efficiency scheme grants since 1991.

Mr. Maclean: Within the network installer area which contains the hon. Member's constituency, 2,341 homes have benefited from home energy efficiency scheme grant since 1 January 1991.

City Challenge

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement regarding the decisions on city challenge applications before 16 July.

Mr. Robin Squire: No.

Leeds Task Force

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), 6 July, *Official Report*, column *79*, if he will list the businesses assisted by the task force and show whether the assistance was *(a)* financial aid, *(b)* advice, *(c)* provision of information of *(d)* other.

Mr. Robin Squire: A list of the individual businesses assisted by the Government's former Leeds task force is maintained by the bodies providing the assistance and no central record is kept. Businesses in the task force area were assisted on over 417 occasions. Assistance took the form of advice (350 occasions), financial help (241 occasions), use of premises either purchased or refurbished by the task force (172 occasions) and help to attend or exhibit at events such as trade fairs (71 occasions). The figures total more than 417 because, in some instances, the assistance given covered more than one of the categories.

International Bible Students Association

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received expressing opposition to the proposal by the International Bible Students Association to make further developments to the site on which the Watchtower House, Mill Hill, is located; whether these proposals infringe the Government's green belt policy; and if he will order a

public inquiry for the purpose of collecting local objections before making any decision on matters relating to any International Bible Students Association appeal.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has received four representations and one petition.

The applicants have appealed to my right hon. Friend who will appoint an inspector to examine the merits of the case.

The principle parties to an appeal are normally consulted about whether to hold a public inquiry or to proceed on the basis of written representations. In this case they have opted for written representations but the local residents will have an opportunity to make their views known in writing to the inspector.

London Forum

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the London Forum.

Mr. Howard: In the Conservative Manifesto for the general election the Government undertook to convene a private sector forum to promote London internationally. I can now announce the Government's proposals in more detail.

The members of the forum will be drawn from the private sector. We intend to convene a first-class chairman and members, totalling about 12 in all, who can bring their entrepreneurial and presentational expertise to the business of promoting London.

The key functions of the forum will be to promote London internationally with a view to maximising business investment and growth in the capital, and to expanding London's role as a centre for tourism and culture. The forum will also wish to become involved in significant developments to maintain its position as one of the world's leading capital cities.

To drive this work forward, the forum will need to be supported by a strong chief executive backed by a small but high calibre team of staff. Private enterprise in London will benefit from the activities of the forum, and it will be appropriate for the forum to look to the private sector for its funding.

The forum will need to establish strong working relationships with business organisations in London, with training and enterprise councils and with existing bodies charged with arts and tourism responsibilities, particularly the London tourist board and the British Tourist Authority. It will also need to co-operate closely with local authorities and other public sector bodies in London. As well as informal links with all these bodies, it will need to establish a formal mechanism for consulting key organisations on a regular basis. A consultative group comprising all the key bodies will be set up for this purpose.

I will be taking forward these proposals for the forum over the summer, in consultation with key organisations with an interest in promoting London. A further announcement will be made in the autumn.

Pollution Information

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those categories of information in regard to pollution that his Department or predecessor Departments have asked to be withheld from public disclosure under section 5(1) of the Public Records Act 1967.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* None.

Second Hand Cars

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to prohibit the use by organisations of the highway outside residential properties for displaying second hand cars for sale.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* I have been asked to reply.

Part III of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 already enables district councils to take powers to control the selling, exposing or offering for sale, of any article on any road or footway.

Where the display of cars for sale on the highway takes place in association with off-highway land which is being used for the sale of second-hand cars in breach of planning control, local planning authorities have adequate powers to take enforcement action under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The parking of such vehicles on the highway may also constitute an offence if waiting restrictions apply or if the vehicles are parked dangerously or obstructively; in such circumstances, action would be a matter for the police or traffic wardens, as appropriate.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) on 9 June, *Official Report*, columns *146-47*, if he will set out the methods by which the Government intend to carry out the option to return radioactive waste from British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.'s reprocessing activities for overseas customers; and whether reprocessing contracts signed by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority with overseas customers contain parallel return-to-sender options for nuclear waste arising from reprocessing.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1976, all contracts signed by British Nuclear Fuels plc (BNFL) and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority for reprocessing overseas spent fuel have contained options for the return of wastes. As envisaged in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) on 2 May 1986 at columns *500-01*, the option of substituting for less radioactive wastes an equivalent quantity, in radiological terms, of higher level wastes is being considered. BNFL has put forward proposals on these lines and the Radioactive Waste Management advisory committee has been asked for its views on the likely radiological and environmental impact for the United Kingdom.

TRANSPORT

Shipping

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the main financial and other advantages to the owners of beneficially *(a)* British owned and *(b)* non-British owned vessels of registering in the United Kingdom register, as opposed to the registers of the Crown

dependencies, of registering in Crown dependencies as opposed to the United Kingdom register, of the Crown dependencies registers as opposed to the British dependent territories registers, of the British dependent territories registers as opposed to the Crown dependencies registers, of the United Kingdom register as opposed to British dependent territories registers, and of the British dependent territories register as opposed to the United Kingdom register.

Mr. Norris: The advantages which shipowners receive from any particular register will depend to a great extent upon the individual circumstances under which each shipowner is operating.

The United Kingdom aims to ensure that all British shipping registers are operated under similar rules and conditions and, in particular, that all comply with proper safety standards. The advantage of high-quality operation, plus access to British consular services and protection form the Royal Navy, apply to vessels registered on any British register.

Within this framework, the dependent territories and Crown dependencies are largely free to make such fiscal arrangements as they consider appropriate in relation either to companies generally or specifically to companies operating vessels on their registers.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what comparative examination he has made of the British tax regime as it affects *(a)* the Merchant Navy and *(b)* seafarers relative to the tax regimes of (i) France, (ii) Germany, (iii) Greece, (iv) Norway and (v) Denmark; if he will list the main differences; and what conclusion he has reached as to, respectively, the advantages and disadvantages to the British Merchant Navy of each difference;

(2) what latest comparative examination he has made of the requirements and the consequences of merchant ships registered in the *(a)* French, *(b)* German, *(c)* Greek, *(d)* Norwegian and *(e)* Danish registers as opposed to the United Kingdom register; if he will list the main economic and other differences for merchant ships in both requirements and consequences; and if he will list the main economic and other advantages and disadvantages in each case.

Mr. Norris: We monitor the different forms of direct and indirect subsidies granted by other countries and it is our policy in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and EC to press for the removal of any forms of subsidy which have the effect of distorting competition.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the continuing reduction in the number of vessels on the British register; and what further action he has in mind to increase the size of the British Merchant Navy.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* My Department is constantly monitoring the state of the British shipping industry and, in close liaison with the industry itself, is prepared to consider any measure to encourage and facilitate registration in the United Kingdom which falls within its remit.

The Merchant Shipping (Registrations etc.) Bill which is to come before this House early in 1993 offers opportunities to simplify ship registration law and make provision for the registration of vessels on bareboat charter. Subject to the precise provisions of this private Member's Bill, the Government will wholeheartedly support this important measure. My Department is also participating with the industry in a thorough review of the structure of United Kingdom maritime examinations and certificates of competency. In international fora, we continue to press strongly for the removal of subsidies, restrictions on trade, and poorly enforced safety standards, in order that British shipping is given greater opportunity to compete on a fair and equal basis.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many fishing vessels have been registered in, respectively, England, Wales and Harwich for each of the last 20 years;

(2) how many vessels from Northern Ireland have been registered in the United Kingdom fishing vessel register each year for the last 20 years.

Mr. Norris: The Department maintains records of the registration of United Kingdom fishing vessels only since 1989 and not in the form that can readily provide the information requested. I will write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as the information has been extracted.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the number and the percentage of fishing vessels on the United Kingdom register of fishing vessels which are beneficially non-British owned; and if he will list such vessels by the country of beneficial ownership.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
Spain	56
Holland	18
Denmark	2
Belgium	1
Total	[1]77

[1] Less than 1 per cent. of the total registered fleet.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on how many persons have been employed as *(a)* skippers, *(b)* second hands and *(c)* engineers on registered United Kingdom fishing vessels in (i) England and (ii) Harwich, for each year since 1972.

Mr. Norris: The Department does not maintain such statistics.

Orange Badges

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the regulations which apply to the issuing of orange badges with a view to enabling hospital consultants to issue a dated, temporary sticker to patients who in their medical opinion require such a facility.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Under the existing legislation, only local authorities are empowered to issue badges. The possibility of issuing temporary badges was considered during the recent review of the scheme. It was rejected in the light of representations received and difficulties that would have arisen in the successful operation of the scheme.

M25

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transort, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *664*, (1) if he will list the addresses of the 2,300 properties which received brochures about his plans to enlarge the M25 between junctions 12 and 15;

(2) if he will list the addresses of the 24 residential and eight commercial properties that would need to be demolished if his plans to enlarge the M25 between junctions 12 and 15 go ahead.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state what is the maximum volume of traffic he expects the M25 and the new proposed feeder roads together to take.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* My Department has produced forecasts of traffic flows on the M25 between junctions 12 and 15 for the year 2015. On the basis of high growth assumptions, the volumes of traffic expected to use this section of the motorway and the proposed new link roads expressed as average annual daily traffic, are as follows:

Junctions 12-13—210,000
Junctions 13-14—228,000
Junctions 14-15—220,000

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the paper outlining the different options for solving the congestion on the M25.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Catalytic Converters

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider making catalytic converters compulsory on all new cars.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: To meet the stricter EC emission limits that will come into force on 31 December, virtually all new petrol-engined cars first used from that date will need to make use of three-way catalytic converters, whereas new diesel-engined cars will not. EC directive 91/441, which prescribes the limits, does not specify the technology by which those limits are met.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993, the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Throughout the Year of the Elderly, the Department of Transport will continue to work with the transport industry to plan and provide for the increasing numbers of elderly people, and those with disabilities, and to introduce measures of positive benefit to them.

Vehicle Fire Resistance

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to improve the fire resistance of car and bus interiors as outlined in the non-statutory regulations issued by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders to car manufacturers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The European Commission has recently published a proposal for a directive relating to the burning behaviour of materials used in the construction of certain categories of motor vehicles. The proposal has not yet been considered by the Council. Although it does not cover the full range of vehicle interiors, it would be premature to act nationally before discussions have taken place.

Railway Stations (Accidents)

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents there were in the last five years involving persons falling down the gap between train and platform on railway stations.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not readily available as the Health and Safety Executive's annual report on railway safety does not classify accidents in this way.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the level of transport supplementary grant in *(a)* Wiltshire and *(b)* Thamesdown in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The figures for Wiltshire county council are:

Year	*Transport Supplementary Grant (£ million)*
1983-84	1·399
1984-85	2·488
1985-86	1·391
1986-87	1·448
1987-88	1·429
1988-89	0·361
1989-90	0·109
1990-91	2·985
1991-92	2·688
1992-93	1·493

Transport supplementary grant has not been paid to Thamesdown. It is paid to local highway authorities. The local highway authority for Thamesdown is Wiltshire county council.

Network SouthEast

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in 1991-92 what proportion of Network SouthEast trains *(a)* arrived within five minutes of the published time, *(b)* arrived within five minutes of the published time within the morning and evening peak and *(c)* were cleaned inside and out each day.

Mr. Freeman: The answer is:

(a) 91 per cent.
(b) 85 per cent.
(c) 79 per cent.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in 1991-92 what proportion of Network SouthEast passengers were served by booking offices *(a)* within three minutes and *(b)* within five minutes in the peak.

Mr. Freeman: In 1991-92, British Rail estimates that 97·4 per cent. of passengers were served by booking offices within three minutes and within five minutes during the peak.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in 1991-92 what proportion of telephone inquiries about Network SouthEast trains were answered within 30 seconds.

Mr. Freeman: In 1991-92, British Rail estimates that 91 per cent. of telephone enquiries about Network SouthEast trains were answered within 30 seconds, an improvement of 3 per cent. on the previous year.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) of 3 July, *Official Report*, column *729*, what is the source of the data his Department provided to the International Atomic Energy Agency on the shipments of nuclear materials in 1990.

Mr. Norris: Information supplied by British Nuclear Fuels plc., Nuclear Transport Ltd., Nuclear Electric, Scottish Nuclear and AEA Technology.

Life Jackets

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to make the wearing of life jackets compulsory for all users of pleasure craft under 10 m, when under way.

Mr. Norris: Her Majesty's Coastguard has issued a brochure which states that life jackets for all on board are essential and should be worn at all times.

National Travel Card

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will establish a national travel card allowing pensioners to travel at concessionary rates on different forms of public transport without having to make arrangements with separate local or transport authorities.

Mr. Freeman: We have no plans to change the present arrangements for travel by pensioners on local bus services. Both British Rail and long-distance coach operators have their own commercial travel concessions for elderly people.

Light Dues

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has reached following the publication of the British Ports Association study on extending light dues to pleasure craft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) on 2 June, *Official Report*, column *512*.

Greater Crested Newts

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his discussions with English Nature about the future of great crested newts at Barnfield pond in the Huntingdon constituency, in relation to land construction.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A meeting was held with English Nature on 23 June to discuss proposals for protecting the newt colony at Barnfield pond. Although the Department's preferred option is translocation of the newts, English Nature asked for an assessment of whether it would be possible to realign the road locally. Our consultants are to make the assessment and further discussions will take place.

British Rail Performance

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of British Rail stations display daily figures for their performance on punctuality and reliability of local services.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail does not publish daily figures for punctuality and reliability. However, in keeping with the passengers charter commitment to keep passengers informed of how services perform, "TrackRecord" displays showing details of punctuality and reliability are displayed at major stations. These are updated every four weeks.

London Underground

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on London Underground *(a)* what percentage of scheduled mileage was run in April, *(b)* what percentage of passengers had to wait more than one and a half times the scheduled interval in April, *(c)* what percentage of trains were cleaned internally every day and externally every three days in April and *(d)* what percentage of passengers had to wait more than three minutes for their tickets in April.

Mr. Norris: In the four week period up to 25 April, London Underground operated 98 per cent. of scheduled train mileage, 6 per cent. of passengers waited longer than one and a half times the scheduled interval for an underground train, 97 per cent. of underground trains were cleaned internally every service day and 82 per cent. were cleaned externally every three service days, and 1 per cent. of passengers waited longer than three minutes to purchase a ticket. In May, the Government set the Underground a new series of quality of service objectives for the next two years.

Driving Tests

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of people taking their driving test in March had waited more than six weeks for their test.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have asked the chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motor vehicles have been checked for dirty emissions during 1991; how many prosecutions resulted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Annual roadworthiness tests of cars, goods vehicles and buses, of which there are some 19 million a year, include an emissions check. Such checks were introduced for cars and light goods vehicles in November 1991. Vehicles fail tests if emissions exceed the relevant limits. In addition, in 1991-92 the vehicle inspectorate checked smoke emission during inspections of 313,781 heavy goods vehicles and 32,441 public service vehicles, and 4,778 heavy goods vehicles were subject to smoke-only checks. The inspectorate's policy is to prohibit a vehicle which is smoking excessively, although separate figures for prohibitions for this defect are not available. The police also have the power to inspect vehicle emissions and to prosecute if they see fit.

Plastic Waste

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory provisions relate to the disposal of plastic waste at sea; and if he has any plans to review current legislation.

Mr. Norris: The Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution by Garbage) Regulations 1988 prohibit the discharge of plastics into the sea; these regulations are amended as necessary to implement any new MARPOL —marine pollution—73/78 convention requirements.

Accidents at Sea

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents have been reported for each of the last five years in British waters, involving professionally qualified crews.

Mr. Norris: The statistics maintained do not distinguish between accidents within and outside United Kingdom territorial waters.

The number of reported accidents worldwide involving United Kingdom registered merchant vessels over 100 gross tonnes or fishing vessels for the period 1987 to 1992 is:

Year	*Accidents to vessels*	*Accidents to crew*
1987	471	709
1988	641	680
1989	786	690
1990	799	718
1991	577	729

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many pleasure craft are registered to use British waters; and how many accidents have been reported for each of the last five years involving such pleasure craft.

Mr. Norris: There are 73,000 pleasure craft currently registered in the United Kingdom.

The Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations 1987 define, among other things, the term "pleasure craft" as a vessel primarily used for sport or recreation. The regulations do not require such vessels to report accidents.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the events surrounding the discovery of an empty fishing boat Springbok off the north Devon coast on 8 July, with particular reference to the role of the coastguard.

Mr. Norris: The empty fishing dory Springbok was reported to Swansea Coastguard on the morning of 8 July 1992. Swansea Coastguard immediately initiated the standard course of search-and-rescue action based on the initial information.

By late evening on 8 July, it was established that on 5 July Milford Haven Coastguard had received a report by the owners that the Springbok had gone missing.

Watch officers at Milford Haven did not however associate this information with the request by the marine rescue co-ordination centre, Swansea on 8 July that record be checked for reports of missing craft.

HM Coastguard, while satisfied that MRCC Swansea acted correctly in this incident, accepts that a mistake was made, and has carried out an internal inquiry to determine the reasons why the recorded information was not identified and passed on by MRSC Milford Haven on 8 July. Action has been taken in the light of this inquiry to remind officers of the correct procedure.

Rail Maintenance Grant

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the grant for permanent way maintenance and replacement on British Rail for the last financial year; and how much was actually spent.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail estimates that total permanent way maintenance and replacement costs were some £620 million for the last financial year, including £249·7 million for the public service obligation (PSO) grant supported sectors, Network SouthEast and regional railways. PSO grant is paid as a total to the board by the Government to compensate BR for maintaining its loss-making passenger services. The latest BR annual report shows that PSO grant for 1991-92 totalled £890.7 million.

Empty Housing

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham are owned by his Department; if he will publish a list of such residential properties which are currently empty, giving the type of accommodation available, the length of time each property has been vacant, and the intended future use.

Mr. Norris: My Department owns 22 residential properties acquired for a trunk road improvement and all are currently let. In addition, five residential properties were transferred to the Department from the National Bus Company on its dissolution in 1991. These five are currently vacant. Three are to be demolished to enable a housing development to take place. The other two are required for the trunk road improvement scheme and consideration is being given to the possibility of letting them in the meantime. It is not my Department's practice to release publicly the address of vacant properties.

The Department also owns 14 commercial properties, with integral living accommodation, all acquired for the trunk road scheme. Twelve of these are let on a commercial basis and attempts are being made to find suitable commercial tenants for the other two.

DTI Inspections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Norris: Such information is not available centrally but my right hon. Friend takes account of all relevant factors in making appointments.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Norris: The devolved nature of my Department means that no central record of advisers is maintained. However, full account is taken of all relevant factors when the employment of advisers is being considered.

Ferry Tariffs

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to meet other EC representatives to discuss policy on ferry tariffs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I have no such plans.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 29 June to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner),

Official Report, column *393 (a)* how many of his Department's employees and *(b)* what proportion of his Department's employees were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Norris: The numbers and proportion of registered disabled staff employed in the Department in 1989 and 1990 are:

Year	
1989	
Number	188
Percentage	1·35
1990	
Number	186
Percentage	1·28

Nuclear Fuel Rods

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, column *343*, which Government Department keeps records of the import by air of nuclear fuel rods into the United Kingdom; and whether this information is published.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise keeps records of such imports into the United Kingdom and compiles aggregated trade statistics which are published monthly by the Central Statistical Office—overseas trade statistics of the United Kingdom: MM20 of the business monitor series. The safeguards office of the Department of Trade and Industry receives information on imports of safeguarded nuclear material, including fuel rods, and forwards this to Euratom. Information for safeguards purposes is supplied in confidence. Neither the overseas trade statistics nor the information held by safeguards office identifies separately movements by air.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the nuclear power stations in the United Kingdom, by type, giving the radius of the emergency planning zone in each case.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

Nuclear power station	*Type*	*Emergency planning zone (Km)*
Chapelcross	Magnox	2
Calder Hall	Magnox	2
Torness	AGR	3
Hunterston A	Magnox	2·4
Hunterston B	AGR	
Dounreay	Prototype fast reactor	5
Hartlepool	AGR	1
Heysham 1	AGR	1
Heysham 2	AGR	
Wylfa	Magnox	1·6
Trawsfynydd	Magnox	2·5
Berkeley	Magnox	1
Oldbury	Magnox	1
Hinkley A	Magnox	3·5
Hinkley B	AGR	
Sizewell A	Magnox	2·5
Bradwell	Magnox	2·4
Dungeness A	Magnox	2·4
Dungeness B	AGR	

The distances quoted are the radii of the detailed emergency planning zones around each nuclear power station in the United Kingdom. The size of these zones, formally approved by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate, is based on a "reference" accident for the reactor type in question. The reference accident is the maximum size of an accident that can reasonably be foreseen. On this basis, the size of the detailed emergency planning zone for steel pressure vessel Magnox stations is larger than for concrete pressure vessel Magnox and AGR stations. In the case of steel pressure vessel Magnox stations which have been de-fuelled—for example, Berkeley—the zone has been reduced. Some distances have also been extended where necessary to take into account local circumstances, topography and population distribution. This is particularly the case in Scotland.

Pottery and Ceramics

Ms. Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will identify the posts and locations of officers dealing with the pottery and ceramics industry.

Mr. Eggar: Depending on the subject matter, officers in various parts of my Department will have dealings with the pottery and ceramics industry. Further details of the restructuring of the Department, including the revised sponsorship responsibilities, will be available soon.

British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of the purchase cost around the Sellafield reprocessing plant owned by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. was met from public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Land acquisition by British Nuclear Fuels plc is a commercial matter for the company. The Government have made no grants to BNFL for this purpose.

Wearmouth Colliery

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give the value of capital investment at Wearmouth colliery for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for the British Coal Corporation.

Power Demand

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's estimate of the current demand for power set against supply *(a)* currently, *(b)* by 2000 and *(c)* by 2010; and how the future estimates are reached.

Mr. Eggar: The latest estimates of electricity supply and demand are available in my Department's publication

"Energy Trends". Provisional 1991 figures for total electricity available for consumption, from both public distribution and other generators, in the United Kingdom amounted to some 315 TWh which, after transmission, distribution and other losses, provided for some 290 TWh of electricity consumption.

The Department does not produce specific estimates of future energy demand, although some analysis of the energy market is carried out in order to produce scenarios for United Kingdom carbon dioxide emission. Details of the revised scenarios, including their underlying assumptions, are being prepared for publication.

Export Controls

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase his Department's export control office to support the agreement made at the G7 summit in Munich to extend co-operation between the G7 member states on sensitive export controls and to tighten existing arrangements on export licensing.

Mr. Needham: I am confident that the resources currently allocated to export controls are adequate. However, I would consider increasing them in the future if the United Kingdom's international export control obligations made it necessary to do so.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, column *761*, on safeguarded withdrawals of nuclear materials, if he will set out *(a)* how many of the 41 withdrawals were permanent, *(b)* what was the type of nuclear material involved in each case and the purpose of each withdrawal, *(c)* which nuclear facilities were involved and *(d)* whether Euratom and the International Atomic Energy Agency, respectively, were informed in advance about each withdrawal.

Mr. Eggar: Details of withdrawals of material from safeguards under the tripartite safeguards agreement are supplied in advance to the IAEA and Euratom on a confidential basis. It would not be in the public interest to publish this information.

Blue Arrow plc

Mr. Duncan-Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the nature of the representation which caused his predecessor to delay publication of the inspector's report on Blue Arrow plc; and in what circumstances publication will now be appropriate.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 30 June, *Official Report*, column *527*. It would be inappropriate for me to indicate the nature of the representations or to comment further.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what proposals he has under which public limited companies would be required to file their accounts at Companies house within three months of year end;

(2) if he will draw up proposals under which all private companies would be required to file their annual accounts at Companies house within six months of year end.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have no immediate plans to reduce the period allowed for laying and delivery of accounts from the present 10 months for private companies and seven months for public limited companies. My priority has been to improve levels of compliance with the existing requirements.

Prior to the introduction of late filing penalties for accounts on 1 July, over 91 per cent. of active companies, that is, those not in liquidation or in course of dissolution, had provided Companies house with the latest accounts due. I shall, however, be seeking further improvements.

Market Values

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will propose legislation under which all large companies would be required to show market values of their assets in the balance sheet.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have no plans to do so.

Accounting Standards Board

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has for increasing the full-time membership of the Accounting Standards Board.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Membership of the Accounting Standards Board is a matter for the Financial Reporting Council.

Financial Reporting Council

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give details of the financing arrangements for the Financial Reporting Council currently in place and the arrangements which will apply from 1993-94.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: At present, broadly one third of the funding of the Financial Reporting Council is provided by the Government, one third by the accountancy profession through the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies and the final third by bodies representing City interests. The chairman of the FRC is currently engaged in setting up the arrangements for 1993-94 onwards.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much is his contribution to the Financial Reporting Council's costs *(a)* in 1991-92 and *(b)* proposed for 1992-93.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Department's contribution to the costs of the Financial Reporting Council and its associated bodies in 1991-92 was £907,793. Its contribution for 1992-93 is expected to be £620,000. The figure for 1991-92 included an element towards the financial reporting review panel's legal costs fund, for which no further contribution is required in 1992-93.

Auditing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date he first became aware that the going concern auditing guideline urged auditors to be passive.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have noted, but do not necessarily accept, the hon. Member's view, from which I assume that he welcomes the exposure draft on this subject issued by the Auditing Practices Board on 12 May.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade under which parts of the Companies Acts company auditors owe a duty of care to individual shareholders.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The question whether auditors owe a duty of care in respect of their functions under the Companies Acts, and to whom, is a matter for the common law. I refer the hon. Member to the judgment of the House of Lords in Caparo Industries plc *v* Dickman and others.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will produce proposals to amend the Partnership Act 1890 to require auditing firms to publish information about their affairs.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will appoint an independent commission to investigate the handling of auditor regulation by the recognised supervisory bodies.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which parts of the Companies Acts require auditors to inform shareholders on the effectiveness of internal controls.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The expression "internal controls" does not appear in the Companies Acts. So far as company accounts are concerned, however, the duties of auditors set out in section 237 of the Companies Act 1985 include a requirement to report if they are of opinion that proper accounting records have not been kept by the company.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will propose legislation under which a company's auditors would be prevented from acting as receivers for that company.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy that his Department will offer no consultancy work to any auditing firm criticised in the inspectors' report for a period of at least five years after that report.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No. However, in considering the appointment of auditing firms any criticisms which may have been made in this way will be taken into account.

Recognised Supervisory Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will propose legislation under which unelected persons would not be able to sit on the councils of the recognised supervisory bodies under the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No.

The Bestwood plc

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will be in a position to publish his Department's inspectors' report relating to The Bestwood plc.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My right hon. Friend will consider whether to publish the inspectors' report when criminal proceedings relating to the conduct of the affairs of The Bestwood plc have been concluded.

Interests (Capitalisation)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which sections and schedules of the Companies Acts refer to or require the capitalisation of interests; and whether he has these matters under review.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Paragraph 26(3)(b) of schedule 4 to the Companies Act 1985 permits interest to be included in the production cost of an asset. I have no plans to review this sub-paragraph which implements a provision in the EC fourth directive.

Petrol Market

Sir David Steel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his response to the Petrol Retailers Association's representations concerning the review of oil company undertakings in the United Kingdom retail petrol market by the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Director General of Fair Trading will in due course be advising the President on whether any changes should be considered in the existing undertakings given by the oil companies following earlier MMC reports on the supply of petrol. When such advice is received, the President will consider it very carefully.

DTI Inspections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by his Department's inspectors;

(2) if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by his Department's inspectors.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. My Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Consumer Organisations

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he will take, during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC, to establish the right of United Kingdom and other EC consumer organisations to play an active role in EC trade and anti-dumping procedures.

Mr. Needham: It is for the European Commission to seek the views of consumer organisations on particular cases being considered under EC trade policy instruments. Commission proposals put to the Council of Ministers should include an assessment of the impact on consumers. During its presidency the United Kingdom will ensure that the views of member states, including any views on consumer aspects, are taken into account when considering Commission proposals. My Department has regular contact with consumer organisations in the United Kingdom on trade policy matters.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) of 29 June, *Official Report*, column *405*, how many, and what proportion of his Department's employees, were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Eggar: The figures for the Department, including the Business Statistics Office, 1989 only, its executive agencies and the former Department of Energy are:

Date	*Number of registered disabled staff*	*Percentage of staff*
1 June 1989	165	1·2
1 June 1990	153	1·2

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. Eggar: A total of 12,214 staff were employed in the Department of Trade and Industry on 1 June 1992. The planned expenditure on pay for 1992-93 is £254·2 million.

Details of the staffing levels of the Department of Trade and Industry at its creation on 15 October 1970 are not readily available. The manpower provision of the Department's constituent parts six and a half months earlier, at 1 April 1970, totalled 26,483 with a pay provision for 1970-71 of £53·5 million.

Radio Spectrum Reviews

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the series of radio spectrum reviews is to continue.

Mr. Leigh: My colleagues in the Home Office, Ministry of Defence and the Scottish Office and I are pleased to announce that an independent committee, chaired by Sir Colin Fielding, will review the radio spectrum in the range 28MHz to 470MHz. This frequency range is one of the most intensively used parts of the radio spectrum and demand for access is increasing. The aim of the review, which will be the third in the current series of reviews, is to examine existing and planned use of the radio spectrum within the review range and make recommendations on that use in the light of national and international developments in radiocommunications. The committee intends to consult widely. The previous two reviews produced reports which have been widely welcomed as making major contributions towards our commitments to make more efficient use of the spectrum and my colleagues and I look forward to the report of the committee on this key frequency range.

Post Office

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Post Office's performance against the financial and efficiency targets set for the three years 1989-90 to 1991-92.

Mr. Leigh: On 18 January 1990 the Secretary of State, in agreement with the Treasury announced profit targets for the Post Office.

The targets were set as an annual average percentage return on mean capital employed—ROCE—for the three-year period to 1991-92. The returns are determined before taxation and interest receivable on accumulated past surpluses.

The targets are flexed if the actual interest rates differs significantly from that assumed when targets were set.

The overall targets were an expression of a Government requirement that each of the Post Office businesses and the Post Office Group as a whole should be in 1991-92, work up to a profitability consistent with a real rate of return of 8 per cent. in line with Government policy on the rate of return that public sector industries should achieve on their investment. Yearly group and business targets on this basis were set and announced to the House on 18 January 1990. The Post Office achievement against these annual targets has been:

	Group	*Royal Mail*	*Parcelforce*	*PO Counters*
1989-90				
Target percentage				
As announced	2·4	1·0	2·5	6·0
After interest flexing	2·4	1·0	2·5	9·4
Actual percentage	3·7	2·2	0·6	10·0
1990-91				
Target percentage				
As announced	6·3	6·3	5·0	7·0
After interest flexing	6·3	6·8	4·8	11·0
Actual percentage	1·5	8·2	(67·5)	12·0
1991-92				
Target percentage				
As announced	10·6	11·8	10·0	8·0
After interest flexing	11·0	12·2	10·0	9·5
Actual percentage	11·8	17·5	(10·6)	10·5

The annual average percentage return for the three-year period—the actual averages being calculated on the same basis as the targets—was:

	Three-year period average to 1991-92		
	Target as announced Per cent.	Target after interest flexing Per cent.	Actual Per cent.
Group	6·4	6·6	5·7
Royal Mail	6·4	6·7	9·3
Parcelforce	5·8	5·8	(25·8)
PO Counters	7·0	10·0	10·8

The three-year group achievement reflects the consequences of plans formulated in 1990-91 to change significantly the geographical and administrative structures of the Royal Mail and Parcelforce businesses, thereby focusing more sharply on the customer. Future costs of restructuring and development together with accelerated depreciation, in total amounting to £106 million, were provided for in that year. If these exceptional items are ignored, the average performance over a three-year period to 1991-92 at group level was 7·4 per cent. against a 6·6 per cent. target.

Also in 1990-91 the basis of apportioning stamp and meter income between Royal Mail and Parcelforce was revised. A new methodology using direct measurement of parcel volumes transacted at Post Office Counters resulted in an income transfer from Parcelforce to Royal Mail and revised charging arrangements for costs. While this did not affect group results, Royal Mail and Parcelforce ROCE were affected.

If the changes had not been made the ROCE results for 1990-91 would have been:

1990-91		
	Target performance (per cent.)	[1] Actual performance (per cent.)
Royal Mail	6·8	4·9
Parcelforce	4·8	(35·8)

[1] Before income transfer and revised charging arrangements for costs.

Because there was a change of methodology in one year, it is not possible to produce data on a comparable basis for 1989-90 and 1991-92.

The Secretary of State also announced on 18 January 1990, following consultation with the Post Office, real unit cost—RUC—targets for Royal Mail and Post Office Counters. These businesses were targeted to achieve in 1991-92 a 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. reduction respectively in RUC against a 1988-89 base. Counters target was flexed to a 2·4 per cent. reduction to reflect movement in interest rates. No RUC targets were set for Parcelforce or for the Group.

Actual achievement against target is:

	1991-92	
	Real unit cost achievement per cent.	Reduction target per cent.
Royl Mail	1·0	1·0
PO Counters	2·7	2·4

If the improve method for apportioning stamp and meter income between Royal Mail Letters and Parcelforce introduced in 1990-91 had not been effected, Royal Mail Letters' RUC performance to 1990-91 would have been different:

	Reduction/ (Increase)[1]
Interim Target	(0·5)
Result before exceptional items	
Without change in measurement system	2·0
After change in measurement system	3·5
Result after exceptional items	
Without change in measurement system	0·5
After change in measurement system	2·1

[1] Against a 1988-89 base

Because relevant data are not available for 1988-89 and 1991-92, no reliable assessment can be made of the effect of the changes in the measurement system on the achievement reported for RUC for 1991-92.

Insurance Company Agents

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what complaints he has received alleging insurance companies are refusing to appoint agents in the United Kingdom who are of ethnic minority origin; what inquiries are being conducted into these allegations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* No complaints have been received by the Department.

Bicycles

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the level of duty on the import of cycle components by the British cycle industry; what is the level of duty on the import of finished bicycles from China; and if he will make it his policy to equalise the treatment of British manufacturers and their Chinese competitors.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The European Community's common external tariff on bicycle components is currently 8 per cent. The tariff on finished bicycles is currently 17 per cent. Following representations earlier this year from the United Kingdom, supported by other member states, duty was reimposed on finished bicycles from China under the generalised system of preferences—GSP—scheme, for the remainder of 1992.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to seek the automatic enforcement of a 17 per cent. tax on the import of Chinese cycles to Britain once their quota is exceeded.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* There are agreed Community procedures for requesting the reimposition of duty on products which would otherwise be entitled to duty-free treatment under the generalised system of preferences scheme. The operation of the GSP scheme is due for review this year and the concerns of the bicycle manufacturers, along with those of other sectors of industry, will be considered during discussions in the Community.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from the cycle industry about dumping practices in Britain.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The Department has received a number of representations

from the United Kingdom bicycle industry about the alleged dumping of bicycles from China and Taiwan. The European Commission, which is responsible for investigating anti-dumping complaints, is currently investigating one from the European Bicycle Manufacturers' Association which also represents United Kingdom firms. We are currently waiting for the Commission to consult us on the preliminary findings of its investigation.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* Details of non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department, including audit information, are set out in "Public Bodies 1991", a copy of which is in the library of the House.

Audit arrangements for the bodies which are not audited by the National Audit Office are:

Public Body	*Auditor*
British Hallmarking Council	BDO Binder Hamlyn
National Consumer Council	Coopers & Lybrand
Gas Consumers' Council	Coopers & Lybrand
English Industrial Estates Corporation	Ernst & Young
Hearing Aid Council	Grant Thornton
Policyholders' Protection Board	Touche Ross & Co.

Appointments to audit are made after a competitive tender except where the size of the audit and the likely fee is small. Reappointments are usually on an annual basis. Performance of the auditors is regularly reviewed and a new competition would be held if the findings indicate that there would merit in again testing the market.

Gas and Electricity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the impact of European Community-wide transparency in gas and electricity markets on United Kingdom gas and electricity consumers at *(a)* domestic tariff levels, *(b)* medium-sized commercial consumers and *(c)* heavy industry.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The European Community directive on the transparency of gas and electricity prices—Council directive 90/377/EEC—covers only prices charged to industrial end-users. A commentary on the prices charged at 1 July 1991 was included in the May 1992 issue of "Energy Trends", copies of which are available in the Library.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the change in real terms in electricity prices paid by industry as a whole between 1986 and 1991.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* Average electricity prices paid by industry fell in real terms by 15·6 per cent. between 1986 and 1991.

Iraqi Funds

Mr. Beggs: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has received for the release of blocked Iraqi funds for the purposes of funding trade in goods not embargoed under United Nations Security Council resolutions 706 and 712; and what advice his Department has given to United Kingdom firms on such trade.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* I have received several inquiries concerning the release of Iraqi funds from restricted accounts in the United Kingdom to pay for the supply of humanitarian goods to Iraq.

Responsibility for administering restricted Iraqi accounts is delegated by Her Majesty's Treasury to the Bank of England.

When my Department considers whether to grant a licence to export humanitarian goods to Iraq, such as foodstuffs and medicines, the question of means of payment is not one of the criteria which is necessary for that decision. How the goods will be paid for is a matter for the exporter and the customer, bearing in mind the restrictions imposed by United Nations sanctions against Iraq.

Pyramid Selling

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will reconsider the use of the term "legal pyramid selling scheme", with regard to multi-level marketing companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* This term "legal pyramid selling scheme" is not used in the Pyramid Selling Schemes Regulations 1989, and it is not for me to prescribe when it should or should not be used. In common use, the terms "pyramid selling", "multi-level marketing" and "network marketing" appear to be interchangeable. The promoter may choose how to describe his own scheme.

Deregulatory Unit

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress his deregulatory unit has made during 1992.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* A report on progress under the deregulation initiative for the period up to 30 June 1992 is currently in preparation. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House when it has been completed. A report of the achievements under the initiative over the past 18 months is planned. for publication in the autumn.

Sellafield

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the total discharges of radioactivity, in terms of total activity, from the Sellafield plant in each year since 1985; and if he wil make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The data requested by the hon. Member are in British Nuclear Fuel's annual report of "Radioactive Discharges and Monitoring of the Environment", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Bankers Charter

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he proposes to adopt the bankers charter proposed by the EC Competition Commissioner into his own citizens charter proposals.

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

No. As I told the House on 3 June at column *927*, while the Government fully support the intention of improving the speed and efficiency of cross-border payments, which lie behind the EC Commission's proposed charter, we believe that the emphasis—as stressed in the Commission's report—should be on the banks introducing their own initiatives in this sector.

HEALTH

Dentistry

17. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she next proposes to meet the British Dental Association to discuss dentists' contracts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My Department is in frequent contact with the British Dental Association on a range of issues. The principles of the dental contract are firmly in place, but we have always been prepared to make changes where necessary.

20. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the current situation regarding dentists' fees and remuneration.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government remain firmly committed to dentistry within the national health service and we shall take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the NHS dental services remain available. For the future, we are looking to the fundamental review to produce a system which will more fairly and more effectively remunerate all NHS dentists for the important work they do.

21. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will pay an official visit to south Cumbria to discuss provision of dental treatment within the national health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are keeping in touch with all parts of the country about the provision of dental treatment within the national health service.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the consequence for children's dental health of *(a)* the reduction in orthodontic multiband fees and *(b)* the lowering of the limit on prior approval.

Dr. Mawhinney: We do not believe there will be any consequence for children's dental health. The range of treatments available to children under the national health service remains the same, and the changes to the prior approval requirement will not significantly increase total treatment time.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many additional staff will be employed at the Scottish and English dental practice boards to process prior approval estimates following the introduction of the £200 limit;

(2) how many days, on average, it will take to process prior approval requests for dental treatment.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 13 July. Information relating to Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of orthodontic courses of treatment, excluding examination, diagnosis and retention will be subject to the new prior approval restriction.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Dental Practice Board has estimated that some 30 per cent. will require prior approval.

NHS Building Projects

18. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service building projects have been completed in England since 1979; and how many are under way.

Dr. Mawhinney: More than 600 capital schemes, each costing more than £1 million, have been completed in the national health service since 1979. A further 400 such schemes are in various stages of planning, design and construction, of which 105 are currently under construction.

Learning Disabilities (Trusts)

19. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the appropriateness of granting trust status to hospitals caring for persons with learning disabilities.

24. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the appropriateness of granting trust status to hospitals caring for persons with learning disabilities.

Mr. Yeo: All units applying for national health service trust status are carefully assessed by a stringent set of criteria. These include:

identifying the benefits and improved quality of service;
ensuring the management has the skills to run the trust;
ensuring that senior professional staff, including consultants are involved in the management of the trust;
and assessing the financial viability of the trust.

Patients Charter

22. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further improvements in waiting times the Government intend to make under the patients charter.

Mr. Sackville: On 12 May 1992, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, announced our intention to follow up the successful introduction of the two year guarantee with a new and additional guarantee that, from 1 April 1993, no-one should have to wait more than 18 months for a hip or knee joint replacement, or a cataract operation.

Life Expectancy

23. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average life expectancy in the United Kingdom; and what figures she has for *(a)* life expectancy in 1979 and *(b)* the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average.

Mr. Sackville: In 1990 the average life expectancy at birth in the United Kingdom was 72·8 years for men and 78·5 years for women. This compares with 70·1 and 76·2 years respectively in 1979.

Due to lack of information for certain countries an average figure for all OECD countries is not available. However, in 1989 the average life expectancy for men across 19 OECD countries was 72·8 years, and for women 79·2 years.

AIDS

25. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much specific grants to local authorities for spending on AIDS and mental illness services will increase in 1992-93; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The specific grant available nationally to local authorities for people with AIDS/HIV increased by £5·1 million, or 43·5 per cent. in real terms, between 1991-92 and 1992-93. The grant for people with mental illness increased by £10·4 million, or 43·1 per cent. in real terms, over the same period.

Community Care

26. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met the Association of Directors of Social Services to discuss the implementation of the community care reforms.

Dr. Mawhinney: I last met with the Association of Directors of Social Services on 8 June.

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has had from home owners, residents and local authorities about the funding to be made available for the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Many representations about community care funding have been received from individuals, home owners, local authorities and representative organisations. Announcements about funding for the personal social services in 1993-94, including resources for community care and their distribution, will be made in the context of this year's local authority expenditure settlement.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of social services clients had an individual care plan on 1 April.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will take steps to ensure that the provision of care for the highly dependent client remains the statutory responsibility of district health authorities; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The role of health authorities in providing services for highly dependent people was reaffirmed in "Caring for People". As purchasers of health care, health authorities have a duty to secure the best possible services for all their residents, including highly dependent people, taking into account local circumstances, priorities and available resources.

Junior Doctors

27. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the average hours worked in any week by a junior hospital doctor in 1979 and the most recent year available; and what plans she has to reduce the figure.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1979 junior hospital doctors in England and Wales were contracted to be on duty for an average of 89 hours per week. At 30 September 1990, the latest date for which information is available, this average had fallen to 79 hours per week.

Following the launch of the new deal for junior doctors in June 1991 we have an agreed timetable for reducing the hours of duty of doctors and dentists in training. Our target is to reduce maximum average contracted hours of duty to 83 per week for those working on-call rotas, 72 per week for those working partial shifts and 60 per week for those working full shifts by 1 April 1993. They are to be reduced further by 31 December 1994, to 72 per week for those working on-call rotas in hard-pressed posts, 64 hours per week for those working partial shifts and 56 hours per week for those working on full shifts. Subject to review, our aim is to reduce the maximum average contracted hours of junior doctors working on-call rotas in posts which are not considered to be hard-pressed to 72 per week by 31 December 1996. However in certain circumstances higher specialist trainees may continue to contract for up to 83 hours after this date. These measures will further reduce the average weekly contracted hours of junior doctors.

Regardless of the contracted hours of duty for individual posts we intend that from 31 December 1994 junior doctors should not normally be expected to work for more than an average of 56 hours per week.

Complaints Procedure

28. **Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the national health service complaints procedure.

Mr. Sackville: We keep the hospital and family health service complaints procedure under review, and are encouraging management and staff to respond more positively to oral and written complaints. The procedure was last updated by the patients charter, which introduced the right to have any complaint about NHS services investigated and to receive a full and prompt written reply from the chief executive or general manager. Authorities will also have to record the number of complaints received and the response time. We are looking at ways to make complaints procedures more friendly and responsive to the needs of individual patients.

Smoking

29. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new initiatives she intends to introduce to reduce illnesses and deaths caused by smoking.

Dr. Mawhinney: The "Health of the Nation" White Paper commits us to ambitious targets to reduce smoking further. It sets out a comprehensive strategy to achieve these targets, including action on price, health education, ensuring effective controls on advertising and a greater national health service role in reducing smoking.

Health Service, London

30. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress on the Tomlinson inquiry into London's health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: Sir Bernard Tomlinson and his team are making excellent progress and are due to report to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and for Education in the autumn.

Metabolic Disease

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make it her policy to maintain the symbiosis of research and service provision in the detection of inherited metabolic disease;

(2) if she will make it her policy to establish mandatory quality assessment schemes to ensure adequate standards of service for the detection of inherited metabolic disease;

(3) what representations she has received from the British Inherited Disease Group concerning the SAS system; and if she will make a statement on the operation of the SAS system and its relevance to regional services for the detection of inherited metabolic disease.

Mr. Sackville: We have received no such representations. The supra regional assay service (SAS) contracts with purchasing authorities to provide rare or infrequently requested laboratory tests. It is for purchasing authorities to ensure that they specify in contracts, and monitor, the quality elements which they require.

The national health service management executive is currently reviewing issues arising from contracting for specialised services, including genetic services.

Infant Medication

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of whether enough information is now available to the public to justify the introduction of the 5ml dilution of infants' medication.

Dr. Mawhinney: The 5ml dilution convention ended on 1 July. Where a dose of less than 5ml is prescribed the patient will be supplied with an oral syringe. We are satisfied that sufficient information is available to the public to explain the change.

GP Fund Holders

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps she has taken to ensure that there is adequate monitoring of general practitioner fund holders by family health service authorities where they provide services other than general medical services including *(a)* ophthalmology and *(b)* physiotherapy services; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will impose on family health service authorities an obligation to monitor the standards of all services provided by general practitioner fund holders, including services other than primary care; and if she will arrange for the results of such monitoring to be publicly available locally.

Dr. Mawhinney: The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 gave family health service authorities a duty to monitor the expenditure of general practitioner fund holders (for whatever purpose) and to institute audit and review where appropriate. Publication of the outcome is for local decision. Additionally, regional health authorities must ensure compliance with the terms of recognition of a general practitioner as a fund holder, including fund holders' obligation to satisfy themselves that the provider of any service they purchase is competent and has appropriate qualifications, training and experience.

Regional Funding

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will reassess the method chosen to allocate funds to regions and districts in England so as to implement a different method of allocation which reflects more closely the differing health needs of each of those regions and districts; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The principle of funding health authorities in proportion to the number of people for whom they are responsible is well-established. The Department keeps under review the details of the method by which population figures are weighted to allow for differences between populations of the same size. This method rests on a statistical analysis of census and national health service data. The 1991 census will provide the opportunity for reassessment when the results are available in a suitable form in 1993.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will increase levels of staffing and resources for community health councils to meet the increased demands on its service resulting from the citizens and patients charters.

Mr. Sackville: Regional health authorities are responsible for allocating resources to community health councils (CHCs), and for determining the appropriate staffing levels. The deputy chief executive of the national health service management executive wrote to regional general managers on 6 March about the role of CHCs and reminded them to ensure that CHCs were properly resourced.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to review cases where a community health council considers that its observers are being unreasonably excluded from *(a)* trust, *(b)* district health authority and *(c)* regional health authority meetings; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Community health councils (CHCs) have the right to attend any national health service authority or trust meetings which are open to the public. It is matter for decision by authorities and trusts whether CHCs will be invited to attend meetings which are otherwise closed to the public. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action her Department is currently carrying out to increase the public's awareness of community health councils; and if she will make it her policy to fund a campaign for this.

Mr. Sackville: Community health councils (CHCs) are independent statutory bodies and are responsible for their own publicity.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will reconsider extending the current terms of office of community health councils to three four-year terms; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Members of community health councils (CHCs) are ineligible for reappointment after the completion of two consecutive four-year terms of office. We believe that this encourages a combination of experience and fresh enthusiasm among the membership of CHCs. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to improve the statutory rights of community health councils in their relationship with *(a)* purchasers, *(b)* improved access to information, *(c)* automatic observer status on district and regional health authorities public and closed meetings and *(d)* membership of appropriate health authority working groups.

Mr. Sackville: Legislation is not necessary. My hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and the deputy chief executive of the national health service management executive have both written to regional health authorities to remind them of the importance of ensuring that community health councils play a full part in the reformed NHS.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy for community health councils to have full responsibility for their non-staff budget with full details of budgets being submitted in annual reports of the community health councils; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Regional health authorities are responsible for allocating resources to community health councils. The detailed arrangements for managing community health council budgets are for local decision.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will amend the Community Health Council Regulations 1985 to provide those councils with the right of inspection of those parts of general practitioners' premises where minor surgery is performed under general practitioners' contracts; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Community health councils do not have a statutory right of access to general practitioners' premises, and we have no plans to change these arrangements.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue immediate guidance to health authorities regarding their relationship with community health councils.

Mr. Sackville: Existing guidance was issued in 1990. In addition, my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and the deputy chief executive of the national health service management executive wrote to health authorities in February and March about the role of community health councils in relation to health authorities.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action she is taking to ensure that community health councils have sufficient knowledge of the terms of the relevant contracts covering patients who are placed with national health service funding under trusts or privately-run services; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will issue guidelines to health authorities encouraging them to supply community health councils with the relevant terms of contracts so as to facilitate accurate monitoring by them of the care of patients being treated by a particular service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Contracts between health authorities and providers are public documents available to community health councils. The deputy chief executive of the national health service management executive wrote to health authorities in March emphasising the importance of community health councils having access to district health authority contracts with providers.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation so that community health councils could nominate specific members to monitor the national health service purchaser/provider split in local planning and purchasing functions with different specified members to monitor the providing process; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Existing legislation enables community health councils (CHCs) to monitor all services purchased and provided by the local district. It is for individual CHCs to decide how to deploy their members on different tasks.

Creuzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will launch an investigation into the circumstances under which a number of height-deficient children were injected with Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease during clinical trials conducted by the national health service.

Mr. Yeo: The background to this problem is already well documented in medical journals: the article "Friendly fire in medicine: hormones, homografts and Creuzfeldt Jakob disease" in *The Lancet* (vol. 340: July 4 1992) includes a history and a full list of references. We are supporting research into the origins and transmission of CJD and keep all relevant developments under review.

A copy of *The Lancet* is available in the Library.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her latest estimate of the extent of the contamination of human growth hormone with Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Mr. Yeo: So far six cases of Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) have been confirmed among the 1,908 patients treated with human derived pituitary growth hormone and two more are suspected, one of them a patient who has recently died. I am advised that further cases are possible, but no reliable estimates of the extent of the problem can be made until we know more about the origins of CJD and its transmission.

Human Growth Hormones

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received about the indiscriminate removal of pituitary glands by mortuary technicians for human growth hormone processing.

Mr. Yeo: None.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the need for guidelines on the safe selection of glands used to make human growth hormone was first identified; when the guidelines were issued; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The need for selectivity in the collection of pituitaries was recognised from the time the treatment was first used. At the start of its trial, in 1958, the Medical Research Committee issued a direction that diseased pituitaries should not be collected. In 1977 it issued more specific criteria which excluded the collection of pituitaries from donors believed to have been suffering from various communicable or degenerative diseases. In 1981 the Department, which by then had taken over arrangements for the supply of the growth hormone, issued a new direction which specifically mentioned Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease among the exclusion criteria.

Treatment Assessments

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment has been made of the expected demand for hospitals or community-based health service treatment over the next decade in Dewsbury, Huddersfield and Calderdale;

(2) what assessment has been made of under or over capacity in the provision of hospital-based care over the next decade in Dewsbury, Huddersfield and Calderdale; and what capital developments are proposed.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally. Planning for the development of local health and community services is a matter for the health authorities concerned. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Dewsbury, Huddersfield and Calderdale health authorities for details.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy that the orders arising from section 30(9) of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 will be laid before Parliament before 16 July.

Mr. Sackville: It is our intention that these regulations, which are currently in preparation, will be subject to a wide consultation in the autumn before they are laid before Parliament.

Census

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the progress of the 1991 census.

Mr. Sackville: Counts of the population present on census night were published in the preliminary reports in July 1991. These provisional figures were obtained from summaries prepared by the local field staff.

Computer processed results from the 1991 census are being processed on a county-by-county (England and Wales) or region-by-region (Scotland) basis, and monitors containing summary statistics on the census topics for which answers were fully processed have been published for 11 counties and one Scottish region.

"Census Newsletter, No. 22," which is due to be published during July, will contain the planned publication dates for the remaining monitors. A copy will be placed in the Library. The newsletter will also include a timetable for the availability and publication of the other main products, such as the small area statistics, county reports and national reports, and reports on specific census topics. There are two small changes from the timetable given in my reply to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 18 June at column *672*. The last county monitor is now scheduled to be published in October, and the last small area statistics released in November.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the overall percentage of forms returned under the 1991 census.

Mr. Sackville: The census validation survey will report on census coverage later this year. This work will be published in the autumn.

Nursing and Residential Homes

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will indicate the extent to which the national health service budget will be altered to reflect the transfer to local councils of responsibility for people in nursing and residential homes.

Mr. Yeo: Funding for health authorities in 1993-94 and later years will be decided in the public expenditure survey in the normal way.

Resources

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the current and projected levels of hospital and community-based resources within Dewsbury, Huddersfield and Calderdale available to meeet current and expected health needs.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Brian Askew, the chairman of Yorkshire regional health authority, for details.

Rampton Hospital

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died in Rampton hospital during the last 10 years; and from what causes.

Mr. Yeo: A total of 46 people have died while patients of Rampton hospital in the past 10 years. The causes of death recorded are:

	Number
Natural causes	36
Suicide	5
Open verdict following inquest	3
Final inquest not yet held	2

HIV

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements she is making to enable payments to be made under the special scheme for people infected with HIV as a result of national health service blood transfusion or tissue transfer.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Parliamentary approval to this new expenditure, announced on 17 February, will be

sought in a supplementary estimate for the Department of Health administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England vote (class XIII vote 3). Pending that approval, expenditure estimated at £1·2 million will be met by repayable advances from the contingencies fund.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the implications for Government policy of the recent case in Birmingham of the transmission of HIV infection.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government recognise that HIV/AIDS is perhaps the greatest new public health challenge this century. The Government have consistently identified the threat of HIV/AIDS. This country is a recognised world leader in the action it has taken.

Between 1985-86 and 1992-93 the Government have allocated nearly £700 million to health and local authorities for the development of HIV-related services as well as over £73 million to developing a national AIDS public education campaign.

Establishing better sexual health—within which context the spread of HIV can best be minimised—is one of the five key target areas in the "Health of the Nation" White Paper. This reflects the importance the Government attach to combatting the spread of HIV.

The Birmingham case has highlighted the fact that heterosexuals cannnot ignore the risk of HIV. Past and present experience of sexually transmitted diseases indicates that the public health, and that of individuals, is best served if people at risk of infection and their sexual partners can come forward freely for confidential advice, testing and help.

The Government will take the issues raised by the Birmingham case, and other recent developments, carefully into account. These issues will be reflected in the current work of the ministerial AIDS action group which is due to report in the autumn.

Tobacco

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will publish the fifth annual report of the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship has submitted its fifth report to the United Kingdom Health Ministers and to the Secretary of State for National Heritage. Copies have been placed in the Library. I am very grateful to the committee, and particularly the chairman, Sir John Blelloch, for their valuable work in continuing to monitor the agreements. The report shows that the industry has continued to honour its commitments.

Geneticists

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the need of central laboratories for clinical geneticists.

Mr. Sackville: Most clinical genetics laboratories are based in regional genetics centres. Laboratory services in respect of complex or rare disorders are provided by a national centre, such as the National Haemoglobinopathy reference laboratory. This laboratory is the national reference centre for carrier diagnosis and prenatal diagnosis of complex haemoglobinopathies, notably the thalassaemias and sickle cell disease. The pattern of provision will depend to a large extent on the pace of developments.

Genetic Disorders

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proposals she has for the provision of genetic registers, and enabling such registers to play a role in the elimination of potential carriers of disease;

(2) what provision she is making to provide genetic counselling for *(a)* individual patients, *(b)* family groups and *(c)* relatives of victims of genetic disorders.

Mr. Sackville: Genetic registers and genetic counselling are integral components of the rapidly developing speciality of national health service genetic services. The level of provision of health care services, including genetic services, is a matter for health authorities to decide. As purchasers of services, health authorities are in the best position to make these decisions on the basis of their assessment of local needs.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses are currently trained in the detection and treatment of genetic disorders; and what plans she has to increase the numbers.

Mr. Sackville: The care and treatment of patients suffering from genetic disorders is shared between a range of professionals including hospital specialists, GPs and nurses. In 1990, the latest year for which figures are available, there were 76 hospital doctors (47·4 whole time equivalent) specialising in the treatment of genetic disorders in England. Quotas for the number of training posts are set on the basis of advice from the joint planning advisory committee which includes representatives of the Royal colleges, the medical profession and the national health service.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom suffer from genetic disorders.

Mr. Sackville: Genetic factors are present in all human disorders to varying degrees, even in conditions as relatively minor as colour blindness. It is therefore not practicable to analyse all disorders in genetic terms. One of the most common and most serious single gene disorder is cystic fibrosis which is estimated to be present in one in 2,000 unborn children.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what study she has made of the practice of payment from one health authority to another in paying for tests relating to genetic disorders.

Mr. Sackville: The first point of contact for patients requiring genetic advice is usually their GP, who will refer them for tests, if appropriate. The funding arrangements are therefore the same as for any other GP referral. The national health service management executive has agreed with general managers that regions should develop appropriate arrangements to assure the purchase of specialist services, both in NHS trust hospitals and in those managed directly by districts.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to promote the early adoption of new techniques of diagnosis management, and treatment of the effect of genetic disease, including proven gene therapy;

(2) what strategy she has to use new molecular knowledge in surgery and treatment; and what training is given to those who use manipulative techniques in this field.

Mr. Sackville: An important part of the Department's research and development strategy is to ensure that the best use is made of the high quality of our medical research to improve patient care. The Government consider that it is important that applications of new molecular biological techniques to the diagnosis, management and treatment of patients should be subjected to stringent evaluation before they are adopted for use in clinical practice.

The Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy was set up in 1989 to provide advice to the United Kingdom Health Ministers on scientific and medical developments which have a bearing on the safety and efficacy of human gene modification. The committee's report was published in January this year when the Government announced that they would be consulting professional, scientific and lay bodies on the committee's recommendations. The consultation process was completed on 18 May and the Government are currently studying the responses.

Each of the Royal colleges and their faculties takes the lead on professional training within its own specialty. Training in molecular biological techniques is available for clinicians in training programmes organised by the Medical Research Council, the Wellcome Trust and other bodies.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to ensure that opted-out hospitals maintain responsibility for training and research for medical and nursing staff.

Dr. Mawhinney: Trusts are expected to play a full role in teaching and training, including both undergraduate and postgraduate medical and dental education and other professional training and research. Health authorities or purchasers are expected to take account of teaching and research interests in their purchasing decisions.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of beds are sold to the private sector by opted-out hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: National health service hospital trusts have powers to authorise the use of beds for private patients, subject to the statutory requirement that there is no significant interference with the performance by the trust of its obligation under NHS contracts. Beds are not sold to the private sector and remain available to NHS patients.

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what legal limits there are on the number of pay beds in hospital trusts.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) earlier today.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress in addressing the conclusions about the workings of the conscience clause of the Abortion Act 1967 made by the Select Committee for Health in its tenth report of Session 1989-90.

Mr. Sackville: The Government's response to the Select Committee's report was published in May 1991. The action promised in paragraph 10 of the report was undertaken immediately, and the monitoring referred to in paragraphs 5 and 12 of the response continues.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage of hospital discharges, after abortion not legally induced, to live births for 1967-68, 1979 and the last year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Percentage of hospital discharges after abortion (not legally induced) to livebirths for 1967, 1968, 1979 and 1985 England and Wales (except 1985, England only)

Year	*ICD*	*Description*	*Number of discharges*	*Number of livebirths*	*Rate per 100 livebirths*
1967	650·0 + 651·0	Spontaneous abortion	67,816	832,164	8·15
	650·2 + 651·2	Abortion induced for other reasons[1]	285	832,164	·03
	650·3 + 651·3	Other abortion	1,800	832,164	·22
1968	642	Abortion induced for other reasons[1]	550	819,272	·07
	643	Spontaneous abortion	5,951	819,272	·73
	644	Abortion not specified as induced or spontaneous	60,824	819,272	7·42
	645	Other abortion	2,068	819,272	·25
1979	634	Spontaneous abortion	26,641	638,028	4·18
	636	Illegally induced abortion	72	638,028	·01
	637	Unspecified abortion	25,501	638,028	4·00
1985[2]	634	Spontaneous abortion	32,716	619,301	5·28
	636	Illegally induced abortion	93	619,301	·02
	637	Unspecified abortion	18,789	619,301	3·03

[1] Reasons other than legal or medical indications.
[2] England only.

Note:
Data for 1967 are based on the seventh revision of the International Classification of Diseases. Data for 1968 are based on the eighth revision, and data for 1979 and 1985 are based on the ninth revision. The data for the three periods in question are not necessarily comparable.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage of legal abortions to live births for 1967-68, 1979 and the last year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 7 July 1992]:* The information requested for 1968, 1979 and 1991 is shown in the table.

Percentage of legal abortions, under the Abortion Act 1967, to livebirths for 1968, 1979 and 1991—England and Wales

Year	Number of abortions	Number of livebirths	Rate per 100
1968[1]	23,641	539,259	4·38
1979	149,746	638,028	23·47
1991[2]	177,642	699,217	25·41

[1] The number of abortions for 1968 is for the period 27 April 1968 (when the Act came into force) to 31 December 1968. The number of livebirths for 1968 is for 1 May 1968 to 31 December 1968.
[2] The number of abortions for 1991 is a provisional figure.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to distinguish in the annual abortion statistics between abortions conducted solely with RU486 and those conducted with RU486 and in addition prostaglandins or D and C and D and E.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* Published statistics state the method of termination used. From 1992, statistics will include terminations using antiprogesterone (RU486) with prostaglandin.

Genetic Therapy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policy conclusions have been drawn in relation to genetic therapy and genetic counselling from the conference "Our Genetic Future" held at BMA House on 30 June.

Mr. Sackville: The conference made a valuable contribution to discussion of the implications of gene therapy and genetic counselling. The Government are currently considering their response to the report of the Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy (Cm 1788) and will take account of the conclusions reached at the conference.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the recent letter from the chief medical officer to public health authorities on genetic therapy.

Mr. Sackville: The most recent letter on gene therapy sent to the health authorities was issued on 16 January 1992. It invited comments on the recommendations in the report of the Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy (Cm 1788). A copy of the letter is attached to Department of Health press release H92/20 which is available in the Library.

DNA Information

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on the provision of DNA information about patients to insurance companies.

Mr. Sackville: Any information which is obtained as a result of DNA testing is no less confidential than other personal health information and should not be disclosed to insurance companies without the patient's prior consent.

Thalassaemia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision is made for those suffering from thalassaemia.

Mr. Sackville: Health care for those suffering from thalassaemia is provided by district health authorities in the light of the health needs of their resident populations.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has any plans for hospital closures in the London area; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Sir Bernard Tomlinson is currently carrying out a review of the health and medical education needs of the capital. His report will form the basis for decisions about the future pattern of hospital provision in London.

Domiciliary Care

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to monitor the provision of domiciliary care to ensure it is of an adequate standard.

Mr. Yeo: Local social services authorities are responsible for the provision and management of personal social services including domiciliary care services. It is for each authority to ensure that services they supply or arrange are of adequate standard.

Care Homes

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide information on the unit costs of residential places provided by each local authority in England and Wales, with the comparable unit costs for private homes.

Mr. Yeo: The local authority analysis of gross weekly cost per place filled excluding capital charges in local authority homes for elderly people in 1989-90, the latest date for which information is available, is given in "Key Indicators of Local Authority Social Services 1989-90", a copy of which is available in the Library.

These unit costs, which relate to England only, are based on data collected by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

Information relating to local authorities in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales.

Information about costs in the independent sector was produced in the Price Waterhouse report commissioned by the Department of Social Security, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about how residents and potential residents and their next of kin will be informed of which services and facilities, as laid down in regulation 10 of SI (1984) No. 1345, should be provided and what complaints procedure will operate in a regulated small home.

Mr. Yeo: We are considering responses to the consultation document issued earlier this year about the regulations which should apply to small residential care

homes once the Registered Homes (Amendment) Act 1991 is brought into force. Our intention is that the regulations should require that local authority registers should show whether a home is registered as a small home. Those consulting the registers will then be able to see which statutory requirements apply. More detailed information about individual homes will generally be available from the people running those homes and from other, independent sources.

We intend that the same requirements about complaints procedures should apply to registered small homes as already apply to larger homes.

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide statistics on the proportion of elderly people aged over 75 years who die within three months after being moved from one residential home to another.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not collected centrally.

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Registered Homes (Amendment) Act 1991 regulations and commencement order will be laid before the House.

Mr. Yeo: Regulations amending the Residential Care Homes Regulations 1984 for the purpose of their application to small homes will be laid in the next few weeks. We hope to make the commencement order specifying when the Registered Homes (Amendment) Act 1991 will be brought into force at about the same time.

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what precautions she intends to take to safeguard residents from eviction as a result of an owner of a small home being evicted himself for rent or mortgage arrears, by fraudulently obtaining multi-mortgages in order to run a number of small homes.

Mr. Yeo: It is for local authorities to ensure that anyone in need of residential care not otherwise available is properly provided for.

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps after 1 April 1993, a local authority would have to take to safeguard elderly residents, before refusing or terminating a contract with a home owner.

Mr. Yeo: It will be for local authorities to devise their procedures for placing and reviewing contracts. The Government will expect local authorities to behave reasonably and sensitively, and give sufficient notice of their contracting policies and decisions. This could include providing any suitable assistance to minimise inconvenience to existing residents caused by the failure of the home in which they live to gain or retain a contract.

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health after 1 April 1993, if the choice of potential residents in nursing and residential homes will be confined to those homes selected by local authorities, unless the residents can afford to pay the full charges.

Mr. Yeo: From April 1993 local authorities will place contracts with residential care and nursing homes on behalf of individuals who are assessed as needing such care and need to be publicly supported. We have made it clear that authorities should take into account people's preferences for the home they enter and not unreasonably restrict people's choice. We have also made it clear that local authorities' arrangements should be sufficiently flexible to allow relatives and friends to contribute, if they so wish, towards the cost of a place in a more expensive home than the authority would normally contract with.

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what qualifications a person running a registered small home should have other than not having been found guilty of a criminal offence.

Mr. Yeo: The Registered Homes Act 1984 provides that registration in respect of a residential care home for four or more people may be refused if a person is not considered fit to be involved in running the home. The same will apply to applications for registration from those planning to run small homes once the Registered Homes (Amendment Act) 1991 is brought into force. It is for registration authorities to interpret and apply this requirement.

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of how many of the existing private nursing and residential homes will close by 1994.

Mr. Yeo: Information about the number of independent nursing and residential care homes that close is not collected centrally.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of prescriptions was written generically in 1991; what percentage was dispensed generically; what percentage of the total drug bill related to generic items; and whether she can give an estimate of the figures expected to apply in the current year.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1991, 41 per cent. of all prescriptions were written generically and 35·2 per cent. were dispensed generically. Information on the percentage of the total drug bill which relates to generic items is not available. However, 26·6 per cent. of the basic cost of drugs (that is, the net ingredient cost, excluding remuneration for dispensing, VAT, container costs and discounts) related to items written generically and 13·9 per cent. of the net ingredient cost related to items dispensed generically.

In the first quarter of 1992 generic prescribing increased to 43·2 per cent.

Marriages (Immigration Purposes)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, column *748*, on marriages for immigration purposes, how many of the cases in the London borough of Lewisham which were reported to the Registrar General, were passed on to the Home Office; and how many of those complaints were proven.

Mr. Sackville: Of the 21 cases reported to the registrar general, information in respect of 10 was passed to the Home Office. I understand that in two of the 10 cases notified the marriage has yet to take place. In a further six cases, the marriage was followed by an application to the Home Office for leave to remain as a foreign spouse of which two have been granted and four are the subject of ongoing inquiries. Applications to remain on the basis of marriage have yet to be received in respect of the remaining two cases.

Child Minders

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will *(a)* list the number of child minders registered in each local authority in 1991 and *(b)* list the number re-registered under the Children Act 1989 in each local authority to date; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Information about the number of child minders registered by each social services department at 31 March 1991 was published in "Children's Day Care Facilities at 31 March 1991 England"; a copy of which is available in the Library.

The number of child minders who have re-registered in the period to 30 June 1992 is being collected as part of a national exercise to monitor local authority implementation of the Children Act 1989 which will be reported to Parliament by the end of 1992.

Dentists Fees

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the mean fee earnings per dentist in the Cumbria family health services authority in each year since 1987 at current prices.

Dr. Mawhinney: The table shows the mean gross earnings of general dental practitioners on the dental list of Cumbria family health services authority over the five financial years from 1987-88 to 1991-92, at 1991-92 prices.

Mean gross fee earnings per DRSG dentist at 1991-92 prices

Financial year	*Cumbria FHSA (£)*
1987-88	75,192
1988-89	82,893
1989-90	76,979
1990-91	80,503
1991-92	87,554

These means relate only to earnings through fees and to general dental practitioners in the population used by the dental rates study group. They exclude seniority payments, maternity payments, long-term sickness payments, postgraduate education allowances and other such allowances. They relate only to those general dental practitioners who were in contract for the complete financial year in question.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff her Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and if she will calculate the staffing level of the health section of the former Department of Health and Social Security and the associated personnel costs immediately before its separation.

Mr. Sackville: For 1991-92 the Department's estimated outturn pay costs were £100 million for 4,659 staff; for 1987-88 (prior to the split of the former DHSS), outturn paycosts were £60 million for 3,932 staff. The 1987-88 figures have been adjusted to reflect staff numbers and costs as they would have related to the present organisation. All paybill costs include employers' earnings related national insurance contributions.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list any public appointments by her Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors;

(2) if she will list any advisers retained by her Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally in the form requested. The Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Social Workers

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps have been taken by the Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work to ensure that the training of social workers approved under the Mental Health Act 1983, includes a knowledge of mental illness and its treatment;

(2) what steps are being taken by the Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work to ensure that social workers in training for approval and those already approved are aware of the contents of the letter about inaccuracies in the code of practice under the Mental Health Act 1983 sent to local authorities on 18 February;

(3) what guidance approved social workers receive about implementing the policy of using resources for early and appropriate intervention to prevent deterioration of a mentally ill person's condition.

Mr. Yeo: All local authorities have access to approved training programmes for those social workers they wish to approve to carry out duties under mental health legislation. The Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work has a responsibility to approve these courses of training and has set out full guidelines on course content in their paper 19.19; "Regulations and Guidance for the Training of Social Workers to be considered for Approval in England and Wales under the Mental Health Act 1983" which was published in January 1987. This guidance is currently under review.

Although their primary purpose is to prepare such social workers for the specific duties they are to carry out under the Mental Health Act 1983 they may also be used to meet more general staff development needs in relation to mental health social work.

The letter of 18 February was circulated widely, with instructions that it should be drawn to the attention of all staff concerned with the implementation of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken by the Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work to prepare social workers and probation officers for work with mentally disordered offenders and similar patients in secure settings.

Mr. Yeo: The joint Department of Health and Home Office review of health and social services for mentally disordered offenders has considered relevant aspects of the training of social workers.

The report of the review's staffing and training advisory group was published for consultation on 2 June. A number

of its recommendations, if accepted by Ministers, would require action by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work.

Departmental Properties

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham are owned by her Department; and if she will publish a list of such residential properties which are currently empty, giving the type of accommodation available, the length of time each property has been vacant and the intended future use.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally. The management of the national health service residential estate is the responsibility of health authorities and NHS trusts.

NHS Accounting System

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the quality of the accounting system operating within the national health service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has with the approval of Her Majesty's Treasury issued directions under the National Health Service Act 1977 which establish the framework for NHS financial management and the form of the accounts. It is the responsibility of NHS bodies to implement local systems for maintaining sound financial management, which are subject to statutory audit arranged by the Audit Commission.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice she has given to local authorities in relation to taking account of receipt of a mobility component of disability living allowance in determining either the provision of services or charging for services; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Guidance was provided for local authorities in local authority circular (92)4, a copy of which is available in the Library, to the effect that awards of the mobility component of disability living allowance should be disregarded in full in the charging assessment for people receiving residential care.

Guidance about the treatment of the mobility component of disability living allowance in charging for domiciliary and day services is to be issued later this year.

Consultants

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average age of consultants at the time of appointment, for each specialty and for each category of merit award.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* The table gives the average median age of consultants at first appointment and the average age at which consultants receive each category of distinction award by broad specialty group for the latest year for which information is available.

Average median age of consultants on (A) first appointment and (B) obtaining merit award

	A	B			
	Years	*A+*	*A*	*B*	*C*
Accident and Emergency	37	—	—	52	48
Anaesthesia	36	54	50	49	46
Dentistry	40	59	57	54	50
Medicine	38	56	54	49	46
Surgery	38	57	54	52	49
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	39	61	55	52	47
Pathology	36	58	54	50	46
Psychiatry	37	60	54	50	45
Public Health Medicine	41	55	59	49	49
Radiology	35	54	51	52	46
Radiotherapy	39	56	56	48	45
All specialties	37	57	54	50	47

A Source: Medical and Dental census—28 September 1990.
B Source: Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards—31 December 1991.

Distinction Awards, Mersey Region

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will break down the level of award and the distribution across disciplines of distinction awards for the Mersey region into the individual health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* The tables have been placed in the Library.

Some consultants have contracts with more than one authority and where this occurs they have been counted in each authority. The total number of awards held in the Mersey region by grade is 5A+, 31A, 68B and 152C.

CATERING COMMITTEE

Press Facilities

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what is the annual cost of providing *(a)* the Press Bar and *(b)* dining and refreshment facilities in the press section at the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The management accounts of the Refreshment Department do not provide for the separate allocation of costs between *(a)* the Press Bar, and *(b)* the Press Cafeteria and Dining Room.

In the year ended 31 March 1992, a trading surplus of £25,000 was returned from the Press Gallery refreshment facilities. However many of the overhead costs of the Refreshment Department including most staff costs, are borne on the votes for House of Commons: Administration and House of Commons: Accommodation Services. None of these costs are apportioned directly to the Press Gallery facilities.

Refreshment Department facilities in the Press Gallery are also open to staff of the *Official Report* who make significant use of them.

ACCOMMODATION AND WORKS COMMITTEE

Press Facilities

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what is the number of rooms in the Palace of Westminster allocated to

the press lobby; how many telephones, desks and chairs are provided; what is the estimated total capital costs of this provision and the annual cost of maintenance; and what revenue is received from this provision.

Mr. Ray Powell: It is not possible to separate from the Press Gallery accommodation that part available to the Press lobby. There are 17 rooms allocated for use by reporters in the Press Gallery which contain approximately 121 telephones, 90 desks and 90 chairs. The estimated capital and annual costs maintenance of these facilities cannot be identified from the overall totals for the Palace of Westminster without disproportionate cost. No revenue is received from their provision.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 15 July 1992

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Occupational Health Service

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the annual report of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service is due to be published.

Mr. Waldegrave: Part 1 of the annual report of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service for 1991-92 is published today. This reports on the health of the civil service. Part 2 of the report, which covers the activities of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service during 1991-92 and includes the agency's accounts, will be published by 31 July. Copies of both parts will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses on publication.

Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the first annual report of the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have today arranged for copies of the first year's annual report of the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency to be placed in the Library of the House.

The report makes it clear that 1991-92 was not an easy year in which to launch a new recruitment business on a full repayment basis. The agency was unable to achieve a financial balance but it contained its cash deficit to £146,000 and its trading deficit on a accruals basis to £431,000. Although it nearly achieved its target for the number of recruitment schemes, the number of vacancies per scheme was down. On the other hand, it significantly exceeded its target for consultancy days and met its quality of service targets.

Civil Service College

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the annual report of the Civil Service College.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have today arranged for copies of this year's annual report of the Civil Service College to be placed in the Library of the House.

Efficiency Unit

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what topics have been covered in the efficiency unit's central scrutiny programme in the last financial year.

Mr. Waldergrave: Seventeen efficiency scrutinies have been undertaken by Departments in 1991-92 in association with the Prime Minister's adviser on efficiency and the efficiency unit. The programme of scrutinies, including those which are not yet completed, is as follows:

Department/Title of scrutiny	*Report completed*
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	
Organisation of Purchasing and Supply	Yes
Customs and Excise	
VAT Enforcement	Yes
Ministry of Defence	
Third Line Helicopter Repair	Yes
Electronic Component Repair	Yes
Department of the Environment	
Rent Officer Service	Yes
Department of Health	
Office Equipment, Furniture and Fittings	Yes
Home Office	
Information Flows Between Police and Government	Yes
Inland Revenue	
Organisation of Trust Work	Yes
Sub-Contractors Deduction Scheme	Yes
Northern Ireland Office	
Escorting and Conveyance of Prisoners	Yes
Overseas Development Administration	
Output and Performance Measures	Yes
Scottish Office	
Text Creation	Yes
Department of Social Security	
Departmental Relationships	No
Benefiting the Community	Yes
Department of Trade and Industry	
Management Information Systems	No
Management of Accommodation	Yes
Department of Transport	
Developers' Contributions to Highway Works	Yes

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July, *Official Report*, columns *430-31*.

Civil Servants' Shareholdings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department provides brief guidance in part IV of the Cabinet Office staff handbook, but individuals refer to the code and guide for detail. All

three documents are publicly available whilst the code and the guide are in the Library of the House. The same regulations apply to staff in the agencies. Information about reported shareholdings is not held centrally in the form requested; each application is, however, scrutinised carefully to guard against potential conflicts of interest.

PRIME MINISTER

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Office and the Cabinet Office in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Office monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

The Prime Minister: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to apply the principle of subsidiarity in the drafting of Government legislative proposals to be submitted to Parliament in respect of the role and powers of local government within the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The Government are guided by all appropriate considerations in drafting legislative proposals in respect of the role and powers of local government.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

War Crimes

Mr. Janner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many public records in the Public Record Office relating to war crimes in the Channel Islands have been closed for more than 30 years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Documentation relating to public records in the Public Record Office closed for longer than 30 years is not held in a form which would enable all records relating to a particular subject to be readily identified with precision, but a small number of records relating to the Channel Islands in general are subject to extended closure.

Credit Repair Agencies

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what action he will take on advertisements by credit repair agencies purporting to be able to have county court judgments removed from the register.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am deeply concerned that consumers should think carefully before paying any fees for such a service. The procedures for having entries removed from the register are described in the leaflet sent to defendants on entry of judgment; they are quite simple and can be followed easily and cheaply by defendants themselves. However, the circumstances in which entries can be deleted from the register are limited. Almost all judgments are registered on entry of judgment, the major exception being where judgment is given at a contested hearing which the losing party attended and at which he did not ask for time to pay. Most entries then stay on the register for six years, even where payment has been made; they can be removed only where the defendant provides proof that the debt was paid within one month of judgment, where the court, through administrative error, has wrongly registered the judgment, or where the defendant makes a successful application to have the judgment "set aside". But the court will not set the judgment aside simply because the debt has been paid subsequently; a judgment will usually be set aside only on the ground that there is a defence to the claim which ought to be heard. Officials in my Department have already taken steps to warn the courts to be alert for potential abuses of this procedure and are also in contact with the Office of Fair Trading which is considering whether it would be appropriate to use any of its powers against these companies.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax Law

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidelines exist on the circumstances in which a Minister should be informed when arguments advanced in a lower court are reversed at a subsequent stage; and if he will publish those guidelines.

Mr. Dorrell: I am not aware of any such guidelines.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what occasions the agreement referred to by the Minister in column 213 of the *Official Report* of Standing Committe B, 6 June 1991, has been upheld by the courts.

Mr. Dorrell: The passage to which my hon. Friend refers mentions two instances of agreement between taxpayers and the Inland Revenue. Neither has had to be considered by the courts.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Padmore *v.* CIR referred to by the then Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 6 June 1991, Standing Committee B, columns 205 and 213, was a judicial review case; and whether the Padmore case applied to taxpayers who were not in partnership with the taxpayer bringing the case.

Mr. Dorrell: Padmore *v.* CIR was not a judicial review case. The taxpayers who benefited from the judgment in that case included at least one who was not in partnership with Mr. Padmore.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) in what circumstances it is the policy of the Inland Revenue to propose to a taxpayer that public law proceedings brought by another taxpayer shall be treated as a test case for that taxpayer also; and when that policy first started;

(2) what rights he intends to confer upon taxpayers by providing that an agreement with a taxpayer that public law proceedings brought by another taxpayer shall be treated as a test case for that taxpayer;

(3) if he will list the occasions on which the Inland Revenue agreed on a judicial review with a taxpayer that public law proceedings brought by another taxpayer shall be treated as a test case for that taxpayer also;

(4) on how many occasions has the Inland Revenue agreed with a taxpayer that public proceedings brought by another taxpayer shall be treated as a test case for that taxpayer also;

(5) in what circumstances it is the policy of the Inland Revenue to accept a proposal from the taxpayer that public law proceedings brought by another taxpayer shall be treated as a test case for that taxpayer also; and when that policy first started;

(6) if he will list the precedents in cases of judicial review for the Minister's statement in column 213 of the *Official Report* of Standing Committee B, 6 June 1991, that other people could have joined in that agreement.

Mr. Dorrell: If the matters in issue in public law proceedings are relevant to the tax affairs of another taxpayer not party to the proceedings, such a taxpayer can rely on the result of those proceedings without reference to the Inland Revenue.

The then Economic Secretary explained in Standing Committee B last year that the established principles would apply if retrospective legislation were in contemplation following those proceedings. If a taxpayer not party to the proceedings has expressly agreed with the Inland Revenue that the final resolution of some aspect of his or her tax affairs should await the outcome of public law proceedings, and follow the result, Ministers would feel bound to exclude that taxpayer from the scope of any subsequent retrospective legislation in the same way as the successful litigant. I am aware of no instance when this issue has arisen in practice in relation to public law proceedings.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances the Inland Revenue is excluded from the application of common law.

Mr. Dorrell: The Commissioners of the Inland Revenue are required to act in accordance with the powers conferred upon them by statute and in accordance with common law.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which a taxpayer may apply for judicial review where the Exchequer has refused to repay tax unlawfully raised;

(2) what steps he has taken to ensure that a taxpayer can apply for judicial review where the Exchequer has refused to repay tax unlawfully raised.

Mr. Dorrell: The decision to apply for judicial review in a particular instance is a matter for the taxpayer concerned.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his policy on the repayment of tax unlawfully raised;

(2) by what authority the Exchequer is not required to repay tax unlawfully raised.

Mr. Dorrell: I assume that my hon. Friend's reference to "tax unlawfully raised" is a reference to tax paid pursuant to regulations subsequently found to be ultra vires. The question of the recovery of ultra vires charges levied by public bodies is currently in issue in the case of Woolwich *v.* CIR in which the judgment of the House of Lords is expected shortly.

Income Tax (Building Societies) Regulations 1986

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the position of regulation 3 of the Income Tax (Building Societies) Regulations 1986 with regard to the imposition of double taxation.

Mr. Dorrell: Regulation 3 did not impose double taxation.

Citizens Charters

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on retroactive amendments to citizens charters.

Mr. Dorrell: The taxpayers charter was relaunched in August 1991 following the publication of the citizens charter in July 1991. The amendments were to make it shorter and easier to understand, and not to change its substance. The question of retroaction does not arise.

Taxpayers Charter

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of the carving of the taxpayers charter in Somerset House.

Mr. Dorrell: The full cost of the taxpayers charter in Somerset House, including the panel, lettering and erection, was £4,927. Copies are displayed in offices throughout the Department.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the exceptions and proposed exceptions to the taxpayers charter to the right of a taxpayer to take a grievance to an independent tribunal.

Mr. Dorrell: The circumstances under which a taxpayer has the right to take a grievance to an independent tribunal are laid down in statute. The taxpayers charter commits the revenue departments to publicising these rights, but does not affect them.

Income Tax (Building Societies) Regulations 1986

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many building societies had a late enough year-end and interest accruals so concentrated at the end of their accounting period that they benefited from the introduction of the Income Tax (Building Societies) Regulations 1986.

Mr. Dorrell: The regulations were designed to deal consistently with societies, whatever their year-end, by securing in each case that interest came into account once, and once only, on the transition to revised payment arrangements for composite rate tax.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has made to the points raised recently by the counsel to the Woolwich building society.

Mr. Dorrell: I am not aware of any points raised recently by counsel for the Woolwich building society.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July, at column *430*. I have no plans for additional action.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government's economic policies are designed to maintain an environment in which business and enterprise can develop and prosper. The Treasury therefore places a high priority on helping small businesses, and among the specific measures included in the 1992 Budget were:

a package worth £480 million in 1992-93 and £590 million in 1993-94 to assist business ratepayers. No business will face an increase in its rates bill for 1992-93 above the rate of inflation;
raising the VAT registration threshold in line with inflation to £36,600;
reducing VAT penalties;
changes to the VAT cash accounting system (under which small businesses with turnover under £300,000 can defer VAT payments until they receive payment of bills owing to them). This is now available to traders who owe Customs and Excise up to £5,000;
increasing the limit for small employers making quarterly PAYE and NICs payments (rather than monthly) from £400 to £450 a month;
exempting most business assets from inheritance tax, so that family businesses may be passed on without charge;
the halving of car tax on new cars, which will benefit many small businesses; and
requiring Government contractors to pay their bills to sub-contractors promptly.

Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise officials also continuously review forms, explanatory notices and leaflets with the aim of providing guidance which is easily understood.

Capital Allowances

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to improve the inspection of the validity of capital allowances claimed on office equipment leases.

Mr. Dorrell: Claims to capital allowances are subject to the same scrutiny by tax inspectors as other aspects of taxpayers' affairs. The operation of the capital allowance system is generally kept under review and guidance is given to inspectors where appropriate.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to ensure that capital allowances are not claimed by the same finance company on the same equipment which has been the subject of a previous financial agreement on which allowances have already been claimed.

Mr. Dorrell: The eligibility of expenditure for capital allowances is a matter covered by detailed and comprehensive legislation. Examinations carried out by tax inspectors are aimed at ensuring that claims made are in accordance with the requirements of this legislation.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the loss to the Exchequer from the artificial inflation for the purposes of capital allowances claimed on office equipment leases of the retail value of equipment such as photocopiers.

Mr. Dorrell: No such specific assessment has been made.

Pension Funds

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will draw up proposals to amend the Financial Services Act 1986 to strengthen the regulation of in-house pension fund investment managers and bring it closer into line with that of external managers.

Mr. Nelson: Rules on the management of investments under the Act are a matter for the Securities and Investments Board and the self-regulating organisations. The Investment Management Regulatory Organisation issued in May this year a consultation document which reviews the rules applicable to occupational pension schemes and recommends changes.

Taxpayers (Confidentiality)

Mrs. Chaplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provision has been made to ensure that the confidentiality of taxpayers' affairs is preserved if the Inland Revenue contracts out some of its support services.

Mr. Dorrell: There are two safeguards. The first is that all relevant contracts will contain provisions obliging contractors to make all necessary arrangements to protect the privacy of personal information. The second is that contractors and their employees will be subject, in the same way as Revenue employees, to the criminal sanctions —a fine, or imprisonment, or both—provided by section 182 of the Finance Act 1989 for unauthorised disclosure of personal tax information.

Central Statistical Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Central Statistical Office performed against its key targets for 1991-92; and what are the CSO's key targets for 1992-93.

Mr. Lamont: The Central Statistical Office's performance against its key targets for 1991-92 is described in the agency's annual report, which is published today. All of the CSO's statistics were published on their pre-announced release dates. Nine of the CSO's 11 targets relating to revisions were achieved, as were eight of the nine targets on coherence: there was a high rate of achievement on the targets for response rates; and the agency achieved its targets for running costs and efficiency improvements, though not that for receipts from sales.

The steps taken by the Government since 1989, including the establishment of the enlarged CSO as a separate department, the package of measures announced in May 1990 and the move to executive agency status last

November, have all contributed substantially to a significant improvement in the quality of economic statistics. I applaud the efforts CSO staff have made to achieve this.

The CSO's key targets for 1992-93 are also published today as part of the CSO's strategic plan for the 1992-95 period. Copies of both the annual report and strategic plan are being placed in the Library of the House. As in the previous year these targets cover the timeliness of published statistics: the size of revisions; the coherence of GDP and other key economic statistics; the response rates for CSO statistical inquiries; action to minimise compliance costs for business; response times to public requests for information; and the CSO's running costs, efficiency improvements and receipts.

Following the further package of measures to improve the quality of economic statistics announced in November 1991 some of the key targets for 1992-93 have been tightened. I expect the initiatives to improve economic statistics to continue to bear fruit.

End-Year Flexibility Schemes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the entitlements for 1992-93 resulting from the carry-forward of capital and running costs underspends allowed under the end-year flexibility schemes.

Mr. Portillo: A list of entitlements totalling £188 million for capital expenditure and £41 million for running costs is shown in the table.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, individual cash limits and running costs limits will be increased when entitlement is taken up.

The total increase in cash limits resulting from the take-up of end-year flexibility will be charged to the reserve and will therefore not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Entitlements for 1992-93 cash limits resulting from the carryover of capital underspends
Cash limit on Votes

Class	*Vote*	*Department*	*Description*	*Amount £ thousands*
II	1	Foreign and Commonwealth Office	Overseas representation	4,935
II	3	Foreign and Commonwealth Office	External broadcasting and monitoring	3,142
III	4	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Agricultural, food and fishing services	2,000
IV	2	Department of Trade and Industry	Support for industry, international trade, statutory and regulatory work, consumer protection and administration	3,133
IV	4	Export Credits Guarantee	Administration	2,000
IV	7	Office of Fair Trading		331
V	9	Office of Electricity Regulation		112
VI	1	Department of Employment	Programmes and central services	1,497
VII	1	Department of Transport	National roads, England	524
VII	2	Department of Transport	Administration and transport services	2,000
VII	4	Department of Transport	Driver and vehicle licensing	2,000
VII	5	Department of Transport	Local roads and transport	1,100
VIII	5	Department of the Environment	Central environmental services, etc.	2,865
VIII	6	Department of National Heritage	Royal palaces, royal parks, historic buildings, ancient monuments and the national heritage	699
VIII	7	Property Holdings[1]	Civil accommodation services and administration, etc.	1
VIII	11	Ordnance Survey		1,487
IX	2	Home Office	Prisons, England and Wales	1,989
IX	3	Home Office	Administration, immigration and police support services, England and Wales	2,000
X	11	Her Majesty's Land Registry[2]		1
X	12	Public Record Office		1,759
X	13	The Crown Office, Scotland	Administration	59
XI	1	Department for Education	Schools, research and miscellaneous services	1,977
XI	2	Department for Education	Higher and further education	839
XI	4	Department for Education	Administration	1,069

Class	Vote	Department	Description	Amount £ thousands
XII	1	Department of National Heritage	Museums and galleries	270
XIII	1	Department of Health	Hospital and community health services, family health services (part) and related services, England	47,893
XIII	3	Department of Health	Administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England	2,665
XIII	6	Office of Population Censuses and Surveys		178
XIV	4	Department of Social Security	Administration and miscellaneous services	7,690
XV	2	The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department	Agricultural services, agricultural grants and fisheries, Scotland	2,000
XV	3	The Scottish Office Industry Department	Training programmes, roads and transport services and industrial support, Scotland	748
XV	12	The Scottish Office Home and Health Department	Law, order, miscellaneous health and social work services, Scotland	803
XV	13	The Scottish Office Education Department	Education, arts and libraries, Scotland	2,341
XV	16	Scottish Record Office		231
XV	17	General Register Office for Scotland		578
XV	19	The Scottish Office	Administration	361
XVI	2	Welsh Office	Agricultural services, fishing, arterial drainage, flood and coast protection; regional and industrial development, Wales	449
XVI	5	Welsh Office	Tourism, roads and transport, education, arts and libraries and health and personal social services, Wales	4,709
XVI	8	Welsh Office	Hospital, community health, family health services (part) and related services, Wales	6,552
XVI	9	Welsh Office	Administration	181
XVIII	1	Her Majesty's Treasury	Administration	2,000
XVIII	5	Customs and Excise	Administration	4,398
XVIII	6	Inland Revenue	Administration	1,281
XVIII	10	Department for National Savings		1,616
XIX	2	Cabinet Office	Other services	2,000
TOTAL VOTED				126,463

[1] This is a token Vote. Carryforward will be taken in the form of increased appropriations in aid of £3,053,000.
[2] This is a token Vote. Carryforward will be taken in the form of increased appropriations in aid of £2,000,000.

Cash limits on non-voted expenditure

Cash block	Department	Description	Amount £ thousands
DOE/HC	Department of the Environment	Grants and capital expenditure financed by the Housing Corporation in England	700
DOE/UA	Department of the Environment	External financing requirements of Urban Development Corporations in England, grants to local authorities and other bodies under the urban programme, the derelict land reclamation and city grant programmes (including associated LA credit approval(s) and other expenditure for inner cities initiatives	21,723
DOE/LACAP	Department of the Environment	Basic credit approvals to local authorities in England for housing, transport (except passenger transport authorities), education, health, other services and Home Office (fire services in shires only). Supplementary credit approvals and grants to authorities in England for housing	1,403

Cash block	Department	Description	Amount £ thousands
DOE/OES	Department of the Environment	Supplementary credit approvals for other Isles of Scilly (water and sewerage)	4,719
DES/LACAP	Department of Education	Supplementary credit approvals for education in England	905
DOH/LACAP	Department of Health	Supplementary credit approvals for health in England	895
MAFF/LACAP	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Supplementary credit approvals for flood defence and coast protection and harbour improvements in England	772
SO/LA1	Scottish Office	Net capital allocations and grants to local authorities in Scotland for roads and transport, water and sewerage, police, education, social work services, general services, urban programme, river purification and civil defence	10,612
SO/LA2	Scottish Office	Net capital allocations and grants to local authorities in Scotland for housing. Capital expenditure by New Towns in Scotland for housing and other environmental services	13,065
WO/UA	Welsh Office	Supplementary credit approvals and grants (both capital and current) to local authorities in Wales in respect of the urban programme and Urban Development Grant. Urban Investment Grant and expenditure by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	3,695
NID1	Northern Ireland Departments	Services in Northern Ireland broadly analogous to services in Great Britain covered by cash limits but including family practitioner services	3,150
TOTAL NON-VOTED			61,639
TOTAL CAPITAL END YEAR FLEXIBILITY (VOTED AND NON-VOTED)			188,102

Entitlements for 1992-93 running costs limits resulting from the carryforward of running costs underspends

Department	Amount (£000s)
Overseas Development Administration	224
Intervention Board—Executive Agency	145
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	1,563
Trade and Industry	1,500
Department of Transport	1,099
Property Holdings	274
Home Office	6,520
Lord Chancellor's Department	1,777
Department for Education	475
Department of Health	1,264
Office of Population Censuses and Surveys	504
Department of Social Security	10,795
Scottish Office	1,305
Scottish Courts Administration	148
Scottish Record Office	50
General Register Office, Scotland	64
Welsh Office	294
Northern Ireland Office / Northern Ireland Departments	2,729
HM Treasury	427
Customs and Exercise	2,012
Inland Revenue	7,000
Department for National Savings	814
Central Statistical Office	162
Government Actuary's Department	50
Total	41,195

Central Government Staff

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of staff in post in central Government Departments at 1 April.

Mr. Portillo: On 1 April 1992 there were 565,319 staff in post in central Government. Of those, 504,237 were non-industrial staff and 61,082 were classified as being in industrial work. A summary showing staff in post by Department has been placed in the Library.

Excise Duties

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when further draft regulations to implement the single market legislation for excise duties will be issued to the trade for comment; and what additional guidance is being issued.

Sir John Cope: We have consulted widely on the single market legislation on excise duty. Customs and Excise have been in touch with the trade on this subject since June 1990 and a rolling programme of regulations is well advanced. The first draft regulations, about keeping and preserving records and accounts, have already been issued to the trade.

Draft notices have been issued which give guidance on excise warehousing and registered excise dealers and shippers. Other notices and draft regulations will follow shortly.

Copies of the draft regulations and notices have already been placed in the Library of the House.

Russia (Currency Stabilisation)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the procedure for the United Kingdom to make a response to a call by the International Monetary Fund

under its general arrangements to borrow in respect of a currency stabilisation fund for Russia; and what financial provision is made.

Mr. Nelson: In the event of an agreement by the IMF executive board to an activation of the general arrangements to borrow—GAB—the United Kingdom would meet its obligations by setting up a line of credit under which the IMF could borrow up to an agreed amount of sterling. Loans to the IMF would be made from the National Loans Fund—NLF—under the International Monetary Fund Act 1979, as amended by the International Monetary Arrangements Act 1983. Under the terms of the GAB the IMF is obliged to repay any borrowing once the terms of the loan expires—a maximum of five years. Conditions also exist under which repayment can take place, at either the IMF or the lender's instigation, before that time.

Under the GAB decision, loans made to the IMF are matched by a liquid claim on the IMF, and consequently do not add to public expenditure. Loans under the GAB are denominated in special drawing rights—SDRs—although payment would be made in sterling and are remunerated at the IMF's SDR interest rate. The International Monetary Fund Act 1979 provides for foreign exchange and interest rate gains and losses on loans to be for the account of the NLF. Any such gains or losses would not score as public expenditure, though any difference between the cost of borrowing by the NLF and the interest received would score in the central Government borrowing requirement and the public sector borrowing requirement.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) of 6 July, *Official Report*, column *10*, *(a)* how many of his Department's employees, and *(b)* what proportion of his Department's employees, were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* Details of the numbers and proportions of registered disabled people employed by my Department in 1989 and 1990 were as follows:

	Number	*Per cent.*
1989	35	1·1
1990	31·5	1·0

These figures show the position at 1 June 1989 and 1 June 1990 and are drawn from the publication "Independent". Copies of this publication are in the Library of the House of Commons. Part-time staff are counted as half units. The Department also employs a number of people with disabilities who have chosen not to register as disabled.

Banks (Regulation)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to create a banking commission to regulate all banks operating in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have no plans to establish a new regulatory body in place of the Bank of England, which is currently responsible for supervising all banks operating in the United Kingdom. The Government will shortly be bringing forward their proposals for implementing the second banking co-ordination directive, under which the primary responsibility for supervision of EC banks' operations throughout the EC will fall to the authorities of their home state.

Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will prepare proposals for amending the Banking Act 1979 to prevent auditors from recruiting directors of the client bank.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have no such plans.

Banking Act

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will draw up proposals to amend the Banking Act 1987 to prevent auditors of banks advising those banks on tax matters.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have no such plans.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for amending the Banking Act to require all banks to file copies of the audit tenders received with the regulators.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have no such proposals.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for keeping Parliament informed of steps taken by the United Kingdom with a view to moving to the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Mr. Nelson: As clause 2 of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill makes clear, no notification of an intention by the United Kingdom to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union will be given to the Council of the European Communities unless a draft of the notification has first been approved by Act of Parliament.

Pension Plans

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations he has had about the quality of financial advice surrounding the transfer from occupational pension schemes to private personal pension plans; and what steps he is taking to *(a)* ensure the provision of best advice and *(b)* compensate or recompense those suffering the consequences of poor advice;

(2) what is the number of insurance companies and others fined or disciplined each year under the Financial Services Act 1986 for the placing of investments in such a way as to compromise the giving of independent financial advice;

(3) to what extent, and through which agencies, the duty of best advice exists in the insurance and related industries; and what steps he is taking to report to Parliament on the quality of this best advice.

Mr. Nelson: These are matters for the Securities and Investments Board.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Nelson: The main aim of the Treasury is to assist Ministers in the formulation and implementation of the Government's economic policy. This is reflected in seven broad areas of continuing activity towards which all divisions and branches contribute. Within each area more specific objectives are defined from time to time. A full statement of these roles and current objectives is set out on pages 14 to 21 of the "1992 Departmental Report for the Chancellor's Departments"—Cm 1918.

Personal Investment Authority

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice he has offered to the Securities and Investments Board and the formation committee of the proposed personal investment authority on the need for greater consumer representation.

Mr. Nelson: None. The formation committee was appointed by SIB and the self-regulating organisations (SROs) to establish the personal investment authority (PIA). I understand that the formation committee will be consulting widely on the constitution and other aspects of the PIA.

Commission Charges

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Office of Fair Trading on the disclosure of commission charges by financial advisers and insurance and other company representatives; and whether he proposes to undertake any review himself.

Mr. Nelson: If I receive a report from the Director General of Fair Trading under the competition provisions of the Financial Services Act 1986, I shall consider it carefully.

EC Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Lamont: The Economic and Finance Council of the European Community met in Brussels under my chairmanship on 13 July. The Paymaster General represented the United Kingdom.

The Council held one of its six-monthly multilateral surveillance discussions of the economic situation in the Community. The Council agreed that prudent monetary and fiscal policies must be maintained and that there was a further need to reduce structural rigidities. The Council also welcomed the Italian Government's recent package of measures designed to reduce their budget deficit.

The Council also discussed a programme for economic convergence submitted by the Netherlands. The Council noted the exceptional Dutch record of price and exchange rate stability, but emphasised that the recent increase in inflation must be quickly reversed. The Dutch commitment to targets for the reduction of their budget deficit and their debt to GDP ratio was welcomed, as was their programme of structural reforms, privatisation, reducing subsidies, improving public sector efficiency and increasing labour market participation.

The Council also discussed Russia's need for medical aid and agreed that up to 150 mecu of the 1·25 becu loan already agreed by the Community for the countries of the former Soviet Union should be released in order to help the Russians to meet their medical needs. Balance of payments assistance for Albania in the form of a grant of 35 mecu from the Community budget was also agreed. A further tranche may also be considered at a later date for 1993.

Over lunch, President Delors and the German representative, Herr Köhler, gave a brief report on the outcome of the recent Group of seven meeting in Munich and I set out my programme for the work of the Council under the United Kingdom presidency. I emphasised that my main priorities would be to work towards an agreement on the future financing of the Community, to complete the single market, to reduce the scope for fraud against the Community budget and to encourage free trade, noting in particular the importance of enhanced access to EC markets for the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The Council also held a useful discussion of the Commission's proposals for the future financing of the Community. A majority of member states agreed that the Commission's proposals for increases to the Community budget were excessive. Some useful new elements were introduced into the discussion, such as the scope for offsetting savings, the need for improved financial management and a greater role for the European Investment bank in improving economic and social cohesion.

Pension Funds

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to require the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation to withdraw recognition of membership from those pension funds whose ultimate control lies outside the jurisdiction of Great Britain.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* This is a matter for the Securities and Investments Board (SIB) and the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation (IMRO). I understand that SRO members, the control of which lies outside the United Kingdom, are subject to detailed fitness and properness checks and monitoring of their United Kingdom operations, as with any other member.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Recycled Stationers

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commisison, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column 567, if the Commission will make it its policy to ensure that stocks of recycled stationery are permanently kept in all the stationery cupboards adjacent to offices, regardless of whether or not a particular demand has been identified.

Mr. Beith: This is a matter for the Administration Committee now that it has been set up. However, I understand that, in order to make the most effective use of the limited space available, it is the practice to adjust the variety of stock items in stationery cupboards, including recycled stationery, to meet the particular demands of users as they arise.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Sunday Trading

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his oral answer of 11 May, *Official Report*, columns 367-68, on Sunday trading, what consideration he has now given to *(a)* the result of the Kirklees case and *(b)* the Advocate-General's opinion in the case before the European Court of Justice.

The Attorney-General: I have considered the decision of the House of Lords in the Kirklees case and the opinion of the Advocate-General in the cases before the European Court of Justice. The decision of the House of Lords means that local authorities can apply for interim injunctions against retailers in order to enforce the law without giving cross-undertakings in damages. The Advocate-General has said that the Shops Act 1950 pursues an objective which is justified in Community law. He also said that it is for national courts to decide whether the effects of the Shops Act 1950 exceeded what was necessary to realise its objective. We are now awaiting the judgment of the European Court of Justice.

I do not consider that action by me would be appropriate at present.

SCOTLAND

Registers of Scotland

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the annual report of the Registers of Scotland executive agency will be published.

Mr. Lang: Copies of the annual report have today been placed in the library.

Law Courts

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what targets have been set for completing office business in the sheriff courts and supreme courts; and what performance was secured in 1991-92.

Mr. Lang: The targets set for completion of office business in the sheriff courts in 1991-92 are as follows. These targets remain in force for 1992-93. The percentage figures following each target indicate the proportion of sheriff courts achieving the target figures or better in the course of the year. More detailed information on the performance of individual court offices will be made available to local court advisory committees. Similar targets are in force in the supreme courts and all of these were achieved in 1991-92.

Targets for sheriff clerk offices and performance 1991-92

To issue the first deliverance in all ordinary writs, or return to sender, within two working days of receipt. 97 per cent.

To issue the first deliverance in all summary cause actions (including small claims), or return to sender, within three working days of receipt. 97 per cent.

To draft, in preparation for signature, all final ordinary decrees in absence (excluding divorce) within one working day of receipt of the minute craving decree. 91 per cent.

To draft, within seven days of receipt of the affidavits, in preparation for signature, all final decrees in undefended ordinary actions of divorce *or* return the affidavits to the sender. 91 per cent.

To draft, in preparation for signature, all decrees in actions of divorce under the simplified procedure within one working day of expiry of the period of notice. 98 per cent.

To issue extract decrees in all ordinary actions (excluding divorce) within three working days of the date of ordering or the expiry of the days of appeal—whichever is the later. 80 per cent.

To issue all summary cause/small claim extract decrees within one working day of the due date. 96 per cent.

To issue extract decrees in all ordinary actions of divorce within one working day of the due date. 86 per cent.

To issue extract decrees of divorce under the simplified procedure within one working day of the due date. 89 per cent.

To issue the first deliverance in all petitions for sequestration/liquidation, or return to sender, within two working days of receipt. 91 per cent.

To prepare for signature the first deliverance in all adoption petitions within one working day of a correct petition being received. 89 per cent.

To scrutinise and accept or reject commissary petitions and inventories within two working days of receipt. 96 per cent.

To issue confirmation within three working days of acceptance of inventory. 91 per cent.

To conduct small estate interviews within seven days from the time an interview is requested. 98 per cent.

To process juror claims for payment, or return to sender, within two working days of receipt. 97 per cent.

To process postal fines (other than unidentified payments) on day of receipt. 99 per cent.

To issue warning letters, means inquiry citations, warrants, extracts, etc, and transfer fines within seven days of the trawl. 93 per cent.

To remit all non-Exchequer receipts to entitled parties within 14 days from the end of the last accountancy period. 94 per cent.

To effect a card reconciliation of all outstanding financial penalties on a monthly basis. 88 per cent.

To reply to letter pleas within one working day of the court. 98 per cent.

To order social inquiry and other reports within one working day of the court. 98 per cent.

To complete probation, community service, compensation and fines supervision orders within two working days of the court. 98 per cent.

To issue juror citations in the first instance at least 21 days prior to a jury sitting/trial. 96 per cent.

To reply to all letter inquiries except those which require extensive investigation within two working days of receipt. 92 per cent.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what objectives for reducing court waiting periods have been established; what targets have been set for 1992-93 in respect of court waiting periods for the supreme and sheriff courts; and if he will give details of the performance of the supreme courts and each of the sheriff courts in 1991-92.

Mr. Lang: The programming of court business is a matter for the judiciary. Acting in co-operation with the judiciary in the supreme and sheriff courts, the Government seek to provide the resources which will allow speedy access to justice. Having regard to the time required by parties to have their cases properly prepared, the following objectives have been adopted:

The Lord President of the Court of Session has accepted the recommendations of a committee chaired by Lord Maxwell relating to the reduction of waiting periods in the Supreme Courts: the target is to reduce waiting periods to the recommended levels and, subject to any acceleration in the

rate of increase in court work, maintain waiting periods at that level: for certain categories of hearing, additional targets involving much reduced waiting periods, have been set;

Sheriffs Principal have agreed to overall targets of reducing waiting periods for summary criminal trials in the Sheriff Courts to 12 weeks or less by the end of 1992-93 and to hold them at that level thereafter; and to maintain waiting periods at 12 weeks or less for civil cases in the Sheriff Courts.

The main targets for waiting periods for 1992-93 are as follows. "Waiting period" is the period between a trial or proof being requested or an appeal being received and the date assigned expressed in weeks. The same targets applied in 1991-92 and national performance for that year is noted in the second column.

	Target	*1991-92 performance*
Criminal Appeal Business		
Summary prosecutions: Notes of Appeal against Sentence and Stated cases (accused in custody)	4	4
Court of Session		
(a) Ordinary proofs	24	28
(b) Defended Consistorial proofs	17	17
Sheriff Courts (national average)		
(a) Civil proofs/debates	12	11·8
(b) Summary Criminal Trials	12	14·5

In 1991-92 waiting periods of 12 weeks or less were achieved for civil debates/proofs in 90 per cent. of sheriff courts.

Waiting periods of 12 weeks or less were achieved for summary criminal business in 78 per cent. of sheriff courts.

Performance of individual sheriff courts at 31 March 1992 is set out in the table.

Court	*Civil proofs*	*Summary criminal trials*
Hamilton	14	22
Edinburgh	14	17
Perth	14	17
Linlithgow	14	15
Elgin	13	11
Stirling	12	10
Aberdeen	12	12
Dumbarton	12	13
Dingwall	12	12
Glasgow	12	13
Ayr	12	15
Dumfries	12	9
Stornoway	12	14
Kirkcaldy	12	13
Dunoon	12	12
Portree	12	8
Rothesay	12	12
Fort William	12	12
Falkirk	11	18
Inverness	11	11
Kirkcudbright	11	12
Campbeltown	10	6
Kilmarnock	10	14
Airdrie	10	14
Paisley	10	9
Cupar	10	11
Alloa	10	6
Wick	10	14
Lanark	10	10
Oban	10	12
Greenock	10	11
Stonehaven	10	10
Dornoch	9	11
Kirkwall	9	9
Forfar	9	7
Selkirk	9	11
Stranraer	9	12
Dundee	9	8
Haddington	8	14
Jedburgh	8	8
Peebles	8	12
Banff	8	10
Duns	8	8
Lerwick	8	8
Peterhead	8	12
Tain	8	11
Dunfermline	7	7
Arbroath	7	11
Lochmaddy	4	8

In addition, the sheriffs principal have agreed that sheriff court programmes should be designed to ensure that the number of trials adjourned due to lack of court time should not exceed 5 per cent. of the total number set down, a target met in 86 per cent. of sheriff courts in the first three months of this year.

Elderly People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Abbeyfield organisation to discuss the provision of residential care for elderly people; when he next plans to meet them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* My hon. Friend the Minister for Education and Housing attended the national conference of Abbeyfield Societies in September 1989. More recently, an official from my Department gave the opening address at the annual conference of the Abbeyfield Society for Scotland in March this year. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has no plans at present to meet representatives of the Abbeyfield organisation.

The Government fully recognise the contribution made by the Abbeyfield Society to the care of elderly people and expects the society to continue to play an important role in this area of community care in the future.

Police Funding, Strathclyde

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of Strathclyde regional council to discuss the impact of funding contraints on police services; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. The Government pay specific grant on all net expenditure by police authorities. Responsibility for the provision of sufficient funds to allow Strathclyde police to staff up to their fully authorised establishment level rests with Strathclyde regional council. I welcome the decision recently taken by the council to reduce the existing shortfall in the number of police officers in Strathclyde.

Fisheries Protection

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the arrangements which his Agriculture and Fisheries Department makes for the provision of maritime fishery protection services; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Maritime fishery protection services in Scottish waters are provided by the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency—an executive agency of the Secretary of State for Scotland—to provide intelligence on fishing patterns and to deter and detect illegal fishing activity.

The agency has four offshore patrol vessels which can operate out to the 200-mile limit; two fast launches for patrolling inshore waters and sea lochs; and a small launch used for seasonal patrol of estuarial waters. The agency also contracts with the Ministry of Defence for the supply of Royal Navy vessels to undertake fishery protection patrols in Scottish waters. The total budget of the agency for marine surveillance is £9·2 million in the current financial year.

The agency deploys two fisheries surveillance aircraft in Scottish waters and charters helicopter services as required for inshore patrol duties. The budget for aerial surveillance in the current financial year is £2·4 million.

Heritage Lands

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under what criteria grants may be paid by Scottish National Heritage for the maintenance of estate land to which no right of public access exists.

Sir Hector Monro: Scottish National Heritage operates a range of grant schemes designed to conserve and enhance Scotland's natural heritage and to foster the public's enjoyment and understanding of it. All grants awarded deliver public benefit by helping to meet Scottish National Heritage statutory objectives, whether or not there is a public right of access to the land involved.

Football Matches

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the numbers of those arrested and ejected at football matches in Scotland expressed as a percentage of attendance in the last five years for which information is available.

Sir Hector Monro: This information cannot be asembled in the time available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Prison Escapes

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners have escaped from *(a)* police custody and *(b)* penal institutions in the last 10 years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of escapes from police custody is not held centrally.

The numbers of escapes and absconds from penal establishments over the last 10 years are as follows:

	Absconds	*Escapes*
1982	32	14
1983	38	16
1984	52	19
1985	36	39
1986	43	7
1987	41	24
1988	75	30
1989	65	20
1990	88	27
1991	150	36
1992[1]	54	19

[1] to date

The definitions of escape and abscond are that a prisoner escapes if he unlawfully gains his liberty by overcoming the physical security restraints to which he is subject at the time he was in the presence of a prison officer or officers specially assigned to guard him: a prisoner absconds if he unlawfully gains his liberty by an abuse of trust without having had to overcome any physical security restraint and if he was not at the time in the presence of a prison officer specially assigned to guard him.

Judges

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the rate of remuneration of *(a)* retired judges and *(b)* temporary judges when they sit part-time in the Court of Session.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The rates of remuneration are at present under review. The current rates, where applicable, are *(a)* £423 per day and *(b)* £383 per day.

Law of Damages

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he intends to take with a view to implementing the recommendations of the Scottish Law Commission relating to bringing the law of damages in Scotland into line with that obtaining in England and Wales.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 June 1992]:* My right hon. Friend has welcomed and accepted the recommendation made by the Scottish Law Commission in its report on the effect of death on damages —Scot. Law Com. No. 134. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) introduced a Bill, based upon the Scottish Law Commission's recommendations, on 10 June and the Government have offered the hon. Member their support and assistance in seeking to have the Bill enacted.

Feudal System

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bring forward proposals to abolish the feudal system in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 June 1992]:* The Scottish Law Commission is currently carrying out a major review of property law in Scotland. As part of this work, the commission published a discussion paper in July 1991 seeking comments on various proposals for reform or abolition of the feudal system. The commission is analysing the responses to the discussion paper and will submit a report making specific recommendations for reform. We intend to await this report before reaching any conclusions about the need for a change in the law.

NHS Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the framework document of the next steps agency for the national health service superannuation scheme will be published for Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 29 June 1992]:* As announced by my right hon. Friend on 6 March, the Scottish Office superannuation division, which administers the national health service superannuation scheme in Scotland, is to be launched as a next steps agency by the autumn. The framework document under which the agency will operate will be available by the launch date which will be announced as soon as possible.

Island Health Services

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the non-doctored islands in Scotland and the number of patients in each.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Community Policing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in the last 12 months regarding community policing levels; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* Some 20 letters about policing levels have been received from members of the public since June 1991, together with several from Members of Parliament, including the hon. Member. The allocation of resources to particular policing priorities is a matter for the chief constable concerned.

Crime, Strathclyde

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* murders, *(b)* attempted murders and *(c)* serious assaults in which (i) guns and (ii) knives were used in (1) K division of Strathclyde police, (2) Strathclyde region and (3) Scotland in each year since 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* The available information is set out in the tables.

Cases of homicide, attempted murder, serious assault and petty assault recorded by the police involving the alleged use of a firearm
Scotland 1982 to 1991

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	[1]1990	1991
(a) Homicide (murder and culpable homicide)										
1. K. division, Strathclyde police	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Strathclyde region	0	5	0	5	3	0	2	2	2	6
3. Scotland	3	6	3	9	5	3	2	6	3	7
(b) Attempted murder										
1. K division, Strathclyde police	0	0	5	0	0	1	0	1	5	4
2. Strathclyde region	3	7	13	11	11	17	22	9	27	34
3. Scotland	9	10	14	18	16	20	27	12	31	39
(c) Serious assault										
1. K division, Strathclyde police	0	1	7	2	2	6	2	1	3	6
2. Strathclyde region	18	39	34	23	21	57	32	34	26	44
3. Scotland	78	75	80	158	139	147	74	85	55	65
(d) Petty assault										
1. K division, Strathclyde police	21	16	16	19	27	19	8	12	13	22
2. Strathclyde region	179	211	180	225	203	169	168	109	158	199
3. Scotland	191	260	213	250	221	195	177	116	238	314

[1] The definition of serious assault was amended at the start of 1990. The effect of the change was to reduce the total number of recorded incidents of serious assault and to increase the recorded figure for petty assault correspondingly.

Victims of homicides which involved the use of a sharp instrument
Scotland 1982 to 1991[1]

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	[2]1991
(a) Homicide (murder and culpable homicide)										
2. Strathclyde region	25	19	29	25	21	32	26	28	27	26
3. Scotland	36	36	46	34	33	44	38	38	44	34

[1] Information on the criminal use of sharp instruments, including knives, is not collected at divisional level, or for crimes other than homicide.
[2] Provisional.

I have nothing to add to the replies I gave on 24 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) at columns *254-55* and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) at column *252*.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current levels of violent crime in (i) K division of Strathclyde police, (ii) Strathclyde region and (iii) Scotland; and what action he proposes to initiate to reduce these levels.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* Information on the number of incidents in which knives were used is not held centrally.

The number of crimes and offences involving the alleged use of a firearm recorded by the police for each year since 1982 is given in the table.

Number of crimes and offences recorded by the police involving the alleged use of a firearm, 1982-1991

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
K Division, Strathclyde Police	72	47	74	96	82	76	43	54	123	159
Strathclyde Region	695	818	803	917	831	823	735	718	980	1,250
Scotland	1,283	1,336	1,353	1,675	1,525	1,429	1,159	1,173	1,484	1,887

I have nothing further to add to the replies I gave on 24 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth at columns *254-55* and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill at column *252*.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of incidents in which *(a)* knives and *(b)* guns were used in (i) K division of Strathclyde police, (ii) Strathclyde region and (iii) Scotland in each year since 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* Levels of violent crime are increasing in K division of Strathclyde police, in Strathclyde region, and in Scotland as a whole. I deplore this trend. The Government have increased funding for the police, who are in the front line in tackling violent crime, by 52 per cent. in real terms since 1979. The detection and prevention of violent crime are given a high priority by police forces throughout Scotland, and the Government will continue to provide the necessary resources to enable the police to maintain law and order.

Replica Guns

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what information he has on the use of replica guns in incidents of crime or criminal intent in Scotland; how the use of such replicas has increased or decreased in each year since 1982; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has any plans to introduce new initiatives to discourage the manufacture, sale and use of replica guns; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* Information is collected centrally on each crime and offence involving the alleged use of an imitation firearm. Details collected include local authority district, crime and offence classification, date of incident, number of accused, age and sex of principal accused, number of weapons, type of location where used, how used and, in cases where someone was injured or threatened, number of victims and age and sex of principal victim.

The number of crimes and offences involving the alleged use of an imitation firearm recorded by the police in Scotland in each of the years 1982-1991 is given in the table:

Year	Numbers
1982	49
1983	43
1984	92
1985	56
1986	55
1987	68
1988	61
1989	76
1990	96
1991	102

I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) on 10 February 1992, at column *411*.

Leukaemia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the numbers of leukaemias *(a)* observed and *(b)* expected in the 0 to 24 year age group in the postcode sector DG7.3—Castle Douglas—in the periods (i) 1968 to 1973 (ii) 1974 to 1978, (iii) 1979 to 1984, (iv) 1984 to 1989 and (v) 1990 to the present time, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the comparative incidences of leukaemia in Castle Douglas relative to the rest of Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* The table shows numbers of registrations of leukaemia in the 0 to 24 age group in postcode sector DG7.3, with expected numbers based on Scottish national rates. The figures shown for the period 1990 to 1991 are provisional.

Observed and expected [1]numbers of registration of leukaemia (ICD9 204-208) in the 0-24 age group in postcode sector DG7.3, 1968-91.

Period of registration	Registrations	
	Observed	Expected
1968-73	2	0·26
1974-78	1	0·21
1979-84	1	0·20
1985-89	0	0·19
1990-91	0	0·04

[1] Based on Scottish national rates standardised for age.
Source: ISD Scheme SMR6.

The number of observed registrations of leukaemia in this age group in postcode sector DG7.3 falls within the range to which chance variations in the overall distribution of the disease gives rise.

Homelessness

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many 16 and 17-year-olds in each region in Scotland were registered as homeless in 1990-91; and how many of these were considered as in priority need and housed.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* Information on one person households aged under 18 is set out in the table. Information is not available about the number of 16 and 17-year-olds in other types of applicant households.

Region	Total number of applicants aged under 18 for whom case returns have been received[1]	Number of applicants assessed as: Homeless or potentially homeless	Applicants assessed as in priority need: Total	Applicants assessed as in priority need: Number found accommodation
Scotland	2,779	1,368	983	808
Borders	7	5	4	3
Central	170	105	76	68
Dumfries and Galloway	30	21	7	7
Fife	98	52	19	19
Grampian	143	99	75	69
Highland	19	3	1	1
Lothian	397	319	280	250
Strathclyde	1,772	683	469	340
Tayside	136	77	52	51
Orkney	0	0	0	0
Shetland	5	2	0	0
Western Isles	2	2	0	0

[1] The table shows the number of case returns received for such households in 1990-91. For Scotland as a whole, case returns have been received for 93 per cent. of all applicant households.

Forestry Commission

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) on what basis the target date of 1995 was identified for the Forest Enterprise part of the Forestry Commission becoming self-financing; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans have been drawn up for the Forest Enterprise part of the Forestry Commission becoming self-financing; what are the implications for staffing levels; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* The internal reorganisation of the Forestry Commission, which came into effect on 1 April 1992, required an allocation of staff between the Department of Forestry, including the Forestry Authority, and Forest Enterprise, which will have a separate accounting structure that will clearly identify its particular activities and performance. target date of 1995 for the enterprise to become self-financing was decided by the Forestry Commissioners as part of this reorganisation.

The Forest Enterprise is drawing up business plans for the years to 1995, and the implications for staffing levels are not yet known.

Inverclyde Enterprise Zone

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total of public investment in the Inverclyde enterprise zone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The total of public sector investment in the Inverclyde enterprise zone to date is approximately £13 million, excluding the cost of land purchases which amounted to £2·9 million.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the total of private investment to date in the Inverclyde enterprise zone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The value of the investment made by the 25 or so companies which have established in the Inverclyde enterprise zone is a matter for each individual company. However, about 425,000 sq ft of industrial/business space has been developed in the zone thus far by the private sector, with a further 120,000 sq ft expected to commence shortly. It is estimated that these basic development costs could exceed £50 million.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give *(a)* the date of designation of the Inverclyde enterprise zone and *(b)* its expiry date.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* Inverclyde enterprise zone was designated on 3 March 1989 and will expire on 2 March 1999.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate *(a)* the physical area of the Inverclyde enterprise zone, *(b)* the proportion of the total area which is unused at the present moment and *(c)* the proportion which is under construction today.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The Inverclyde enterprise zone comprises some 274 acres. Some 66 per cent. of the zone is unused at present; that is, there has been little or no development work since designation. The remaining 34 per cent. is currently under construction/recovery or developed.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The number of staff employed by the Scottish Office and associated departments, excluding the Scottish prison service, at 1 April 1992 was 6,558. Personnel management costs for the year 1991-92 were £2,353,617. At 1 April 1992 the Scottish prison service employed 4,228 staff; personnel management costs for 1991-92 were about £813,000.

On 1 January 1970 the composite total for the number of staff employed by the Scottish Office and associated departments including the Scottish prison service was 9,515. This total cannot be broken into its constituent parts; nor are personnel management costs for that year available.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, my Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Framework for Action

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many copies of the framework for action survey questionnaire were sent out by his Department; and how many staff were involved in this project.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The administration of this survey was handled by the information and statistics division—ISD—of the Common Services Agency, not by the Scottish Office. The ISD issued 37,705 copies of the questionnaire. Eight members of staff were involved in working on the survey at various times.

Mental Handicap Project, Glasgow

Mrs. Fife: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has accepted Greater Glasgow health board's bid for bridging finance for the Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped project at Bilsland drive, Maryhill.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The project at Bilsland drive, Maryhill is a jointly funded scheme which has not required bridging finance in order to proceed.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) on 1 July, *Official Report*, column 627, *(a)* how many of his Department's employees and *(b)* what proportion of his Department's employees were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* In 1989, 85 registered disabled persons were employed by my Department—1·4 per cent. of the total work force; the corresponding figures for 1990 were 73 and 1·2 per cent. In each of these years my Department employed, in addition, an unrecorded number of disabled persons who had chosen not to register.

Framework for Action

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give figures showing the expenditure by his Department on *(a)* the preparation and *(b)* the delivery of the framework for action survey questionnaire; and the level of response to it.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* Final figures for expenditure on the survey are not yet available. The level of response to the survey is not yet available, but will be included in the final report, due to be published at the beginning of August.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to complete work on and publish the results of the framework for action survey questionnaire.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* Preliminary results from the framework for action survey were released on 2 June 1992. The final report is currently being prepared, and will be published at the beginning of August. The report will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many original copies and how many reminders and duplicate copies of the framework for action survey questionnaire were sent out by his Department; and what were the costs involved in each case.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The information and statistics division of the Common Services Agency sent out 37,705 questionnaires. In addition, all recipients of the questionnaires were sent reminder cards.

Samples for this survey were selected from three sources: from health board payrolls; all general medical and dental practices; and honorary consultants and associate specialists.

Duplicate questionnaires would only be received by members of staff in the unlikely event of their falling into more than one category and being selected in the separate samples, or where they are on the payroll of more than one health board and are selected under their separate payroll reference numbers.

The final costs of carrying out the work on this survey are not yet available.

Coal (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much coal was transported to Northern Ireland from Ayr harbour in 1992-93.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

About 800,000 tonnes were transported in 1991, the latest year for which figures are available.

EDUCATION

Local Management of Schools

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will review the local management of schools formula to take into account actual salary costs in schools with more than 10 teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: We have said that we will review the policy on funding teachers' salaries within LMS schemes. However, it remains our view that governors should be responsible and accountable for the financial implications of their decisions. That is a fundamental principle of good management in both the public and the private sectors. Many local education authorities have taken sensible steps during the transitional period to ease schools' passage into the new arrangements. It would be an error for other authorities to assume that inactivity on their part will lead to a change of policy.

Nursery Education

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans Her Majesty's Government have to make the provision of nursery education a statutory duty upon local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Government have no such plans.

School Meals

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish a table showing *(a)* expenditure and *(b)* the average price of school meals in each year since 1976 in cash and constant prices.

Mr. Forth: The latest year for which information on actual expenditure on school meals is available is 1989-90. The available information is as follows:

Net expenditure on school meals and milk[1]

	Cash £ million	[2]*Real terms £ million*
1975-76	318	1,065
1976-77	382	1,127
1977-78	365	947
1978-79	388	908
1979-80	422	846
1980-81	397	673
1981-82	397	614
1982-83	411	593
1983-84	427	589
1984-85	432	567
1985-86	435	541
1986-87	460	554
1987-88	443	506
1988-89	405	432
1989-90	382	382

The Department has collected figures for the average price of school meals for 1990 and 1991 only. The available information[3] is as follows:

	1990	*1991*
Primary	68p	72p
Secondary	72p	66p
Special	68p	74p

[1] Recurrent expenditure, less income from paid meals and EC grants.

[2] Figures for earlier years have been converted to 1989-90 prices using the GDP (market prices) deflator.

[3] Figures represent the average charge in England (shown in pence) for a standard meal in schools operating dining centres.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the latest figures showing the numbers of children taking *(a)* paid school meals and *(b)* free school meals in (i) primary, (ii) secondary and (iii) special schools; and what proportion they make up of (1) pupils present and (2) pupils on the school roll in each case.

Mr. Forth: The numbers and percentages of pupils on roll taking school meals are shown in table A15 of "Statistics of Education: Schools 1991", copies of which are available in the Library.

Information on the numbers of pupils present in schools on any given day is not collected centrally.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what discussions he has had with the Audit Commission on transferring responsibility for the auditing of city technology colleges from the colleges themselves to the Audit Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has had no such discussions. It is a requirement on city technology colleges that they have annual audit reports by qualified external auditors appointed by the college. There are no plans to transfer the responsibility for auditing city technology colleges to the Audit Commission.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the land and sites presently held by the City Technology College Trust; and what are the future proposals for each site.

Mr. Forth: The only land presently held by the City Technology College Trust is the site of the former Fitzherbert school, Brighton. The CTC Trust has been actively marketing the site, and is engaged in currrent negotiations to sell it.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the circumstances surrounding the purchase by the the City Technology College Trust of the former Fitzherbert school in Brighton; and what amount of public money was used to acquire the school.

Mr. Forth: The former Fitzherbert school in Brighton was purchased in June 1989 as the site of a proposed city technology college. The cost to public funds was £2·3 million net of legal expenses.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give the names of the CTC original headteachers who no longer hold the post and the reasons for their departures.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the names of principals of each of the city technology colleges; and what information he has on their dates of appointment.

Mr. Forth: The names and dates of appointment of the current principal, or equivalent, of each CTC are as follows:

College	*Title*	*Name*	*Date of appointment*
Kingshurst	Principal	Valerie Bragg	January 1988
Macmillan	Principal	John Paddick	January 1989
Djanogly	Principal	Matt Andrews	September 1988
Dixon's	Principal	John Lewis	September 1989
Leigh	Principal	Virginia Waterhouse	January 1990
Emmanuel	Principal	George McHugh	September 1989
Harris	Principal	Lyndon Jones	January 1990
Bacon's	Principal	Peter Jenkins	September 1990

College	Title	Name	Date of appointment
Britschool	Principal	Anne Rumney	January 1990
Brooke	Principal	Gareth Newman	September 1990
Haberdashers'	Director	Roy Baldock	November 1990
Thomas Telford	Headmaster	Kevin Satchwell	January 1991
ADT	Chief Executive	Richard Painter	October 1990
Landau Forte	Principal	Peter Shackleton	September 1990

None of these are new appointments made since the establishment of the colleges.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 7 July, *Official Report*, column *120*, how many times officials from his Department have had the books and accounts of city technology colleges opened to them; and if he will list the colleges concerned and the dates of each such inspection.

Mr. Forth: Auditing of city technology colleges is the function of external auditors appointed by each college. The Department requires colleges to submit their accounts and auditors' reports soon after the end of each financial year. In addition, the Department's internal audit division has visited each of the colleges at least once since they have opened in order to provide advice on accounting matters to both the colleges and to the Department.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what amounts of public money are estimated to be spent on the funding of city technology colleges for *(a)* 1992-93, *(b)* 1993-94 and *(c)* 1994-95, respectively.

Mr. Forth: Planned expenditure on city technology colleges by the Department for Education in the financial years specified is as follows:

1992-93—£54 million
1993-94—£55 million
1994-95—£56 million

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how expenditure on discretionary awards for students is allowed for within the local authority grant mechanisms; what are the figures for 1991-92 and 1992-93; and if he will break these down by local education authority.

Mr. Forman: In determining education's share of the local authority finance settlement, the Government take account of the broad range of pressures on local education authorities, including the demand for discretionary awards. The total of education standard spending for 1992-93 is £18,786 million, but it is for individual local authorities to decide how to deploy the resources available on the different services for which they are responsible. The proportion of individual local education authorities' standard spending assessments which is attributable to discretionary awards is not separately identified.

English Tests

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to arrange a meeting between the School Examinations and Assessment Council and the Northern Examination Association to draft pilot tests in English at key stage 3 of the national curriculum.

Mr. Forth: None.

Local Education Authority Reorganisation

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the number of *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools affected by local education authority reorganisation for each year since 1987.

Mr. Forth: The number of schools is as follows:

	Primary	Secondary
1987	451	612
1988	451	360
1989	364	504
1990	517	223
1991	408	174

In some cases a school may have featured in more than one statutory proposal.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the time taken for each local education authority schools reorganisation plan since 1987, from submission of the plan to the Department to a decision being made.

Mr. Forth: This information could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Surplus Places

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the reduction of surplus places in schools since August 1988.

Mr. Forth: It is estimated that since August 1988 local education authorities have removed about 100,000 places a year. But the net effect has to a large extent been balanced out by the provision of new places in areas where pupil numbers are expanding. As a result, there is still much more that needs to be done. I shall therefore continue to give high priority in the allocation of resources to cost-effective projects for the removal of surplus places.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which grant-maintained schools have made an application for a change in admissions arrangements; and in each case *(a)* what was the proposed change and *(b)* was the proposed change approved.

Mr. Forth: Decisions have been taken on proposals for changes by the following grant-maintained schools, as indicated.

School	*Change proposed; decision*
Maplesdon Noakes School, Kent	Introduction of policy giving priority to children of employees of the school; approved
St. Francis Xavier's College, Liverpool	Admission of a small number of girls to the sixth form and change to the order of subscription criteria; approved
Wymondham College, Norfolk	Increase in number of day pupils; approved
Wilmingdon Grammar School for girls	Modification to selection arrangements; approved
Bingley Grammar School	Introduction of policy giving priority to children of employees of the school; approved
North Halifax High School	Clarification of existing selection arrangements; approved
Crossley Heath High School	Clarification of existing selection arrangements; approved
Caistor Grammar School	Modification of priority criterion relating to place of residence; approved
Budmouth School	Introduction of policy giving priority to children of parents prepared to participate in home-school partnership arrangements; approved
Bullers Wood School, Bromley	Introduction of policy giving priority to children of employees of the school; approved
Haydon School	Introduction of policy giving priority to children of staff at the school; approved
	Introduction of policy giving priority to siblings of former as well as current pupils at the school; rejected
Oldfield School	Introduction of policy giving priority to early applications; rejected
Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet	Change to order of oversubscription criteria; approved
The King's School, Grantham	Removal of references to residence within the county boundaries; approved

In addition, decisions have yet to be taken on proposals by the following schools for changes to take effect for September 1993.

School	*Change proposed;*
Dartford Grammar School for Boys	Modification to existing selection arrangements
Dartford Grammar School for Girls	Modification to existing selection arrangements
Queensbury School, Dunstable	Introduction of a policy giving priority to early applications
Highams Park School, London	Replacement of catchment area with a policy of allocating places on the basis of proximity of a child's home to the school; higher priority to be given to siblings and children with medical needs
Send CE First School	Admission of children at the beginning of the year, rather than the term, in which they reach age 5
Heathside School, Weybridge	Up to 40 places to be allocated to children with a particular interest in information technology, music or sport
The John Fisher School, Purley	Clarification of existing policy; addition of further priority categories
King John School, Essex	Resumption of former catchment area
Coopers School, Kent	Introduction of a policy giving priority to children of employees of the school
Nonsuch High School for Girls, Surrey	Modification to existing selection arrangements

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Forman: The Department's objectives were most recently published in its departmental report, Cm 1911. They are currently under review.

Student Loans

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the indexation rate for student loans will be for the academic year 1992-93.

Mr. Forman: The indexation rate for the year beginning 1 September 1992 will be 3·9 per cent. This was the increase in the retail prices index in the year to June 1992. It represents a significant fall from the previous rates of 5·8 per cent. in the 1991-92 academic year and of 9·8 per cent. in 1990-91. This demonstrates the Government's success in driving inflation down.

We shall show the new indexation rate in a revised edition of "Student Grants and Loans—A brief guide 1992-93". We shall publish that revised edition shortly.

Special Needs

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he is going to consult on his proposals to amend the Education Act 1981 for the benefit of children with special educational needs and their parents.

Mr. Forth: I am today issuing a consultation document on the Government's proposals to amend the Education Act 1981 which were announced by my noble Friend the Minister of State in another place on 29 June; and on our intention to establish a special educational needs tribunal which I announced on 11 July. Our proposals would improve local education authorities' performance on assessing and issuing statements for pupils with SEN; give parents of children with statements of SEN the right to state a preference for their child's school; oblige governors of LEA and grant-maintained schools whose school is named in a statement of SEN to admit that pupil; and provide for a clear and comprehensive system of rights of appeal by parents to an independent tribunal whose decisions would be binding on LEAs.

Consultants' Contracts

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will list the total number of contracts awarded to private consultants by his Department for each year since 1987;

(2) if he will list the total value of contracts awarded to private consultants by his Department for each year since 1987; and what is the projected cost for 1992 and 1993, respectively;

(3) if he will list the title of each contract awarded to private consultants by his Department for each year since 1987.

Mr. Forman *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* The total value of contracts awarded by this Department in each year since 1987 is as follows:

£ thousands

Year	*Value*
1987	[1]364
1988	[1]438
1989	555
1990	974
1991	1,517

[1] Additional costs of £535,000 and £92,000 were spent on costs associated with the privatisation of the Plant Breeding Institute in 1987 and 1988 respectively.

The Department's estimate of expenditure on private consultants for 1992-93 is £1·677 million, including estimates for sport and science which transfer to other departments in the 1992-93 financial year. Decisions on the distribution of the Department's running costs for future years are taken on an annual basis. No estimate can yet be given for 1993-94.

Details of contracts awarded for each year since 1987 are as follows:

Consultant	*Assignment*
1987	
1. CMG Information Systems	Development of a new administrative computer system for Her Majesty's Inspectorate
2. CCTA	Education information study
3. Research Services Limited	Undergraduate income and expenditure survey
4. Coopers and Lybrand	Advice on financial delegation to schools
5. Peat Marwick Mitchell & Co.	Review of the preparation and production of inspection reports
6. Spicer & Pegler Associates	Review of accounting procedures at one of the Department's grant-aided bodies
7. Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Financial management advice and assistance to the University Grants Committee
8. Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Review of audit controls over teachers' pensions (payments and contributions)
9. Loughborough Consultants Limited	Analysis of universities' responses to the Jarratt report
10. BIS Applied Systems Limited	Office systems strategy—telecommunications study
1988	
1. Logica Limited	Technical study in connection with the Department's education information strategy
2. Logica Limited	Review of teacher information needs
3. Peat Marwick McLintock	Study of requirements for an integrated Vote and management accounting system
4. CMG	Specification of needs for the Department's core resource information system
5. BIS Applied Systems	Communications strategy for HMI
6. FI Group	Study of ORACLE implementation
7. Ernst Whinney	Management system for HMI travelling and subsistence
8. ITS Limited	Training review
9. Coopers and Lybrand	Study of holding board models for the ABRC
10. Coopers and Lybrand	Management framework for the control of information systems projects
11. Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Advice on computer accounting systems for the Department
12. Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Financial management advice and assistance to the University Grants Committee (UGC).
13. Loughborough Consultants Ltd.	Research selectivity project for the UGC
14. City University	Financial services for the UGC
15. Royal Society	Analysis of the earth science review for the UGC
1989	
1. Digitus	Desk Top Publishing
2. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Financial management survey of MRC
3. Peat Marwick McLintock	Financial Survey of SERC
4. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Financial Computer System
5. Peat Marwick McLintock	Financial Computer System
6. Peat Marwick McLintock	Student Loans
7. Illston & Crowcroft	Evaluation of Manufacturing Systems Engineering Programme
8. SCOLL	IT Specialist Productivity
9. BIS	CRAMM Reviews
10. Fearnhart	Service Desk
11. BIS	Telecommunications, Darlington
12. BIS	Data Collection and EDI
13. CMG	Data Modelling
1990	
1. Ernst & Young	SARD: Financial management review of Central Council for Physical Recreation
2. Peat Marwick McLintock	Pensions branch: Pensions administation system
3. PE International	Developmnent of grade 7 training

Consultant	Assignment
4. PE International	Development of management training
5. Touche Ross	Management consultancy: survey of NERC
6. Peat Marwick McLintock	Feasibility study of commercial funding for development of training materials and production of workshop materials
7. Peter Pierce-Price	Quality assurance of ECCTIS 2000
8. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Youth Service: management implications of the ERA
9. Tunnock and Parish	Preparation and production of two COMMETT Strand B guides
10. F. Parrott	Summary report of survey of quality assurance for Computerised Management Information Systems in FE colleges
11. J. Broadbent	Specialist advisor to Youth Service Unit
12. CMC Management Communicatie-Management Consultants	Contribution to seminar on Restructuring an Inspectorate
13. Elizabeth Braiden Management and Survey Consultant	Her Majesty's Inspectorate survey on performance related pay: District Inspectors questionnaire
14. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Comparison of costs and effectiveness of a Her Majesty's Inspectorate Inspection Project with alternative approaches
15. Touche Ross	Advice on extension of LMS to Special Schools
16. PE International	Management consulting for development of branch induction programme
17. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Review of BACS payment system
18. FI Group	Grant payments system
19. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Network Security
20. LBMS	Ingres database
21. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Mainframe replacement
22. Butler Cox	FESR
23. ICL	CRIS-P report writing
24. SSADM (SCOLL)	Productivity Improvement Programme
25. Lalcrest	Productivity Improvement Programme
26. KPMG Peat Marwick	Annual Business Plan
27. RML	Advice on technical enhancements to PCs and network
28. KPMG Peat Marwick	Review of teachers' superannuation scheme
29. Intac	Videoconferencing
30. Hoskyns	Resource planning
31. BIS	Project review of Enhanced Technical Data Service (ETDS)
32. Oracle	Evaluation of software for ETDS
33. Henley	Feasibility of ETDS
34. BIS	Feasibility study into ETDS.
35. Oxford Computer Training	Programming Advice
36. Kinesis	Facilitator in implementation of IT Records Management System
37. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Management of change for IT Records Management System
38. Amtec	Feasibility Study for Policy Branch Information System
39. Tranrate	Programming work on New Basic Teachers Record System
40. Radius	Enhancement and Screen Production on Accounts Payable System
41. ICL	Report and general support to CRIS-F
42. ICL	Review Repair Status of mainframe operating system and recommend any necessary additions
43. Two B	Amendments to Software
44. CMG	Evaluating Network Carriers
45. Butler Cox	PIRE of the FESR System
46. BIS	Full Study for replacement of Data Collection Processing System (DCPS)
47. Oracle	Benchmark of Hardware for DCPS
1991	
1. Robson Rhodes	Selection and implementation of Financial Management System for Teacher's Pensions Agency
2. Poplar Consultants	Accountancy arrangements for Pensions Branch
3. Price Waterhouse	Financial Management Survey of NCET
4. London University	Study on innovative uses of non-teaching staff
5. Forvus	Secondary schools staffing survey
6. High Whiteside	Consultancy services to Pensions Branch
7. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Open University review: Study of costs of part-time Higher Education provision in 3 comparator institutions
8. PE International	Development of Staff Attitude Survey
9. PE International	Development of Customer Care training
10. KPMG Management Consultancy	Training needs analysis of proposed Teachers' Pensions Agency
11. McNeil Robertson Partnership	Development of Teachers' Pensions Agency
12. Coopers Lybrand	Review of Grant Maintained Schools for internal audit
13. LBMS Ltd	Development of productivity improvement initiative

Consultant	Assignment
14. Touche Ross	Budgeting and accounting for DES central services
15. Express Computer Consultants	Redevelopment of PC express software
16. CSL Ltd	Grant maintained schools audit
17. EIS Ltd	Support for Policy Branch Information System
18. Insight Consulting	CRAMM review
19. Coopers Lybrand	Advice to schools on service contracts
20. W. S. Atkins	Policy Branch Information System
21. SEMA Systems	Procurement consultancies for UNIX/RDBMS purchases
22. LBMS Ltd	SSADM version 4 case tool support
23. Admiral	Project management guide for conducting IS projects
24. Derek Etherington	Sports sponsorship
25. PE International	Financial management and policy review of the Sports Council
26. Howard Whitehead and Partners	Management consultancy: survey of ESRC
27. Peat Marwick McLintock	Feasibility study of commercial funding for development of training materials and production of workshop materials
28. Michael Gill	Quality assurance of PROSPECT
29. Touche Ross	Preparation of FE colleges for independence
30. Ernst & Young	Relocation study for FEFC
31. Brown Associates	Financial management of ESRC
32. Touche Ross	Operational research assistance
33. Coopers Lybrand	Inner city youth work training
34. Neville Russell	Accounting advice on APS and MBS
35. Price Waterhouse	Technical advice on financial controls for National Curriculum Council
36. Robert Young	Rewriting school development plans
37. Software Sciences	IT strategy for A and B Branch
38. Kinsley Lord	Management of A and B Branch
39. SEMA Systems	Consultancy for Schools 4 Branch
40. SEMA Systems	Support for Schools 1 and TPG UNIX/INGRES systems
41. MTA Ltd	Feasibility of use of computers in schools
42. Coopers Lybrand	Commitment audit and cash flow verification for Bacon's CTC
43. PA Consulting	Operational research assistance for A and B Branch
44. Forvus Computer Services	Continuous student record
45. Thorn EMI	A & B Review
46. Sybase	RDBMS Trials
47. Kinesis	Options for connecting PCs to network
48. Kinesis	Secretariat Review
49. BBT	ETDS Data Conversion
50. ORACLE	Programming Her Majesty's Inspectorate T and S
51. Duhig Berry	Project management for survey projects
52. PE International	IS Training Strategy study
53. LBMS	Productivity Improvement
54. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	QA consultancy
55. NCC	Redrafting IS Standard C1
56. Duhig Berry	IPSM project
57. BIS	CRAMM review of PAS
58. Touche Ross	Re-charging
59. H. Whiteside	Project management consultancy
60. LBMS	Independent schools
61. LBMS	Her Majesty's Inspectorate project SSADM support
62. Admiral	QMS
63. SD Scicon	Changeman consultancy
64. Research Machines	Unix
65. Microsoft	Scoping study ITIS
66. MSL	Graphical user interface
67. Thorn EMI	A and B strategy study
68. Sema Group	A and B strategy study INGRES support
69. Express Consultancy	PC consultancy
70. W. S. Atkins	SSADM consultancy support
71. EIS	Policy branch information system
72. Oxford Computer Services	Superbase consultancy
73. Kinesis	Records management
74. Radius	Enhancements to PASS software

Consultant	Assignment
75. Sema Group	Evaluation of UNIX and 4GL/RDBMS
76. ORACLE	Her Majesty's Inspectorate management system
77. Dataflex	Her Majesty's Inspectorate management system
78. BIS	ETDS study
79. Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	ETDS and DCPS business case
80. Insight	ETDS CRAMM review
81. SCS	Project consultancy
82. SEMA	DCPS
83. ROCC	Project consultancy
84. Duhig Berry	NBTRS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Council Agenda

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the powers of the European Commission over the inclusion of part A items on the agenda of the European Council.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The agenda for the European Council itself—Heads of State or Government and the President of the Commission—is not divided into parts A and B.

The President of the Council of Ministers is responsible for dividing the agenda for ordinary Council meetings into part A and part B. An "A" item may be withdrawn from the agenda if a member of the Council or the Commission so requests, unless the Council decides otherwise.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the measures required for implementation of the proposed chemical weapons convention by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The chemical weapons convention will require Her Majesty's Government to notify the future Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons of the legislative and administrative measures it has taken to implement the convention in the United Kingdom. This will include the establishment of a national authority.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the proposed chemical weapons convention text recently agreed at the conference on disarmament in Geneva.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We welcomed the presentation of a draft chemical weapons convention to the conference on disarmament on 22 June as offering a major step forward towards the completion of the convention this year. We will support efforts to achieve this and encourage others to do the same.

Air Pollution

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to ratify the protocol to the 1979 convention on long-range transboundary air pollution concerning the control of emissions of volatile organic compounds or their transboundary fluxes.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom is working to ratify this protocol as soon as possible. This is likely to be at the same time as, or soon after, ratification by the European Community.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the protocols to the 1979 convention on long-range transboundary air pollution that have been agreed to by Her Majesty's Government, indicating which have been ratified by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom has signed and ratified the following protocols to the 1979 convention.

The protocol on Long-Term Financing of the Co-operative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-Range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP);

The protocol concerning the Control of Emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds or their Transboundary Fluxes.

In November 1991 the United Kingdom signed the protocol concerning the control of emissions of volatile organic compounds or their transboundary fluxes. Preparations to ratify this agreement are in hand.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Goodlad: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

Small firms are given full opportunity to bid for business with my Department. It is also our policy to pay invoices on time.

Business transacted by my Department with small firms in the United Kingdom has increased from £21·1 million in the financial year 1990-91 to £24·2 million in 1991-92. In 1991-92 17·7 per cent. of total expenditure on the purchase of goods and services was with small firms.

Peru

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Peruvian authorities concerning human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: As I told the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) on 29 June, we take every appropriate opportunity, both bilaterally and with our European partners, to emphasise to the Peruvian

authorities their obligation to respect and protect human rights. When President Fujimori called on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister earlier this year, he was left in no doubt about the strength of feeling in this country. On 17 June, our embassy in Lima reminded the Peruvian Foreign Ministry of the importance we attach to the issue of human rights. Most recently, on 26 June, the EC troika ambassadors called on the Peruvian Prime Minister. Inter alia, they stressed the need for full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Prisoners of War

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Commonwealth of Independent States about President Yeltsin's recent statements about prisoners of war.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have raised this issue in Moscow with the Russian authorities and will continue to pursue it.

Nuclear Exports

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures were agreed at the nuclear suppliers group meeting in Warsaw in April to improve controls on nuclear exports.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Nuclear Suppliers Group—NSG—achieved an important step forward in nuclear non-proliferation by the adoption of new controls on nuclear-related dual-use exports. The 27 participating countries reached agreement on guidelines governing transfers and on a list of the nuclear-related dual-use equipment and materials and related technology they will cover. They intend to bring the new arrangements into effect by the end of 1992.

The group also adopted amendments to the existing NSG trigger list, published in 1978, which bring it into line with other international supplier controls.

The text of the two documents have been communicated to the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency and will be published as parts I and II of a new agency circular—INFCIRC/254 Rev. 1—in July. When they are available, copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

GCHQ

Mr. Milligan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to place the Government communications headquarters on a statutory basis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: We shall bring forward proposals to place GCHQ on a statutory basis together with those for the Secret Intelligence Service to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred during the debate on the Address on 6 May.

Pakistan

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column *269*, how long the deputy high commission in Karachi has been waiting for information from the high commission in Islamabad to deal with the five outstanding applications for entry clearance.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* My answer of 25 June referred to two outstanding applications not five. The deputy high commission in Karachi received the information requested from the high commission in Islamabad within six and seven weeks respectively. Both cases have now been resolved.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Zambia

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response Her Majesty's Government have given to the recent request by President Chiluba of Zambia for additional relief for Zambia's foreign debts; what proportion of these debts are owed to Governments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have already rescheduled debt service payments totalling some £4·1 million due in 1992 on past United Kingdom aid loans. We have also told the Zambian Government that, provided their economic reform programme remains in place, we will consider cancelling all Zambia's outstanding aid debt to the United Kingdom.

Other official debt owed to the United Kingdom and other government creditors will be considered in the context of the Paris club. Subject to IMF approval of Zambia's economic reform programme, we shall be pressing for Zambia to receive Trinidad terms at a Paris club meeting later this month. These terms resulted directly from proposals made by the Prime Minister, in 1990, to relieve the burden of debt on the poorest, most heavily indebted countries.

Of Zambia's $4·8 billion—£2·7 billion—long-term debt, about $2·8 billion—£1·6 billion—is owed to Governments.

Slovakia

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list British assistance to Slovakia; what are the levels of assistance for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: British bilateral assistance is provided to Czechoslovakia under the know-how fund —KHF. For 1992-93 we expect expenditure to amount to some £6 million. There is no separate programme for either Slovakia or the Czech lands. An updated list of all KHF projects was placed in the Library of the House on 29 June.

HEALTH

Dentistry

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she intends to impose the new fee scale on 8 July if no agreement is reached with the British Dental Association.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) on 23 June at columns *161-62.*

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many dentists in the family health services authority covering Rossendale and Darwen constituency are now refusing to take new child national health service patients; and what percentage that figure represents of the total number of dentists registered in that FHSA area;

(2) how many dentists in the family health services authority covering the Rossendale and Darwen constituency are now refusing to take new adult national health service patients; and what percentage that figure represents of the total number of dentists registered in that area.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not available. Lancashire family health services authority has not reported being unable to find a dentist for anyone who has asked for help. There are currently 454 dentists on Lancashire FHSA's dental list.

Radiation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research studies have been sponsored by her Department into the effects of low dose ionising radiation on human blood cells.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health is currently sponsoring the following projects:

1. Collaborative studies on the development and inter-comparison of assays for the detection of abnormal radiosensitivity in individuals;
2. Mutation frequencies in workers at the Sellafield Laboratory.

Care Homes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will instruct health authorities, where they place patients in private and voluntary sector homes, to meet topping up costs; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: When a health authority accepts responsibility for a patient's in-patient care, it must meet the cost of that care in full, regardless of where it is provided. We have issued guidance, EL(91)108, a copy of which is available in the Library, to health authorities about the circumstances in which, under current legislation, they may make payments to independent sector residential care or nursing homes.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she will take to enforce the obligation of health authorities to provide nursing care for patients discharged from hospitals to nursing homes, by implementing the recommendations of this House's Social Security Committee contained in its fourth report of Session 1990-91, on the financing of private residential and nursing home fees; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The Government's response to the recommendations of the Committee's fourth report was fully set out in February 1992, Cm 1828.

District Health Authority Funding

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the district health authorities in England and Wales whose 1992-93 revenue allocation is greater than 5, 10 and 15 per cent. below the target capitation figure which has been agreed by their regional health authorities.

Mr. Sackville: Allocations to district health authorities are the responsibility of the regional health authorities. The following information has been supplied by individual regional health authorities, and are not directly comparable. They should be taken as a broad indication of the relative positions of districts.

The table shows the districts whose 1992-93 revenue allocation is more than 5 per cent., and more than 10 per cent., less than their weighted capitation share. There is only one district, Worthing, whose 1992-93 revenue allocation is more than 15 per cent. under its weighted capitation share.

The information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Regional health authority	*District health authority/ies*	
	5 to 10 per cent.	*10 to 15 per cent.*
Northern	None	None
Yorkshire	None	None
Trent	None	None
East Anglian	Huntingdon	None
North West Thames	North Bedfordshire South Bedfordshire East Hertfordshire	None
North East Thames	North East Essex Mid Essex Tower Hamlets Southend	None
South East Thames	Brighton Hastings South East Kent	Canterbury and Thanet
South West Thames	None	Chichester
Wessex	None	None
Oxford	Kettering	None
South Western	Torbay	None
West Midlands	Sandwell Dudley North Staffs. South East Staffs.	None
Mersey	Southport and Formby Crewe	
North Western	Blackburn Burnley Chorley Bolton Oldham Stockport Tameside	Blackpool

Romanian Adoptions

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prospective adoptive parents seeking to adopt a child from Romania through her Department are now ineligible as a result of the agreement with the Romanian Committee for Adoptions signed on 19 March.

Mr. Yeo: A total of 65 families in the United Kingdom who had applications with their respective Government Departments on 19 March were advised, normally via their respective local authority social services departments, that they were ineligible to adopt under the terms of the agreement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many prospective adoptive parents seeking to adopt a child from Romania are eligible for treatment as special cases as a result of securing parental permission to adoption prior to 16 July 1991;

(2) what action her Department is taking to notify prospective adoptive parents seeking to adopt a child from Romania of the agreement of the Romanian Committee for Adoptions to process applications where parental permission was obtained prior to 16 July 1991.

Mr. Yeo: The Romanian Committee for Adoptions has recently agreed to consider adoption applications from United Kingdom citizens who are able to satisfy the committee that the birth mother had given formal consent to the adoption of her child to the prospective adopters before 17 July 1991. The Department is continuing to trace those to whom the concession may apply, via local authority social services departments.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children from Romania have been adopted by parents resident in the United Kingdom since 1988; and how many of those children have since been received into local authority care.

Mr. Yeo: From the information provided by the Home Office I understand that approximately 340 children have been given leave to enter the United Kingdom from Romania for the purposes of adoption since 1988. Adoption orders are not made until a child has been resident in the United Kingdom for at least 12 months. We are aware of four Romanian children who have been received into local authority care.

Romanian Adoptions

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 June, *Official Report*, columns *477-78*, if he will list the other 11 countries involved in the agreement with the Romanian Committee for Adoption, and if the age conditions are the same for all those countries.

Mr. Yeo: I understand from the Romanian Committee for Adoptions that as of 10 July 1992, the following countries have signed an agreement with it:

Belgium
Canada
Cyprus
Denmark
Finland
France
Holland
Italy
Norway
Sweden
Switzerland
United Kingdom
United States of America.

I have been advised that the age conditions are the same for all countries.

Health Authority Returns

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to require private patients' services to be included in health authority returns; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: No.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for her Department to celebrate the European Year of the Elderly in 1993; and if will make a statment.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave him on 13 July at columns *430-31*.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue guidelines to ensure that national health service staff are aware of the specific problems of certain ethnic minorities in *(a)* religions, *(b)* languages and *(c)* food habits; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has funded the King's Fund centre to produce guidance on ethnic minority health which will include religions, languages and food habits. We hope to publicise this widely to national health service staff.

Ambulance Targets

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the target in the patients charter for ambulances to reach patients in an emergency; what is the latest information she has on the percentage success in meeting this target for each district health authority and regional health authority; and what action is being taken nationally to meet the target.

Mr. Sackville: The benchmark emergency performance targets in the patients charter are 19 minutes and 14 minutes for rural and urban areas respectively.

Revised recommendations on emergency response times were issued by the national health service management executive in November 1990 as part of a package of good practice guidance for the modern ambulance service. The new standards were formally promulgated in "Health Service Guidance" issued in December 1991.

The latest available figures are given in the tables. These refer to the former metropolitan and non-metropolitan services and to emergency response targets of 14 and 20 minutes.

Table 1
Patient transport services 1990-91
Quality of service
Emergency calls: Response times: Metropolitan authorities

Ambulance authority	*Percentage of calls where response within*	
	7 minutes (target 50 per cent.)	*14 minutes (target 95 per cent.)*
Northumbria Metropolitan	53·0	91·5
West Yorkshire Metropolitan	34·4	87·5
South Yorkshire Metropolitan	31·2	75·4
London Ambulance Service	11·0	73·7
West Midlands Metropolitan	51·9	88·1
Mersey Metropolitan	59·6	96·5
Greater Manchester Metropolitan	46·6	94·6

Notes:

1. The response time of an ambulance is defined as the time elapsed from the receipt of emergency call to the arrival of fully equipped ambulance at the scene of the incident.
2. When calculating the percentage of calls resulting in a response within a specified time the total number of calls received was used as the denominator. It should be borne in mind that some of these calls (for example, aborted calls or hoax calls) will not have resulted in a response. The effect of this is to depress the percentage response figures slightly.

Source: KA34 DH Statistics Division (SD2B) 1992.

Table 2
Patient transport services 1990-91
Quality of service
Emergency calls: Response times: Non-Metropolitan authorities England

Ambulance authority	*Percentage of calls where response within 8 minutes (Target 50 per cent.)*	*Percentage of calls where response within 20 minutes (Target 95 per cent.)*
Cleveland	64·4	91·1
Cumbria	55·6	91·4
Durham	53·3	96·7
Humberside	74·0	99·6
North Yorkshire	65·8	95·6
Derbyshire	49·2	96·4
Leicestershire	53·0	96·2
Lincolnshire	64·1	95·7
Nottinghamshire	58·4	96·5
Cambridgeshire	42·2	89·0
Norfolk	54·5	88·7
Suffolk	51·9	88·4
Bedfordshire	57·2	97·5
Hertfordshire	58·0	95·2
Essex	50·3	93·7
East Sussex	66·5	91·8
Kent	59·1	96·7
Surrey	51·0	97·0
West Sussex	59·9	93·6
Dorset	57·5	93·5
Hampshire	53·1	97·2
Wiltshire	64·3	97·7
Isle of Wight	47·3	83·9
Berkshire	47·0	93·1
Buckinghamshire	55·1	88·6
Northamptonshire	60·1	98·2
Oxfordshire	50·9	87·3
Avon	59·5	96·3
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	40·7	90·4
Devon	54·0	94·2
Gloucestershire	59·9	94·8
Somerset	55·2	92·1
Hereford and Worcester	58·0	95·5
Shropshire	50·8	92·4
Staffordshire	47·8	97·7
Warwickshire	61·3	96·0
Cheshire	56·2	87·4
Lancashire	67·1	98·9

Source: KA34 DH Statistics Division (SD2B) 1992.
Notes:

1. The response time of an ambulance is defined as the time elapsed from the receipt of an emergency call to the arrival of fully equipped ambulance at the scene of the incident.
2. When calculating the percentage of calls resulting in a response within a specified time the total number of calls received was used as the denominator. It should be borne in mind that some of the of these calls (for example, aborted calls or hoax calls) will not have resulted in a response. The effect of this is to depress the percentage response figures slightly.

Hospitals

Sir Malcolm Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate her Department has made of the capital cost of the United Kingdom hospital building programme to meet the plans of regional health authorities over the next five years.

Mr. Sackville: From information held centrally, the total capital cost over the five years 1993-94 to 1997-98 of all schemes costing over £1 million in the current national health service building programme in England is estimated to be £2·8 billion. Around £1·5 billion capital will be invested in NHS buildings this year.

Information relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Overseas Doctors

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to oppose current European Community medical directives which restrict the free movement of overseas-qualified doctors within the Community.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will take action to remove the EC medical directives which restrict the free movement of overseas-qualified doctors within the Community; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The medical directives were introduced in 1975 to facilitate the free movement of EC doctors within the Community through the automatic recognition of the medical qualifications awarded by member states. The European Commission is looking at the possibility of amending the directives to incorporate overseas qualifications and discussions are presently taking place between health officials of member states.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met representatives from the Overseas Doctors Association to discuss European Community directives on the free movement of doctors and their implications for overseas-qualified doctors.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not met representatives of the Overseas Doctors

Association recently to discuss this issue but she wrote to their chairman on 25 June setting out the latest position on the European medical directives.

Ministers and officials meet representatives of the association at regular intervals. On 18 February they met my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. Their last meeting with officials was on 18 June. On both occasions this issue was discussed in detail.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary also spoke on this topic when he attended the association's annual dinner as guest speaker on 2 July.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to put discussion on the implications of European Community medical directives affecting overseas-qualified doctors on the programme for the European Community Health Council during the United Kingdom's presidency.

Dr. Mawhinney: Proposals to amend the directives are the responsibility of the Commission which is currently consulting member states.

Dioxin

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether her Department intends to undertake surveys of the levels of dioxin in blood in the population around the Coalite plant in Derbyshire; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Families on the three farms near the Coalite plant which produced milk with high dioxin levels have already been offered blood tests, and those who accepted have been advised of the results. As the only people in the area likely to have been exposed to higher than normal levels of dioxins are the families on these farms who drank their own farm milk, there is no need for widespread blood analysis or other health screening in the area.

Community Care (Rural Areas)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations concerning the development of community care in rural areas; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: We have periodic meetings with the National Council of Voluntary Organisations at which we discuss a wide variety of matters to do with the development of community care.

Eye Tests

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many eye tests have been carried out in each year since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: The number of national health service sight tests, which are free to patients, paid for by family health services authorities and health boards in Great Britain in each financial year are shown in the table.

Number of NHS sight tests by financial year
Great Britain

	Millions	
1979-80	9·55	
1980-81	9·53	
1981-82	9·70	
1982-83	9·94	
1983-84	10·63	
1984-85	11·34	
1985-86	11·76	
1986-87	12·21	
1987-88	13·49	
1988-89	14·39	
1989-90[1]	6·04	[2]10·97
1990-91	4·84	[2]12·43
1991-92	5·79	

[1] From 1 April 1989, NHS sight tests were restricted to certain groups in the population. The sight tests paid for in 1989-90 include 1·82 million conducted prior to 1 April 1989 when sight tests were universally available. The remaining 4·22 million sight tests paid for in 1989-90 do not represent a full year under the new system, because of the delay in payments.

[2] Total number of sight tests conducted. These figures were estimated using data from a survey carried out by the Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians (FODO).

The Department collects no information on the overall volume of private sight tests. However, there is no reason to assume that total volume in 1991-92 will have declined from the volume of 12·43 million.

Pesticides

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what health risks are associated with the common weedkilling pesticides Mecocrop and Dicamba; and if her Department will sponsor a study into their effects on adults, children and pets.

Mr. Sackville: The possibility that health risks might be associated with the use of these pesticides was considered before they were approved for use. No adverse health effects are likely when the products are used in accordance with the conditions of approval. All pesticides are reviewed periodically for safety and efficacy in use. Mecoprop is under review at present and Dicamba is in the future review programme. The matter of effects on pets is for my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to consider. Adverse effects on pets would seem unlikely if the products are used in accordance with the conditions of approval.

Surgeons

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of surgeons currently working in United Kingdom hospitals; and how many of these surgeons qualified outside the European Community.

Dr. Mawhinney: The total number of surgeons workings in hospitals in England and Wales at 30 September 1990 the latest date for which figures are available, was 11,141, of whom 2,994 qualified outside the European Community. The "whole time equivalent" figures are 9,892·8 and 2,655·1 respectively.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Hospitals

Sir Malcolm Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate her Department has made of the construction and repair costs of bringing all hospitals in England and Wales up to her Department's target standards of safety.

Mr. Sackville: According to information held centrally, the cost at March 1991 of bringing the national health service estate up to national safety standards was £395 million. This estimate includes work on property due to be replaced within three years, property not used for patient care, property awaiting planned maintenance and property awaiting disposal which together represent about 30 per cent. of the NHS estate. Around £1·5 billion capital will be invested in NHS buildings this year.

Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Disability (Consultation)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many user consultative committees have been set up at disablement services centres with representation from artificial limb and wheelchair users' organisations; and what steps are being taken to ensure that such committees will be organised at all centres.

Mr. Yeo: We do not routinely collect information on the number of formal user consultative committees set up at disablement services centres, but we understand that in 1991-92 there were 12 such committees, with more in the process of formation. We actively encourage consultation of user interests; the method of consultation is best decided locally.

Radiotherapists

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the establishments in England which train radiotherapists, the number of training places in each, the number of students successfully completing their course in each of the past five years, and the percentage pass rate in each of the past five years, for each establishment.

Dr. Mawhinney: The 31 radiography training establishments in England are as follows:

Addenbrooke's Hospital School of Radiography, Cambridge
Birmingham School of Radiography, Birmingham
Bradford and Airedale College of Health, Bradford Royal Infirmary, Bradford
Bristol School of Radiography, Bristol Royal Infirmary, Bristol
Charterhouse College of Radiography, London
Christchurch College, Canterbury
Christie Hospital and Holt Radium Institute, Manchester
Cleveland School of Radiography, South Cleveland Hospital, Middlesbrough
Derbyshire College of Higher Education, Derby
East Anglian College of Radiography, Ipswich
Guy's Hospital Radiography Education Centre, London
Hatfield Polytechnic, Hertfordshire
Humberside College of Health, Hull
John Radcliffe Hospital School of Radiography, Oxford
King's College Hospital, Department of Radiography, London
Leeds School of Radiography, Royal Infirmary, Leeds
Merseyside School of Radiography, Royal Liverpool Hospital College, Liverpool
Moor Hospital School of Radiography, Lancaster
Newcastle Schools of Radiography, Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Northampton General Hospital School of Radiography, Northampton
North Trent Radiography Training Unit, City Polytechnic, Sheffield
Portsmouth School of Radiography, St. Mary's Hospital, Portsmouth
Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital, School of Radiography, London
Royal Marsden Hospital, School of Therapeutic Radiography, Sutton, Surrey
Salford College of Technology, Salford
Southampton General Hospital, School of Radiography, Southampton
South East Thames Regional Radiotherapy Centre, St. Thomas' Hospital, London
South West College of Health, Plymouth
South West Thames Regional Radiography Centre, St. Luke's Hospital, Guildford
South West Thames School of Radiography, St. George's Hospital, London
Stoke-on-Trent School of Radiography, City General Hospital, Stoke-on-Trent.

The other information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will state for each health authority in England as at 1 April 1992 whether it has published a guaranteed maximum waiting time for patients seeking *(a)* hip replacements, *(b)* cataract removals and *(c)* hernia repairs; and for those authorities that had done so what waiting times were guaranteed by each authority.

Mr. Sackville: From 1 April 1992, under the patients charter, all health authorities are required to guarantee admission for treatment within two years of a patient being placed on a waiting list. This will be improved to 18 months for hip and knee replacement and cataract operations from 31 March 1993. From 1 April 1992 health authorities should ensure that guaranteed maximum waiting times are publicised.

Senior Nurses

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) by each health authority district area how many senior nurse posts have been lost in each of the past five years according to *(a)* director of nursing services—DNS—level, *(b)* assistant DNS, *(c)* senior nursing support posts and *(d)* senior nursing officers; and how many posts in each category have been lost through (i) redeployment and (ii) retirement;

(2) how much money has been saved by each health authority through the elimination of senior nursing posts in each of the last five years; and how the money has been reallocated in each instance.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Medicines Commission

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to receive the annual report of the Medicines Commission for 1991.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have received the report, and copies have today been laid beforé both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of section 5(2) of the Medicines Act 1968.

Bound volumes have been placed in the Library containing the 1991 reports of the Medicines Commission, the Committee on Safety of Medicines, the Committee on Dental and Surgical Materials, the Committee on the Review of Medicines, the British Pharmacopoeia Commission and the Veterinary Products Committee.

We are glad to pay tribute to the valuable work done by the distinguished members of the Medicines Act advisory bodies and thank them warmly for the time and effort which they contribute to the public interest in this most important field.

Medicines

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations apply to the issuing of out-of-date medicines by pharmacists.

Dr. Mawhinney: Expiry dates, which indicate a shelf-life based on manufacturers' stability data, are required to be included on the manufacturers' label of a medicinal product by the Medicines (Labelling) Regulations 1976, as amended. Pharmacists do not dispense medicines past their expiry date other than in very exceptional circumstances, such as in an emergency.

While there are no specific regulations governing the supply by pharmacists of medicines past their expiry date, the dispensing of expired stock runs contrary to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's code of ethics, and disciplinary proceedings may be taken against pharmacists who are found to be in breach of the code.

The dispensing of substandard medicines is a breach of the pharmacist's terms of service under the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992.

Maternity Services

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Government's response to the second report of the Select Committee on Health of Session 1991-92 on maternity services (House of Commons Paper No. 29).

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government have today published their response to the Health Committee's second report on the national health service maternity services.

Pregnancy, childbirth and the early months of life are no longer the hazardous experiences they were in times past. The record speaks for itself. The rate of perinatal and infant mortality is at the lowest level ever. Maternal deaths are now very rare indeed. More premature babies are saved than ever before. Doctors, midwives and nurses can justifiably be proud of the services they give.

The Government have a responsibility for ensuring that women receive the best possible maternity care. We also believe that the service must be sensitive to the views of those who use it, that women are empowered to take decisions about their care. The Government will maintain the high level of service in the NHS and will make improvements where these are necessary. Central to these objectives are:

the patients charter which makes the needs and wishes of those who use the health service paramount;

the improvements in care resulting from the confidential inquiries into maternal deaths and into stillbirths and deaths in infancy;

the target setting and performance monitoring carried out by the NHS management executive to maintain and raise standards of health care.

In the response to the Health Committee, the Government have announced two new initiatives:

the setting up of a maternity services task force to disseminate information widely in the NHS about good practice in the management of health care during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period;

to appoint an expert committee to review policy on care during childbirth and to be chaired by a woman independent of professions involved.

Membership of the expert committee will include strong representation from women who use the service. The expert committee's job will be to make recommendations about arrangements for care, taking full account of the shift in the attitudes of many women in favour of a more homely and less technological setting for care while not compromising the safety of mothers and babies. The committee's considerations will include birth at home.

In all the activities associated with care during pregnancy and childbirth, the woman should be properly informed and able to participate fully in the decisions that are taken. This is common ground between the Government and the Health Committee. The NHS reforms and the patients charter are the means for achieving these ends.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the annual report and accounts of the Medicines Control Agency.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today placed in the Library copies of the agency's report and accounts for 1991-92.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what methods her Department uses to confirm that the number of abortions reported to her Department by private abortion clinics is the actual number of abortions performed at that clinic.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* Section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967 requires the medical practitioner performing the termination, not the approved place, to notify the chief medical officer. Procedures for certification and notification of termination of pregnancy are checked by the Department's officers during the course of unannounced inspection visits. Any inconsistencies revealed are fully investigated.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will detail the procedures followed by her Department when abortion notification forms are received which do not state the medical condition of the mother.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The chief medical officer returns the notification form—HSA4—to the operating doctor with a request that the medical condition should be completed.

Disabled Employees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 30 June, to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West, (Mr. Janner) *Official Report*, column *462*, how many and what proportion of her Department's employees were registered disabled in 1989 and 1990, respectively.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* In June 1989 there were 30 registered disabled people employed in the Department which represented 0·7 per cent. of the total work force. In 1990, the comparable figures were 29 and 0·6 per cent.

Dry-cleaning Chemicals

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been undertaken by her Department into potential health risks from chemicals used by dry cleaners; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

The majority of dry cleaners use either perchloroethylene (tetrachlorethylene), or 1,1,2 trichloro-1,1,2 trifluoroethane (R113). White spirit and trichlorethylene are also known to be used and a few may use 1,1,1 trichloroethane (methyl chloroform) or trichlorofluoromethane) (R11). No specific research into the potential health risks from the use of these chemicals by dry cleaners has been carried out by either the Department of Employment or the Department of Health, but the Health and Safety Executive is currently assessing recently published scientific data concerning health risks associated with exposure to perchloroethylene.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fair Employment

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made to correct the under-employment of Protestants by the Eastern Health and Social Services area board; whether this board has been investigated by the new Fair Employment Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Eastern health and social services board has an equal opportunities policy and has developed procedures for the implementation and monitoring of equality of opportunity, which are in line with the recommendations in the code of practice on fair employment. The board is committed to carry out any affirmative action necessary to address any apparent imbalance in its work force.

The board has not been investigated by the Fair Employment Commission, but, in line with other employers, consults the commission as and when necessary.

Hospitals

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the total expenditure on hospitals by the Eastern health and social services area board in each of the past five years; and how much in each year was for capital projects.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Capital works* £	*Total* £
1986-87	7,972,296	217,094,300
1987-88	11,509,758	236,424,600
1988-89	11,013,938	255,205,941
1989-90	9,032,633	267,502,118
1990-91	11,659,842	296,815,875

Forestry

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed in the forestry industry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: About 1,050; 500 of whom are employed in the Department of Agriculture forest service and approximately 550 in the private sector.

Hospital Services, Downpatrick

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to provide funding for the relocation of acute hospital services on the Downshire site in Downpatrick, Co. Down; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The management and delivery of acute hospital services in the Downpatrick area is the responsibility of the Eastern health and social services board. The consultation period on its recently published consultative document "Framework for General (Acute) Hospital Services within the Board Area" is due to end on 30 September 1992, after which the board will frame its proposals for the future. I understand that the board has not at this time agreed any plans to relocate acute hospital services on the Downshire site.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed by the fishing industry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: There is estimated to be some 2,900 people employed in the Northern Ireland fishing industry either on a full-time or part-time basis. This includes sea fisherman, fish farmers, those engage in processing and other ancillary occupations and commercial salmon and inland fishery enterprises.

Hospital Bed Closures

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will increase the budgetary allocation to the Eastern health and social services board in order to prevent the proposed reductions of beds and job losses in hospitals within the board area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Eastern board's recently published consultative document "A Framework for General (Acute) Hospital Services within the Eastern Board Area" contains an analysis of the future need for acute hospital beds in its area. The conclusion in the document that fewer acute beds will be needed does not stem primarily from cost or budgetary considerations. Advances in medical techniques and tchnology, and improvements in efficiency levels in the use of beds to match those being achieved elsewhere, mean that the same number of patients could receive treatment of a higher quality in the Eastern board area with at least 750 fewer beds. The Government are fully committed to seeking continuing improvements in the quality of care while making the best use of available resources and they fully support the principles which underline the Eastern board's policy for the provision of acute care.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July, *Official Report*, columns *430-31*.

The Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland is contributing to the development of the national programme for the year and, in addition, has set up a Northern Ireland steering group to plan and co-ordinate regional activities.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what dates and in what parts of Northern Ireland the cold weather payments system was triggered during the winter of 1991-92; and how many households received payment on each occasion.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of the chief executive of the Social Security Agency. However, I understand that the cold weather payment system was not triggered in any part of Northern Ireland during the winter of 1991-92.

Grammar Schools

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many places in grammar schools in South Down were allocated to students who obtained a grade 1 and a grade 2, respectively, in the selection procedure;

(2) how many applications were received by each grammar school in South Down from pupils who received grade 1 and grade 2 in the selection procedure;

(3) how many places were available for student intakes into each grammar school in South Down for the academic year 1992-93.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested in respect of 1992-93 is as follows:

School	*Places available*	*Applications*		*Admissions*	
		Grade 1	*Grade 2*	*Grade 1*	*Grade 2*
Down High School, Downpatrick	100	74	33	74	26
Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch	135	134	36	134	1
St. Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick	100	94	28	94	16
St. Louis's Grammar School, Kilkeel	78	35	41	35	40
Total	423	337	138	337	83

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many households in Northern Ireland qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Hanley: Social Security operational matters are the responsibility of the chief executive of the Social Security Agency. However, I understand that information is not kept on the number of households in Northern Ireland who qualify for payments under the cold weather payment scheme.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what dates cold weather payments were made in Northern Ireland in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and if he will indicate the period taken for payment to be made once the system has been triggered.

Mr. Hanley: Social Security operation matters are the responsibility of the chief executive of the Social Security Agency. However, I understand that since the introduction of the forecast system on 1 November 1991, no cold weather payments have been made in Northern Ireland in response to a forecast of a qualifying period.

Legal Parades

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of *(a)* the number of security force personnel and *(b)* the cost of policing each legal parade or march held in (i) Newry town, (ii) Armagh, (iii) Newtownhamilton or (iv) Markethill in each of the past three years.

Mr. Mates: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many legal parades were approved by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in *(a)* Newry town, *(b)* Armagh, *(c)* Newtonhamiltown and *(d)* Markethill in each year since 1980;

(2) if he will give details of all legal parades or marches in each of the past five years, that were held in *(a)* Newry town, *(b)* Armagh city, *(c)* Newtownhamilton and *(d)* Markethill;

(3) what organisation sought permission for each legal parade in *(a)* Newry town, *(b)* Armagh, *(c)* Newtownhamilton and *(d)* Markethill in each of the past five years.

Mr. Mates: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Police Complaints

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what decisions he has reached on the recommendations contained in the report of the Independent Commission of Police Complaints on its triennial review 1988-91.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My predecessor announced on 27 March 1991 that he intended to consult various interested bodies. A consultation document was sent to the police authority, the Chief Constable, the police representative bodies, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, the Committee

on the Administration of Justice, the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Northern Ireland Members of this House. The document was also made available to anyone else on request.

I have given further consideration to the recommendations in the light of the comments received. I have decided to accept six of the commission's nine recommendations in whole or in part.

I have accepted the following two recommendations which can be implemented by amendments to regulations and I have asked my officials to bring forward the necessary amendments as quickly as possible:

The informal resolution procedure should be amended to provide for the complainant to indicate in writing that he is satisfied that his complaint has been resolved (recommendation 2). The regulations would make it clear that the complainant is not required to sign such a statement if he or she does not want to.

Regulations should be made to provide a monitoring role for the Commission where the Police Authority decides to use its discretionary power under Article 6(2) of the 1987 Order to deal with a complaint against a senior officer other than by formal investigation (recommendation 3).

I have also accepted the following three recommendations whose implementation will require primary legislation. The second of these is part of a wider recommendation. They will be implemented at the earliest legislative opportunity:

A complaint should be referred to the Commission once it has been *recorded* by the appropriate authority under Article 5(1) or Article 6(1) of the 1987 Order (recommendation 4).

The Commission should be granted discretion to discontinue supervision of a case where it becomes apparent that supervision is not warranted (second part of recommendation 6).

The 1987 Order should be amended to require the Commission to give its reasons to the Chief Constable for preferring disciplinary charges at the recommendation stage under Article 13(1) rather than at the later stage of direction (recommendation 7).

The purpose of recommendation 7 is being achieved by administrative action pending amendment to legislation.

I have accepted the following recommendation which is an administrative matter for the Policy Authority and the Independent Commission for Police Complaints:

meetings between the Police Authority and the Commission should continue on a more structured basis (recommendation 9)

I have decided not to accept the following three recommendations and the first part of another recommendation:

The Chief Constable should be required to consult the Commission in those cases where he is of the opinion that the matter does not constitute a complaint within the meaning of Article 2 of the 1987 Order; the Commission's decision should prevail where there is a difference of view as to whether the matter should properly be regarded as constituting a complaint (recommendation 1)

The Commission should be given a reserve power under an amended Article 8 of the 1987 Order to "call in" for supervision in the public interest those matters considered by the Commission to be of grave or exceptional circumstances (recommendation 5)

The mandatory supervision of complaints category relating to serious injury should be eliminated, that supervision in all cases should be a matter for the discretion of the Commission (first part of recommendation 6)

Consideration should be given to the establishment of a truly independent tribunal with a legally qualified chairman to hear disciplinary charges. Such charges would be presented on behalf of the Commission at the hearing; any consequential disciplinary action would be the responsibility of the Chief Constable and he might therefore require to have a presence or a specialised function at a tribunal (recommendation 8).

I have been heartened by the positive response to the consultation document on the commission's recommendations and I am satisfied that the action I have outlined will further enhance the operation of the procedures for dealing with complaints against the police.

Water Privatisation

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will indicate when he plans to privatise the water and sewerage functions of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The citizens charter for Northern Ireland made clear the Government's intention to privatise the Department of the Environment's water and sewerage functions. Hitherto, it had been intended that these functions would be transferred to a Government-owned company before privatisation. However, having reviewed progress, I have concluded that we should in fact proceed directly to privatisation, as soon as practicable in 1995-96. This will build on the preparatory work which has already been done and will allow customers and taxpayers to obtain at the earliest date the benefits that privatisation will bring.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Broadcasting, Northern Ireland

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to ensure that regional broadcasting within Northern Ireland is maintained and enhanced; and if he will make it his policy to ensure that regional broadcasting stations at Newry town hall and elsewhere will continue to operate in the future.

Mr. Key: BBC programming and day-to-day administration, including its continuing commitment to regional broadcasting in Northern Ireland, are a matter for the corporation under its royal charter and licence and agreement. The Broadcasting Act 1990 established the framework for other national and regional television and radio services.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July 1992, *Official Report*, columns *430-31*.

Supermarkets

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information is held on the number of playing fields lost to supermarket developments over the last 10 years in England.

Mr. Key: There is no centrally held information on the loss of playing fields. However, the Sports Council's grant in aid for 1991-92 included a specific sum to cover the cost of preparing a national register of playing fields in England. This will provide a means of monitoring gains and losses in playing fields and should be completed at the end of May 1993.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Scottish Business

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to propose amendments to the procedures for the consideration of business in the House which relates solely to Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Existing procedures offer a variety of ways of handling Scottish business. The recent reconstituting of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee provides an additional opportunity for consideration of Scottish issues by the House.

WALES

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the expenditure of the Welsh Development Agency's property development programme in 1991-92 in the district authority areas of *(a)* Cynon Valley, *(b)* Merthyr Tydfill and *(c)* the Rhondda; and what is the estimated expenditure in these three districts in 1992-93;

(2) whether he will list each project in the Welsh Development Agency's property development programme for 1991-92 and the cost of each project in that year and the corresponding information in 1992-93.

Mr. David Hunt: I have arranged for the chief executive of the WDA to write to the hon. Gentleman, and for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Young People

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many 16 and 17-year-olds there are in *(a)* Blaenau Gwent, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales; and how many in each case are (1) in full-time education, (2) in youth training schemes, (3) receiving income support and (4) are neither in full-time education, youth training schemes, nor in receipt of income support.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The total numbers of 16 and 17-year-olds and the numberrs of those in full-time education for the requested areas are given in the table. Also shown are the numbers of persons of all ages on youth training schemes; age-specific data are not collected. Reliable information on the numbers of 16 and 17-year-olds receiving income support and those who are neither in full-time education, on youth training schemes, nor in receipt of income support is not available for Wales.

Thousands

	Blaenau Gwent	*Gwent*	*Wales*
16 and 17-year-olds:			
Total population[1]	2·1	11·8	76·7
In full-time education—colleges[2]	n/a	3·0	17·9
In full-time education—schools[3]	n/a	3·1	22·4
All persons on Youth Training schemes[4]	n/a	2·6	16·0

[1]Mid year estimate 1990 (*Source:* Office of Population Censuses and Surveys)

[2]Those aged 16 or 17 on 31 August 1991 following full-time courses at colleges of further and higher education as at November 1991.

[3]Those aged 16 or 17 on 31 August 1990 attending schools as at January 1991.

[4]All ages, as at 24 May 1992.

Blind Children

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of parents of blind and partially sighted children received social work counselling in Wales in the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make it his policy to issue guidelines to local authorities concerning the development of counselling services for parents upon discovery of a child's disability.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The figures requested are not held centrally. The Children Act 1989 provides a framework for the provision of services for all children, including those with disabilities. It makes clear the duty of local authorities to safeguard the needs of children with disabilities and their families, and to ensure that advice, guidance and counselling are available. It is for each local authority to decide what serices they consider appropriate. Comprehensive guidance on all aspects of the Act was issued to local authorities prior to its implementation in October 1991. The Secretary of State has no plans to issue further guidance to local authorities on this matter.

Neath-Port Talbot Hospital

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the preparation for the building of the Neath/Port Talbot hospital is on target; and when the first contracts will be signed.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I understand that West Glamorgan health authority still anticipates that work will commence later this year on the infrastructure contract. Progress therefore remains on target.

Youth Training

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the system for monitoring the numbers of young people covered by the youth training guarantee and seeking a place on youth training announced in the oral answer by the Secretary of State for Employment, *Official Report*, 7 July 1992, column 172, will cover Wales; who will be responsible for monitoring in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I reviewed performance on the youth training guarantee at a recent meeting with the chairmen of Welsh training and enterprise councils and I am satisfied that Welsh TECs have the resources they need to meet the guarantee. The Minister of State has subsequently written to the chairmen asking them for advance information of any issues in meeting it. My officials are discussing the position with each TEC, and will also be reviewing with TECs and principal careers officers whether changes to monitoring arrangements need to be made in the light of the steps announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment on 7 July.

Elderly People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of elderly people dependent on income support, that have been turned away from voluntary care homes in Wales, for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Rural Wales

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will bring together the principal agencies concerned with the problems of rural Wales under his chairmanship at regular intervals.

Mr. David Hunt: Ministers frequently meet the chairmen and chief officers of all the agencies concerned to discuss the problems facing rural Wales and my officials are in regular contact with the staff of these agencies. The agencies also maintain close liaison with each other on matters of common interest.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of all sites of special scientific interest in Wales at present; how many of these sites of special scientific interest have been damaged during the last year; and what is the estimated percentage figure of the land mass of Wales currently designated as sites of special scientific interest.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There are currently 843 sites of special scientific interest in Wales. I have arranged for copies of the full list of sites to be placed in the Library of the House.

The Countryside Council for Wales is aware of damage to 45 sites during the period 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992. The area of Wales which has been notified as sites of special scientific interest is approximately 9·5 per cent.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

Measures operated by my Department to assist small businesses include the following:

Support for Local Enterprise Agencies

There are currently 21 local enterprise agencies in Wales and there is a likelihood of a number of new organisations approaching me for approval in the near future. In order to strengthen the network of agencies to improve and enhance services to small businesses mergers between agencies are encouraged where appropriate. One merger involving two agencies has occurred since last year. The WDA and the DBRW provided £318,000 in direct grant support to enterprise agencies for core services in 1991-92.

Training and Enterprise Councils

The training and enterprise councils (TECs) in Wales are responsible for running a range of measures which assist small businesses. They are continuing to develop provision to help new and existing businesses to acquire and build skills which will enable them to compete and grow. During the last financial year Welsh TECs assisted over 8,000 owner-managers and helped more than 3,300 people to start their own new businesses.

Regional Selective Assistance, Regional Enterprise Grant

Small businesses continue to take advantage of the help available under regional selective assistance. In the year to end of June 1992, 139 small firms (employing up to 200 people) accepted offers of RSA. The value of these offers in 1992 amount to £19·2 million. A further 151 small firms (employing less than 25 people) accepted offers of Regional Enterprise Grant totalling £1·70 million.

Enterprise Wales

Launched in January 1988, the consultancy initiatives have proved extremely popular in Wales. More than 5,175 companies have applied. In 1991-92 alone 1,040 applicants were received, 6 per cent. above the economic weight, and 1,031 business reviews were commissioned, 19 per cent. above the economic weight.

Small firms merit award for research and technology (SMART)

The number of small Welsh companies which received a SMART stage 1 award during the past 12 months was 16 and 11 companies received the SMART stage 2 awards. The maximum value of each stage 1 award has been increased from £37,500 to £45,000 and each stage 2 award from £50,000 to £60,000. On a per-capita basis, Wales has continued to do better than most other regions in this annual competition, receiving about 9 per cent. of the total awards nationwide.

Support for products under research

This scheme, which was introduced in 1991, is intended to support highly innovative projects by companies employing up to 500 persons. During the first year of its operation, offers of financial assistance were made to 10 Welsh companies, to a total value of £750,000.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Rod Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will set up a tribunal to consider appeals relating to educational provision for children with special needs in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am pleased to announce that I am today issuing in Wales a consultation paper "Special Educational Needs—Access to the System". This sets out our proposals to introduce legislation to give new rights to parents of children with special educational needs, including a tribunal system, and to make improvements to the assessment and statementing procedures.

Our proposals will extend parents' rights over choice of school, reduce the time taken by local education authorities in making assessments and statements, extend parents' rights to appeal and make those rights more coherent and establish an independent appeals tribunal to replace the present complex arrangements. We shall also be issuing further guidance for local education authorities on the criteria to be used for making assessments and issuing statements.

I am arranging for a copy of the consultation paper to be placed in the Library of the House.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools in Wales have opted out; how many have applied to opt out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Five schools have voted in favour of applying for grant-maintained status and submitted proposals for my consideration. Of these, three were approved. I expect many more applications over the next few months.

Open Government

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what actions he is pursuing to promote open government in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department is taking part in the Duchy of Lancaster interdepartmental review which is looking at: reviewing statutory restrictions on disclosure; extending rights of access to personal records including those held manually; and publication and greater accessibility of technical and other inspection reports.

European Single Market

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the impact of the European single market on the Welsh economy.

Mr. David Hunt: The impact of the single market programme on the Welsh economy will depend on how individual firms respond to the challenges and opportunities which the removal of trade barriers will create. Few firms, even those whose markets are predominantly local, will remain unaffected by some part of the single market programme. To help meet this challenge, the Government have provided the most comprehensive single market information service anywhere in the Community. In Wales, programmes such as Euroline, Interprise and the partnerships which are being developed with other regions of the Community, such as Baden Württemberg, also enhance the opportunities available to companies and both my Department and the Welsh Development Agency make every effort to encourage Welsh companies to take advantage of what is on offer.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest assessment of the impact and advantages for the Welsh economy of the opening of the channel tunnel.

Mr. David Hunt: This is one of the most important projects being undertaken in Europe today. It will provide a new opportunity for access to continental Europe for freight as well as business and leisure travel, to the considerable benefit of the whole of Britain. I am certain that both existing and future businesses in Wales will share in the benefits the channel tunnel will bring.

British Coal

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes next to meet the chairman of British Coal.

Mr. David Hunt: The date for my next meeting with the chairman of British Coal has not yet been fixed.

British Rail

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next proposes to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss investment and development in regional railways.

Mr. David Hunt: I see the chairman of British Rail regularly to discuss a wide range of rail issues. I hope to meet Sir Bob Reid again later this year.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were employed by British Rail in Wales in 1971 and 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not held centrally.

Whaling

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received concerning the killing of whales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received two representations concerning the killing of whales. The hon. Gentleman will by now have seen a copy of the letter that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food issued to all Members of the House on 7 July which sets out the Government's position on whaling. I have nothing further to add.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the financial advantages of opting out of their local education authority for *(a)* high schools and *(b)* primary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: All grant-maintained schools, irrespective of whether they are in the primary or secondary sector, are eligible for four forms of grant aid from my Department: transitional grant, annual maintenance grant, special purpose grants and capital grant.

Transitional grants enable schools to prepare for their new responsibilities in the grant-maintained sector and are payable in advance of the effective date of operation. Annual maintenance grant is based on what a school would have received for its running costs under its former LEA's local management of schools scheme. In addition, the grant includes an amount calculated to be the school's proportion of the LEA's expenditure on services which were previously provided centrally, thereby giving the school complete freedom in deciding which services it wishes to purchase to meet its own priorities, independently of the local authority. Special purpose grants mainly parallel the support available to LEAs through my Department's grants for education support and training —GEST—programme, much of which is currently retained at LEA level, again providing the grant-maintained school with the flexibility to decide its own priorities. Capital grants are available in the form of allocations for named projects and formula-based allocations for the purchase of equipment and small scale projects. All grant-maintained schools are automatically entitled to the latter, thereby guaranteeing them a certain level of funding.

The financial advantages of grant-maintained status are therefore, manifold. It is for governors and headteachers to decide together how to manage the funds, how to manage the curriculum, whom to employ, and what services and goods to buy. Grant-maintained schools therefore benefit from increased flexibility to spend their resources, free from LEA bureaucracy. A recent survey by the Grant Maintained Schools Centre revealed that:

88 per cent. of schools reported increased pupil numbers;

48 per cent. have reported increased classroom support staff;

82 per cent. have reported increased spending on books and equipment;

72 per cent. of those who responded reported increased teacher numbers.

GM heads reported greater flexibility, enhanced administrative support, and redirection of funds from LEA bureaucracy to classroom.

There can be no doubt about the benefit of grant-maintained status to parents, pupils and schools alike. I expect many more applications for grant maintained status over the coming months from schools wishing to take advantage of these benefits.

A494

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which traffic census statistics his Department uses concerning the proposed A494 improvement from the River Dee to Ewloe.

Mr. David Hunt: The north-east Clwyd traffic study was used as the basis for these road proposals, a summary of which was sent to the hon. Gentleman on 22 February 1992.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will seek a new census of traffic concerning the A494 improvement from the River Dee to Ewloe which takes into account the holiday peak period traffic flows; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Peak period holiday traffic flows are already taken into account. It is not the intention at present to carry out additional traffic census as such, but information from existing automatic traffic counters will continue to be examined and assessed.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the statistics on traffic flow used to consider the A494 improvement scheme were taken before the completion of the M53-A55 link; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The projected traffic flows used to formulate the proposals took into account the existence of the M53-A55 link.

NHS Capital Costs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his best estimate of the total capital costs to the NHS in Wales, by health district and in total, arising from *(a)* the removal of Crown immunity, *(b)* health and safety requirements for the incineration of infected waste and *(c)* recommendations to limit ionising radiation exposure to patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: District health authorities in Wales have estimated that the capital expenditure needed to meet the cost of work associated with the removal of Crown immunity and the introduction of new requirements for the incineration of infected waste is as follows:

	£ million
Powys	1.5
Gwent	4·4
West Glamorgan	4·5
Clwyd	2·1
Mid Glamorgan	4·0
East Dyfed	5·0
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	0·7
South Glamorgan	47·0
Gwynedd	3·7
Total	73·0

No figures are available centrally relating to the capital costs of measures to limit the exposure of patients to ionising radiation.

Cardiovascular Disease

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set a target date to cut the number of premature deaths from cardiovascular disease by 40 per cent. in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Health Planning Forum has published an overall goal of a reduction in premature deaths from cardiovascular disease of a third by the year 2002 compared with 1988.

This category of condition encompasses, among other conditions, coronary heart disease and stroke for which separate targets have been set.

In Wales, from the baseline set in 1985, a reduction of 45 and 52 per cent. is sought for women and men respectively in the death rate from coronary heart disease, and 37 and 47 per cent. for women and men respectively in the death rate from stroke.

I am pleased to report that Wales is well on course to meeting these targets.

Radiotherapists

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the establishments in Wales which train radiotherapists, the number of training places on each and the number of students successfully completing their course in each of the past five years, and the percentage pass rate in each of the past five years, for each establishment.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Wales's only School of Therapeutic Radiography is located at Velindre hospital, Cardiff. It is currently accredited to offer 10 student places annually. Information on pass rates, etcetera, over the past five years is as follows:

Number of Students

	Entered for final examinations	*Successfully completed course*	*Pass rate percentage*
1988	7	7	100
1989	[1]0	[1]0	—
1990	3	3	100
1991	6	5	83
1992	5	5	100

[1] No intake in 1986.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what advice has been offered by the Audit Commission in regard to transitional arrangements during the reorganisation of local government in Wales;

(2) what steps he has taken to obtain the advice of the Audit Commission on transitional arrangements in regard to local government organisations in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Transitional arrangements are currently the subject of consultation with the local authority associations and discussion with the Audit Commission.

Senior Nurses

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been saved by each health authority in Wales through the elimination of senior nursing posts in each of the last five years; and how the money has been reallocated in each instance.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Senior Nurses

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by each health authority district area in Wales, how many senior nurse posts have been lost in each of the past, five years according to *(a)* director of nursing services—DNS—level, *(b)* assistant DNS, *(c)* senior nursing support posts and *(d)* senior nursing officers; and how many posts in each category have been lost through (i) redeployment and (ii) retirement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of posts is not available centrally. However some information on the number and whole-time equivalent number of senior nurses/senior midwives is given in the table. Due to the regrading of staff during 1988-89, comparable information is not available for previous years. Senior nurse support staff cannot be separately identified.

Staff in Post: Senior nurses/senior midwives as at 30 September[1]

	Chief Administrative nursing officer		*Director of nursing services*[2]		*Other senior nurses/ Senior midwives*[3]		*Total*	
	Number	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Number*	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Number*	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Number*	*Whole-time equivalent*
1989								
Pembrokeshire	1	1·0	—	—	2	2·0	3	3·0
Clwyd	—	—	6	6·0	16	16·0	22	22·0
East Dyfed	1	1·0	5	5·0	7	7·0	13	13·0
Gwent	—	—	7	7·0	20	20·0	27	27·0
Gwynedd	—	—	3	3·0	8	7·2	11	10·2
Mid-Glamorgan	—	—	7	7·0	25	25·0	32	32·0
Powys	1	1·0	2	2·0	6	6·0	9	9·0
South Glamorgan	—	—	4	4·0	32	31·8	36	35·8
West Glamorgan	1	1·0	5	5·0	14	14·0	20	20·0
1990								
Pembrokeshire	1	1·0	—	—	—	—	1	1·0
Clwyd	—	—	8	8·0	16	16·0	24	24·0
East Dyfed	1	1·0	6	6·0	5	5·0	12	12·0
Gwent	—	—	8	8·0	12	12·0	20	20·0
Gwynedd	1	1·0	2	2·0	7	6·2	10	9·2
Mid-Glamorgan	—	—	5	5·0	17	17·0	22	22·0
Powys	1	1·0	1	1·0	6	6·0	8	8·0
South Glamorgan	—	—	5	5·0	20	19·8	25	24·8
West Glamorgan	1	1·0	5	5·0	12	12·0	18	18·0
1991								
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	—	1	1·0	—	—
Clwyd	—	—	—	—	31	31·0	—	—
East Dyfed	—	—	—	—	8	8·0	—	—
Gwent	—	—	—	—	16	16·0	—	—
Gwynedd	—	—	—	—	13	12·2	—	—
Mid-Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	14	14·0	—	—
Powys	—	—	—	—	5	5·0	—	—
South Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	27	26·8	—	—
West Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	17	17·0	—	—

[1] Excludes Welsh Health Common Services Authority. Some senior nurses/senior midwives may have been reclassified as senior managers over the years shown affecting the comparability of figures for different years.
[2] Included Assistant Director of Nursing Services.
[3] A new senior nurse/senior midwife structure was introduced during 1991, and staff cannot readily be split into the categories used for previous years.

NHS Business Managers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many business managers are currently employed in the national health service by each health authority area.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not available centrally.

Local Authorities (Management)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has in regard to the internal management of local authorities in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The next stage of consultation on internal management is for discussion at the forthcoming meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government.

Health Gain

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made towards completing the protocols for health gain promised in his Department's document "Agenda for Action 2".

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 14 July 1992.

Ophthalmic Treatment, Bangor

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his target date for bringing the percentage of patients treated at the ophthalmic treatment centre at Ysbyty-Gwynedd, Bangor who reside in the centre's host distict down to 10 per cent.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No such target date has been set. In 1992-93 centrally funded capacity has been allocated on the basis of an assessment of waiting list problems, capitation share and demand. Decisions on how the initiative will be taken forward in 1993-94 will be made in due course.

Dentistry

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish, by health authority, those hospitals in Wales that provide 24-hour emergency dental treatment, indicating those in which facilities and staff are always available for carrying out extractions.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available centrally. The level of service provision is a matter for the local health authority to determine.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many salaried dentists are employed by each family health services authority in Wales; and what is the projected increase over the next 12 months.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None at present. The Department has not made a projection of an increase over the next 12 months.

Burials

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will publish for each county in Wales, for each of the last 10 years, the number of persons buried in land that they had previously owned, or owned at the time of death;

(2) how many people were buried in Wales in land that they had owned at the time of their death, in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is yet in a position to announce the appointment of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Wales, the timetable for the establishment of his office and the arrangements for the inspection of schools by registered inspectors.

Mr. David Hunt: I have given detailed consideration to all the issues and, most importantly, those of particular relevance to Wales. This includes the need to establish a body of inspectors in Wales able to inspect the significant number of schools which teach entirely or partly through the medium of Welsh and whether all schools have Welsh included in the national curriculum, as well as having features in the curriculum reflecting Welsh tradition and culture.

I am delighted to announce that, on my recommendation, Her Majesty the Queen by Order in Council has appointed Mr. Roy L. James as Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales. Mr. James's appointment will be initially for three years.

I do not want to delay implementation of the important objectives of our charter for parents in Wales and I have concluded that the office of HMCI Wales should commence in September 1992. The arrangements for inspections of secondary schools will start in September 1993 and in primary and special schools the following September.

I have decided that schools in Wales should be inspected by registered inspectors every five years. This will mean a much more regular inspection with a published report than is the practice at present. With the time that will be needed to effect the inspection, the issue of an action plan and the necessary follow-up action, I believe that the period between inspections on a five-year cycle is reasonable, bearing in mind also the financial implications for local authorities of the new arrangements. It will provide the parents of most children with a detailed report during their child's time at primary or secondary school. Nevertheless, the frequency of inspections will be kept under review.

TRANSPORT

Smoke Hoods

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will encourage operators of British registered passenger transport aircraft to provide smoke hoods which meet the EUROCAE ED-65 specification on their aircraft for passengers in circumstances of aviation fire.

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority has responsibility for civil aviation safety in the United Kingdom. It is for the authority to determine the requirements for passenger safety equipment. I shall bring the hon. Member's question to the attention of the authority and ask it to write to him direct to explain its position regarding the EUROCAE standard for passenger smoke hoods.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now exercise his powers to require the Civil Aviation Authority to obtain the addition to the section 1.2 of chapter 1 of annex 18 of the principal agreement covering the carriage of dangerous goods, and the provisions of that agreement incorporated in the International Civil Aviation Organisation technical instructions for the safe carriage of dangerous goods by air to enable passengers to carry on board passenger transport aircraft breathing-gas-charged smoke hoods.

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority has the responsibility for civil aviation safety in the United Kingdom. The regulations relating to the carriage of

dangerous goods are complex and subject to international agreement. I shall draw the hon. Member's question to the attention of the CAA and ask it to write to him to explain the various technical and international aspects which must be considered.

Unadopted Roads

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek to amend relevant legislation so as to compel local highway authorities to adopt and maintain currently unadopted roads which provide sole access to adopted public roads.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have no plans to do so. Local highway authorities' discretion enables all relevant considerations to be taken into account in decisions on adoption of private streets. A highway authority may, by virtue of section 236 of the Highways Act 1980, contribute towards the costs of a private street works scheme it has resolved to carry out if it considers that the wider public benefit warrants it.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek to amend relevant legislation so as to compel local authorities to adopt and maintain currently unadopted roads before granting planning permission for the construction of new roads to which the unadopted roads in question will provide the only access.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No. It is for the local planning authority, in considering whether to grant planning permission, to take account of whether access arrangements are acceptable. The question whether any unadopted road giving access to the development should become a publicly maintainable highway is for the highway authority to decide.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will clarify the responsibilities for safety regulations for United Kingdom registered passenger transport aviation of *(a)* the Civil Aviation Authority and *(b)* the joint airworthiness authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The responsibilities of the Civil Aviation Authority for the safety regulation of aircraft are set out in section 60 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 and in the Air Navigation Order 1989—SI 1989/2004—as amended. The Joint Aviation Authorities—JAA—is a co-ordinating body which establishes common safety standards and arranges joint certification among its member states, which includes the United Kingdom. Its members are engaged in developing a common code of operating regulation. A number of JAA codes were made directly applicable in member states of the European Communities from 1 January 1992 by Council regulation (EEC) No. 3922/91.

Footpaths

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he gives to local authorities about the impermeability of footpaths; and what standards are laid down.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Department has not given any advice. Most of the various forms of footpath construction currently in use are impermeable to a large extent. There are no departmental or national standards covering this requirement.

M25

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to issue blight notices and pay compensation to property owners affected by his proposals to expand the M25 through the construction of feeder roads, before the completion of the public inquiries.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Those whose property would need to be acquired compulsorily for our proposals to improve M25 between junctions 12 and 15 may be eligible to serve blight notices now. Those who consider their homes would be seriously affected by the construction works or the use of the road in its widened form can also ask the Secretary of State to consider using his discretionary powers of acquisition.

London Buses

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to make propsals for the privatisation of London Buses.

Mr. Norris: I understand that London Transport is exploring the possibility of privatising the subsidiaries of London Buses Ltd. in advance of deregulation. This would require the Government's consent. I await a formal proposal from London Transport.

Lane Rental Contracts

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of *(a)* major and *(b)* all road maintenance contracts let so far in 1992 are covered by lane rental agreements.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Fifty-three motorway and trunk road major maintenance contracts valued at £500,000 or more have been awarded so far this year. Twenty-five of these were lane rental contracts. The value of lane rental contracts awarded was £60·3 million, 68 per cent. of the total. Lane rental is rarely used other than for major maintenance.

Driving Tests

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much has been paid by the Driving Standards Agency since July 1991 to driving examiners in bonus payments linked to the length of waiting times for driving tests and to the number of tests cancelled by the agency;

(2) how much was paid in compensation to members of the public who suffered loss when their driving tests were cancelled *(a)* between July 1990 and June 1991 and *(b)* between July 1991 and June 1992.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have asked the chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Rail Passengers (Compensation)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British Rail InterCity passengers have received compensation since July 1991 because their trains were delayed; and how much compensation in total has been paid to those passengers.

Mr. Freeman: Between July 1991 and June 1992, InterCity paid a total of £425,000 in compensation to passengers for train delays and cancellations. InterCity does not keep a record of the number of individual passengers who receive compensation.

Rail Passengers (Compensation)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport since July 1991 how many BR season ticket holders *(a)* have had the validity of their season tickets extended for days when there is no effective service and *(b)* have been offered discounts on the renewal of their season tickets to compensate them for poor service in the previous year.

Mr. Freeman: BR does not hold information centrally on the number of season tickets extended for days when there was no effective service: decisions on extending season tickets are delegated to route managers. The first discounts on season ticket renewals on routes which fail to meet their charter standards by more than a small margin are not due to be given until January 1993.

Itchen Navigation

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what action has he taken to ensure that the rights of public access and passage along the Itchen navigation and its towpaths between Winchester and Shawford are protected during works associated with the construction of the M3, Bar End-Compton; on what dates relevant legal notices were published; and if he will place copies of the notices, and responses, in the Library;

(2) what public rights of access and passage exist along the Itchen navigation and its towpaths on the section between Winchester and Shawford.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I am advised that the Itchen navigation is in law a navigable waterway, but that the extent of rights of access and passage along it and its towpaths is not clear.

Much of the Itchen navigation has become silted up so that navigation is not practicable. Nevertheless, following public inquiries in 1985 and 1987-88, my Department has taken statutory powers to divert the Itchen navigation and has undertaken to carry out the diversion works, which will make it navigable, as part of any future restoration of the navigation as a whole. Pending such restoration, a 1·8 m culvert is being provided under the M3 and the diverted B3335 to maintain the flow of water along the existing watercourse in accordance with the decision letter of 20 February 1990. I am not aware of any requirement to publish legal notices in connection with this work.

I am satisfied that the work currently being carried out together with the powers taken to divert the navigation and the undertakings that have been given adequately protect the public rights.

Blackburn-Hellifield Rail Line

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Rail about the restoration of services on the Blackburn to Hellifield railway line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: None. The level of service on the line is a matter for British Rail. I understand that at present a montly summer Sunday service operates over the line and on to Carlisle. There is also a summer Saturday service from Blackburn as far as Clitheroe.

Women's Transport Needs

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the amount of Government expenditure granted to women's transport needs in *(a)* percentage and *(b)* real terms since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: Transport expenditure for which my Department is responsible for transport for all categories of person. It does not distinguish between the needs of men and women.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what support is open to local authorities from his Department in the form of grants and other aid to enable them to implement improvements to public transport for women's needs.

Mr. Freeman: It is for local authorities to decide their own policies on the level of public transport they should support, taking account of local needs and to set budgets accordingly. Funds made available by my Department are not targeted at the needs of specific groups. Women are more frequent users of buses than men and are likely to benefit particularly from improvements to bus services.

BA Aircraft Accident, Sumburgh

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the full report of his Department's air accident investigation unit on the accident involving a British Airways advanced turbo-prop aircraft at Sumburgh, Shetland, on 23 December 1991.

Mr. Norris: The air accident investigation branch report on its formal investigation into the accident involving British Airways advanced turbo-prop aircraft at Sumburgh on 23 December 1991 is expected to be published in November this year.

Air Accidents

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list each air accident since 1 January 1986, in respect of which there has been a full investigation report by his Department; and if he will list the date of the accident and the date of the report's publication in each case.

Mr. Norris: The air accident investigation branch of the Department of Transport has supplied the following list of air accidents since 1 January 1986 where a full investigation has been or is being carried out, with details of the reports.

Aircraft Accident Reports (AAR)

Date	Aircraft	Registration Number	Location	Report Number	Publication Date
1986					
31 January 1986	Shorts 369	EI-BEM	East Midlands Airport	AAR 6/87	January 1988
8 April 1986	Twin Squirrel	G-BKIH	Swalecliffe, nr. Banbury	AAR 7/87	February 1988
15 May 1986	Bell 214ST	G-BKFN	Fraserburgh	AAR 9/87	March 1988
12 June 1986	DH6 Twin Otter	G-BGPC	Port Ellen, Islay	AAR 7/86	December 1987
6 November 1986	Boeing Vertol 234	G-BWFC	North Sea, Sumburgh	AAR 2/88	April 1988
15 November 1986	Boeing 747	G-AWNB	Heathrow Airport	AAR 8/87	February 1988
1987					
18 January 1987	Fokker F27	G-BMAU	Castle Donnington	AAR 7/88	January 1989
26 April 1987	Cessna 441	G-MOXY	Blackbushe	AAR 10/88	March 1989
30 April 1987	Cessna 172	OO-JEL	Solent Channel	AAR 4/88	August 1988
6 May 1987	Bell 222	G-META	Lippits Hill	AAR 3/88	August 1988
20 May 1987	AS332L	G-BKZH	nr. Unst	AAR 9/88	February 1989
21 June 1987	Dragon Rapide	G-AGTM	Duxford Airfield	AAR 1/88	March 1988
15 August 1987	Hughes 500	G-GASB	South Heighton	AAR 6/88	November 1988
9 December 1987	Sikorsky 76	G-BHYB	Fulmer Rig, North Sea	AAR 5/88	July 1988
1988					
1 February 1988	B747	N 605 PE	Gatwick	AAR 4/89	August 1989
6 February 1988	Tristar	G-BAH	nr. Lydd	AAR 1/89	February 1989
	T154B	LZ-BTE			
12 April 1988	BAC 1-11	G-AYWN	Airmiss, Gatwick	AAR 2/89	May 1989
	B737	G-ITBZ			
13 July 1988	S-61N	G-BEID	North Sea, nr. Sumburgh	AAR 3/90	September 1990
11 September 1989	B747	G-AWNM	London Heathrow	AAR 5/89	December 1989
17 October 1988	S61N	G-BDII	North of Handa Island	AAR 3/89	June 1989
10 November 1988	S61N	G-BDES	East of Wick	AAR 1/90	May 1990
21 December 1988	B747	N739PA	Lockerbie	AAR 2/90	September 1990
1989					
8 January 1989	B737	G-OMBE	Kegworth	AAR 4/90	October 1990
14 April 1989	Concorde	G-BOAF	Tasman Sea	AAR 6/89	December 1990
18 December 1989	Bell 206	G-SHBB	Biggin Hill	AAR 5/90	February 1991
1990					
25 July 1990	Sikorsky S-61N	G-BEWL	Brent Spa	AAR 2/91	October 1991
10 June 1990	BAC 1-11	G-BJRT	over Woodley, Berks	AAR 1/92	February 1992
11 December 1990	Tristar L1011	C-GAGI	South of Manchester	AAR 3/91	December 1991
23 December 1990	ATP	G-OATP	Ronaldsway Airports, IoM	AAR 1/91	August 1991
1991					
30 January 1991	DH Dash 7	G-BOAW	Stansted Airport	AAR 3/92	July 1992
11 August 1991	BAe ATP	G-BMYK	10 nm North of Cowly	*Not yet published*	
29 August 1991	RAF Jaguar/ Cessna 152	G-BMHI	Mid Air—Carno, Powys	AAR 2/92	June 1992
23 December 1991	BAe ATP	G-BTPE	Sumburgh	*Not yet published*	
1992					
5 February 1992	BAe ATP	G-LOGA	Edinburgh Airport	*Not yet published*	
9 March 1992	Lockheed 1011 Tristar	9Y-TGJ	Frankfurt (Landed at LHR)	*Not yet published*	
14 March 1992	Aerospatiale SA332	G-TIGH	East of Cormorant Alpha East Shetlands Basin	*Not yet published*	
21 March 1992	Concorde	G-BOAB	Between LHR and JFK	*Not yet published*	
31 March 1992	BAe 146	G-UKHP	Overshoot Aberdeen Airport	*Not yet published*	

Vehicle Excise Duty

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will report upon the results of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority in conjunction with the Metropolitan and City of London police forces' campaign against vehicle excise duty evasion in London in June.

Mr. Norris: As a result of the June 1992 London campaign against evasion of vehicle excise duty, 2,481 reports of VED offences have been received so far—2,140 from the Metropolitan police and 341 from the City of London police. These cases are being investigated and where evasion is clear, prosecution will follow.

Taxis

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the report of the working party on the safety of users of taxis and minicabs in London.

Mr. Norris: The report has been published today and copies have been placed in the Library. Any interested party may obtain a copy of the report from the Department of Transport.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Vehicle Inspectorate executive agency annual report for 1991-92 will be published.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The annual report has been published today. Copies are being placed in the House Library.

Register of Small Ships

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to make to the arrangements for maintaining the register of small ships.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Following a competitive market testing exercise, I have made the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency responsible for administering the register, previously operated by the Royal Yachting Association. The financial provision for the service now needs to be transferred from the Department's class VII vote 2 to the DVLA vote—class VII, vote 4. Parliamentary approval of this new expenditure will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency vote—class VII, vote 4. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £55,000 will be met by repayable advances from the contingencies fund.

A2 (Noise)

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department will provide the decibel counts on the A2 motor road as it passes the Painter's Ash school and other points in the borough of Gravesham promised following the visit of the Minister of Public Transport in December 1991.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* An assessment of the current noise environment in the vicinity of the A2 will be made as part of the noise studies for the channel tunnel rail link in connection with the environmental impact assessment for the link. An assessment may also be required in order to calculate additional noise caused by the rail link for the purposes of implementing the proposed regulations on noise insulation grant based on the Mitchell committee's recommendations. I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as noise information becomes available.

Public Transport (Access)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to improve safety and access to public transport for women, children and the disabled;

(2) what is his Department's role in encouraging improvements in public transport for women.

Mr. Freeman: My Department has a long-standing commitment to improve safety and access to public transport for people with mobility problems, including women, children and people with disabilities. We work closely with vehicle designers and manufacturers, public transport operators, local authorities and people with mobility problems as consumers, to promote and encourage greater recognition of their needs.

Women Passengers (Assaults)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many assaults on women travelling on public transport were reported in each year since 1979 *(a)* in London and *(b)* in Britain as a whole.

Mr. Freeman: In 1990, there were 380 reported assaults on women in London on the rail network and 655 reported for Great Britain as a whole. The corresponding figures for 1991 are 556 and 993 respectively. These figures comprise all violent and sexual offences, including common assault and battery, committed against women and include a small number of assaults on female police and staff. Corresponding figures for earlier years and other modes of public transport are not available.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom's presidency of the EC.

Mr. MacGregor: Since my appointment as Secretary of State for Transport I have met several of my EC counterparts for discussions on a wide range of issues, and I have invited them all to the informal Transport Council I am holding on 16 and 17 July.

On 23 June, I attended a meeting of the Transport Council in Luxembourg which agreed the third EC aviation liberalisation package, lifting a wide range of restrictions governing air services within the Community from 1 January 1993. Agreements were also reached on the liberalisation of shipping cabotage and road passenger cabotage.

It will be a priority of the United Kingdom presidency of the EC to ensure that further progress is made towards the creation of a single transport market within the Community, based on the principles of competition and liberalisation. In particular, I shall be seeking an agreement on definitive arrangements for road haulage cabotage, and further progress on slot allocation at airports and state aids.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sunday Trading

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on Sunday trading following *(a)* the outcome of the Kirklees case and *(b)* the delivery of the Advocate-General's opinion in the case before the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It remains our aim to bring forward proposals for reform of the law on Sunday trading in England and Wales once the question of compatibility with the treaty of Rome has been clarified; and we therefore continue to await judgment in relevant cases by the European Court of Justice, which is expected this autumn. This policy is affected neither by the Kirklees judgment, because that determined only the law on interim injunctions, nor by the Advocate General's delivery on 8 July of his opinion to the ECJ, because it formed only part of the Court's deliberations.

Asylum

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his answer of 4 June *Official Report*, column *621*, and the stated intention of Her Majesty's Government to ratify the convention determining the states responsible for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the member states of the European Community signed in Dublin on 15 June 1990, what steps have been taken to ensure that there are effective judicial remedies with suspensive effect in all member states of the European Community for asylum seekers who may be returned from one member state to another member state under this convention; and if he will make a statement on the results of those steps;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *621*, what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to satisfy itself that there is access to legal advice at all stages of the determination procedure for asylum seekers in all EC member states and that such legal advice is publicly funded wherever the asylum seeker is indigent.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None. Those are matters which are the responsibility of individual member states according to their national laws and procedures, but some of these matters will no doubt be considered in the future work programme of Immigration Ministers of the Twelve.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *621*, if he will specify in respect of which matters in the work programme adopted by the EC ministers concerned with immigration in December 1991 progress has been made under the Portuguese presidency; and what specific progress has been made.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Progress was made under the Portuguese presidency on a number of matters identified in the work progamme adopted by EC Ministers concerned with immigration in December 1991, including policy on family reunification; agreed arrangements for transit through member states of persons removed or deported; work on the common interpretation of the concepts used in the Dublin convention, and on extension of the system of the convention to third countries by means of a parallel convention; and the definition, for the purposes of considering asylum applications, of "first host country". Further work in all of these areas remains to be carried forward under the United Kingdom presidency.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Home Office continues to place a high priority on helping small firms to obtain business from the various divisions of the Department by improving access and the information necessary to ensure they have opportunities to submit competitive bids.

We are currently updating our booklet "Selling to the Home Office" which summarises our purchasing needs and lists contact points for potential suppliers. This booklet receives wide circulation through our attendance at "Meet the Buyer" functions, requests from manufacturers' associations and local councils', development initiatives for businesses in their areas.

Home Office performance indicators do not differentiate between the size of firms to which contracts are awarded and we cannot, therefore, provide statistical information about the volume of business we place with small firms.

Prisoners (Personal Property)

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are taken to secure the personal belongings of prisoners inside prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Personal belongings authorised to be retained in a prisoner's own possession remain that prisoner's responsibility. Other property may be taken into store at a prison and will be held under suitably secure conditions. Under arrangements introduced in 1990, prisoner's property is stored and transported, where possible, in sealed bags to prevent accidental loss or theft.

EFTA Nationals

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what transitional provisions will be made in respect of nationals of European free trade area countries who are present in the United Kingdom and wish to remain here pending the coming into force on 1 January 1993 of the agreement on the European economic area signed on 2 May.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The agreement has yet to be ratified and it is not yet certain that it will come into effect on 1 January 1993. A decision on any necessary transitional arrangements will be taken nearer the time.

Data Protection

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received from charities about the effect of the EC data protection directive on their fund-raising activities;

(2) what is his assessment of the effects of the EC data protection directive, if implemented; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what representations he has received from direct mail organisations about the effect of the EC data protection directive on their business;

(4) what representations he has received concerning the EC data protection directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government have received a substantial number of representations about the likely effects of the draft data protection directive, SYN 287. Many have come from charities and direct mail organisations. The Government consider that the draft, if implemented in its present form, would place considerable burdens on many data users, and would curtail some legitimate and beneficial areas of activity altogether. The Government are seeking to modify those provisions in the draft directive which go beyond the European convention on data protection, which is the basis of United Kingdom law, and which the Government believe strikes the right balance between the interests of data users and data

subects. The Government await the Commission's redraft of the directive, which is being drawn up in the light of the views of the official working group in Brussels, the European Parliament, the data protection registrars or commissioners of the Community countries and data users groups.

Prisoners (Hospitalisation)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedure is followed by his Department when a prison inmate requires urgent hospital or medical treatment with a trust hospital and the inmate had no permanent abode prior to being sent to prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: When a prisoner needs to be taken for treatment to an outside NHS hospital, arrangements are made by the prison doctor. The costs of such treatment, whether provided by an NHS trust hospital or by a hospital which continues to be directly managed, fall ordinarily to the prisoner's district health authority of origin. Where this cannot be determined, they fall to the district in which the offence or alleged offence was committed.

Tyre Treads

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the availability to police forces of tyre tread depth gauges of a suitable standard to be accepted as evidence by the courts in cases of prosecution for illegal tyres.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The provision of equipment for use by police forces is a matter for chief constables. The Association of Chief Police Officers sent information on suitable gauges to each chief constable in September 1991.

Stolen Cars

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of stolen cars in *(a)* the Northumberland police area and *(b)* the Durham area in 1991 that were (i) recovered undamaged, (ii) recovered damaged and (iii) not recovered.

Mr. Jack: The available information held centrally shows that, of 30,356 recorded offences of theft of a vehicle in the Northumbria police force area in 1991, 19,275 vehicles were recovered. The corresponding figures for the Durham police force area were 8,640 and 4,383 respectively. Information is not collected centrally on whether or not the recovered vehicles were damaged.

Duty Psychiatrist Schemes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the role of duty psychiatric rota schemes for defendents with mental health problems; and when the relevant legislation is due to come into force;

(2) how many duty psychiatric rota scheme applications have been received by his Department to date; how many have been approved; how much of his Department's allocation is committed to diversion schemes in the current financial year; and how many courts will have the benefit of new schemes by 1 October;

(3) what sum he has allocated for expenditure on duty psychiatric rota schemes in magistrates courts in England and Wales after April;

(4) what efforts his Department has made to publicise the availability of moneys from duty psychiatric rota schemes to courts and others who may wish to apply for grants to finance such schemes.

Mr. Jack: Duty psychiatrist schemes are local initiatives which entail a psychiatrist attending a magistrates court, on call or on a regular sessional basis depending on demand, to examine defendants thought to have some mental disorder and to advise the court on a suitable outcome. Typically, this may involve discontinuing proceedings or diversion to the health or social services. In addition, such schemes help to reduce the need for lengthy remands in custody to await psychiatric assessment. Implementation of duty psychiatrist schemes is not dependent on new legislation.

A recent survey of magistrates courts and the probation service identified 19 schemes in operation. To facilitate the development of further schemes throughout England and Wales, funding of £4 million over a three-year period will be available. Of this, £500,000 has been allocated for expenditure in the current financial year.

We are currently discussing the arrangements for administering these payments with the Department of Health. As soon as these have been decided, we will publicly invite properly costed bids for a share of this funding.

This initiative is one of several in which the Home Office and the Department of Health are involved to promote the diversion of mentally disordered offenders from the criminal justice system.

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reductions in levels of recorded crime have been achieved by the introduction of neighbourhood watch schemes.

Mr. Jack: There are many factors that can have a bearing on changes in the level of recorded crime. However, in one carefully researched area in Kirkholt, Greater Manchester, it was demonstrated that neighbourhood watch was a major contributory factor in reducing the number of burglaries by 75 per cent. Similarly, in Wythenshawe, Manchester, following the introduction of neighbourhood watch on a large council estate the number of burglaries reduced by 25 per cent. and this fall has since been maintained. Studies elsewhere have shown that neighbourhood watch schemes have contributed to a reduction in crime and fear of crime. Data from the British crime survey have also shown that members of neighbourhood watch schemes are more likely than others to take crime prevention measures.

Mr. Andrew Ohene

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the prisons, with dates, which Mr. Andrew Ohene had been in during the course of his sentence; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the transfers;

(2) what were the circumstances surrounding the death of Andrew Ohene, prison number RA0954, at Swaleside prison, Kent on 13 June;

(3) for what reason Mr. Andrew Ohene was in isolation in Swaleside prison immediately before his death;

(4) how many times Mr. Andrew Ohene complained about his conditions and treatment; and if he will give dates and brief details about the complaints and what was done about them;

(5) what requests or complaints Mr. Andrew Ohene made during the 48 hours prior to his death in Swaleside prison, and to whom; and if he was under unimpeded observation during this time.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The circumstances of this very sad death will be fully and openly investigated at the coroner's inquest. It would not be right for me to comment on matters which may be relevant to the cause of death until the jury has reached its verdict.

Racial Discrimination, Swaleside

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints of racial discrimination there have been at Swaleside; and what the conclusions of the resulting inquiries were.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since records began in 1991, there has been one complaint from a prisoner alleging racial discrimination at Swaleside prison. This complaint was investigated but not substantiated.

Explosives

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will refer to the explosives inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive the question of the storing, security and registration of supplies of ammonium nitrate and associated substances suitable for the making of explosives.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that ammonium nitrate is classified, in line with United Nations recommendations, as an oxidising substance rather than as an explosive. It is in widespread use in agriculture, and the Health and Safety Executive has published guidance on its safe storage. I do not believe that further controls would be workable. Accordingly, I have no plans to refer the matter to the explosives inspectorate.

Prisoners

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to ensure that prisoners who make complaints to their Members of Parliament are not intimidated by prison staff or prison authorities.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No staff should intimidate prisoners for this or any other reason. Any prisoners who consider they are being intimidated can use the prison service requests and complaints system to approach the governor, area manager, chairman of the board of visitors, or a range of individuals and bodies outside the prison service.

Prisoners, Swaleside

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths there have been in custody at Swaleside prison during the last five years; and what was the ethnicity of the prisoners.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Swaleside prison opened in July 1988. Since then two prisoners have died at Swaleside prison. Both were black. One was of Afro-Caribbean origin and one was of African origin.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on public interest immunity certificates and state *(a)* who issues them, *(b)* who authorises them, *(c)* their frequency of use, *(d)* the number of trials in which they have been used and *(e)* what authority drew up the rules relating to them; and what these rules are.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the former Home Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Waddington, to a question from the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 1 November 1990, at column *746*.

Prison Escapes

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of those prisoners who escaped from detention and who have not been recaptured in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The table gives the available information, detailing the numbers of prisoners who have escaped from penal establishments, or while being escorted outside penal establishments, and the numbers of escaped prisoners who have been recaptured or who have surrendered. The information is available from 20 June 1988, when a new centralised system for recording incident details was introduced.

	Escapers from penal establish-ments	*Escapers from escort*	*Recaptured/ surrendered prisoners*
20 June 1988 to 31 December 1988	110	55	43
1 January 1989 to 31 December 1989	179	112	115
1 January 1990 to 31 December 1990	197	119	142
1 January 1991 to 31 December 1991	311	145	251
1 January 1992 to 11 July 1992	140	63	109

Primates

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will withdraw or amend licences to supply primates for United Kingdom laboratories to prevent the supply of wild-caught primates and those captive-bred in their country of origin.

Mr. Charles Wardle: While the purpose-breeding of primates in this country for use in research meets some of the demand for the supply of such animals, the numbers and species bred does not meet all the demand. Where the use of primates in research is justified under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, there may be no alternative to the use of wild-caught primates or those

captive-bred abroad. Inspectors do, however, encourage the use of primates purpose-bred in this country where such animals are available.

We have no plans to withdraw or amend the certificates of designation of breeding and supplying establishments issued under section 7 of the 1986 Act to prevent the supply of wild-caught primates or those captive-bred abroad.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will initiate a review of the care and use of primates in research in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The use of primates in research is strictly controlled and special justification is required under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 before the use of primates in research is allowed. The special considerations applying to the housing and care of laboratory primates are recognised in the Home Office code of practice.

The Home Office is carrying out a survey of large non-human primates holding facilities this year. One of the main aims of this special survey will be to examine the progress made in improving holding facilities since an earlier review carried out in 1988.

I understand that the Animal Procedures Committee intends undertaking a review of laboratory primates later this year as part of its continuing interest in this area. The Government look forward to receiving the conclusions of this review in due course.

Passport Applications

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy for passport application forms to be made available at sub-post offices.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This has been passed to the chief executive of the Passport Agency who will reply shortly. A copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Firearms

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to implement the European Community directive on the control of the acquisition and possession of weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have today laid before Parliament draft regulations under the European Communities Act 1972. These regulations will, if approved, transpose the directive into law in Great Britain. Domestic controls on firearms will remain substantially unchanged. However the private possession of firearms disguised as other objects will be lawful only for museums, collectors and others duly authorised. We intend to make arrangements for ex-gratia payments to people who as a result of these regulations surrender such firearms before 1 January 1993 which were lawfully held by them on or before 16 July 1992. Further details of these arangements will be announced in the autumn.

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will lay before Parliament the third annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have placed a copy of the annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee in the Library of both Houses today.

Police Responsibilities and Rewards

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement about financial provision for the inquiry on police responsibilities and rewards.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: On 20 May 1992 I announced my intention to set up an inquiry to look at police responsibilities and rewards, reporting to me by the end of May 1993. Parliamentary approval for this new service will be sought in a winter supplementary estimate for the Home Office administration, immigration and police support services, England and Wales vote—class IX, vote 3. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £334,000 will be met by repayable advances from the contingencies fund.

Young Offenders

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are proposed for the committal of young persons sentenced to periods of detention in young offender institutions following the implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Criminal Justice Act 1991, which comes into effect on 1 October, changes sentencing arrangements for those under 18 years of age and replaces the juvenile court by a new youth court to deal with all young persons up to the age of 17.

These changes will be reflected in the way in which the prison service manages the sentenced young offender population. Two new age bands will be introduced of 15 to 17 years for juveniles, as opposed to 14 to 16 years at present, and 18 to 20 years for young adults.

The proposed arrangements for the committal of male young offenders sentenced to periods of detention in a young offender institution will be as follows. Juveniles will in future be taken direct from the court of sentence to one of six designated juvenile institutions at Deerbolt, north Yorkshire, Feltham in London, Guys Marsh, Dorset, Onley, Warwickshire, Werrington, Staffordshire, and Whetherby, west Yorkshire. A further young offender institution, Thorn Cross near Warrington in Cheshire, will also hold juveniles who are considered suitable to be housed in open conditions.

Further consultation will now take place with other criminal justice agencies in respect of the catchment areas each establishment will serve. All young adults will be committed to an allocation unit in the nearest remand centre or local prison serving the court. Those serving short sentences, who are currently subject to separate direct committal arrangements, will be allocated to a young offender institution at the earliest opportunity. Closeness to home will be an important consideration in the allocation decision.

It is not proposed to make any changes to the committal arrangements for young women who will be affected by the new provisions. They will continue to be held in the most appropriate female establishment closest to their homes.

Unconvicted Prisoners

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster North): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress has been made in developing the separate statement of principle for unconvicted prisoners, referred to in paragraph 7.5 of the White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice."

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The prison service has adopted a statement in the following terms:

"Unconvicted prisoners are presumed to be innocent. Subject to the duty to hold them and deliver them to court securely and to the need to maintain order in establishments, they will be treated acordingly and, in particular, will be allowed all reasonable facilities to—

seek release on bail
preserve their accommodation and employment
prepare for trial
maintain contact with relatives and friends
pursue legitimate business and social interests
obtain help with personal problems

They will receive health care appropriate to their needs. They will have opportunities for education, religious observance, exercise and recreation and, where possible, for training and work."

The statement will be included in the material issued for the information of new unconvicted prisoners and will feature in the training material of new prison officers.

The statement of the task of the prison service set out in the "Prison Service Management Manual" and guidance in that manual for preparation of governors' contracts with their area managers have been expanded to reflect the separate status of unconvicted prisoners and the revised guidance will be issued shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Auditing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many times in 1989, 1990 and 1991 company auditors filed a statement in respect of sections 390(2)a and (2)b of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The number of notices of auditors' resignations received by the registrars of companies for England and Wales and for Scotland was as follows:

Year	*Number of notices*
1989	9,452
1990	12,494
1991	15,787

Until 31 March 1990 notices were sent in accordance with section 390(3) of the Companies Act 1985, as originally enacted. Subsequently notices were sent in accordance with section 392(3) of the Companies Act 1985, as substituted by the Companies Act 1989.

Air Pollution

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to provide specialist assistance to small businesses suffering economic hardship arising from the new requirements to comply with the part I air pollution process controls under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Leigh: In framing air pollution controls under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authorities are, however, required to apply the principles of best available techniques not entailing excessive costs which requires companies to use the best available techniques provided these do not entail excessive costs. Individual authorisations are a matter for the companies and local authorities concerned. My Department has been involved in discussions over the guidelines which inform local authorities.

My Department operates a number of schemes of assistance and provides information and advice to help large and small firms to develop and adopt the technologies and practices which will enable them to remain competitive in the face of rising environmental standards. In particular, the Department's environmental inquiry point offers free advice on a range of environmental issues; and it is open to small firms to use the consultancy initiatives to obtain assisted consultancy help on specific environmental problems. I have also recently announced that my Department will be piloting "one-stop shops" to provide small firms with initial guidance on all matters relevant to their competitive position, including environmental matters.

Share Option Schemes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he proposes to review the extent and nature of executive share option schemes; and what discussions he has had with the Association of British Insurers about its guidelines for the exercise of executive share options.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I am aware of the association's guidelines and would support it in urging companies to link share options to sustained underlying growth of the company. This does not require any change to the Companies Act provisions affecting those participating in share option schemes.

Consulting Grants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consulting grants are available through the enterprise initiative; and if he will publish a table showing the number of grants taken up, and their cost in each standard region during the last three financial years.

Mr. Leigh: Under the enterprise initiative consultancy help scheme, the DTI pays up to two thirds of the cost of consultancy projects, for small and medium-sized enterprises, in the following areas: business planning, design, financial and management information systems, manufacturing and services systems, marketing and quality. Details of the numbers of assisted projects in each region during the last three financial years, and the associated financial contribution from DTI, are as follows:

Enterprise initiative consultancy scheme: Expenditure by region

Region	Financial year 1989-90		Financial year 1990-91		Financial year 1991-92	
	Completed projects	DTI contribution (£ thousands)	Completed projects	DTI contribution (£ thousands)	Completed projects	DTI contribution (£ thousands)
North East	540	1,709	583	2,287	765	3,119
North West	1,964	6,192	2,032	7,002	2,165	6,905
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,157	3,987	1,172	4,723	1,482	5,969
West Midlands	1,332	4,343	1,236	4,963	1,680	6,912
East Midlands	726	2,136	781	2,654	1,017	3,694
South West	894	2,491	1,028	2,981	1,182	3,795
East	725	1,922	828	2,316	1,032	3,227
South East	2,355	6,905	2,834	7,751	3,302	11,157
Scotland	1,054	3,631	806	3,137	1,007	4,248
Wales	644	2,278	633	2,418	755	3,108
Total	11,391	35,594	11,933	40,232	14,387	52,134

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Wells: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The cost to the Monopolies and Mergers commission of carrying out the inquiry into the Commonwealth Development Corporation is estimated at £570,000.

Breathing Equipment

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department will be taking to encourage British manufacturers to produce in quantity breathing-gas-based passenger protective breathing equipment meeting the EUROCAE ED-65 specification published on 1 April 1991, for placement by operators of British-registered passenger transport aircraft.

Mr. Sainsbury: None. This is a matter for the commercial judgment of the companies concerned.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Leigh: The Government continue to help small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

Measures operated by my Department to assist small businesses include:

The enterprise initiative consultancy help scheme. In the year ended March 1992, 23,342 applications were received and 17,996 were approved.

The small firms merit award for research and technology (SMART) scheme. Last year 180 grants, the maximum number on offer, were made.

Support for products under research (SPUR) which helps small firms develop new products and processes. In the first 12 months of the scheme, to February 1992, 100 grants were offered worth over £9 million.

For the future, I intend to establish a network of first stop shops to act as a central signposting and referral service for small firms to all the business support measures available in an area from all sources. As a first step, 10 to 15 pilot projects will be established as quickly as possible.

The loan guarantee scheme enhances smaller firms access to finance. In the 12 months to 30 May 1992, 2,916 loans were guaranteed to a value of £69 million.

A guide to sources of venture capital under £250,000 was published. This comprises a booklet which aims to take some of the mystery out of venture capital and a directory which lists more than 200 organisations throughout the country which offer smaller amounts of venture capital.

Informal investment demonstration projects have been established by five training and enterprise councils in partnership with other local organisations. They help bring together potential investors and small businesses seeking investment. The projects, which were established with pump-priming money from the Employment Department, were established in January 1992 and will run for two years.

New measures were announced at the time of the 1992 Budget to help small firms. These include new Government contracting terms requiring those companies awarded Government contracts to pay their subcontractors promptly; consideration of changes to company reporting requirements to oblige large companies to state their payment terms and performance in annual reports and accounts; improvements to court procedures for debt recovery and financial assistance for trade associations to develop new prompt payment initiatives.

The Department monitors all its programmes and also commissions external evaluations which are published. In May 1992 the Employment Department published "Small Firms in Britain" which was sent to all Members of Parliament. This report surveys developments in the sector, including key statistical indicators and outlines overall Government policy towards small firms.

RETEX Grants

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the representations he has received concerning the allocation of RETEX grants to parts of areas designated for objective 1, 2 or 5(b) of the structural funds in Lancashire.

Mr. Sainsbury: Representations have been received from a number of local interests.

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he will take to consult interested

parties on the allocation of RETEX grants within areas designed for objective 1, 2 or 5(b) of the structural funds in Lancashire.

Mr. Sainsbury: The actual allocation of RETEX grants, as with other Community structural funds initiatives and programmes, will be a matter for special committees established for the purpose, under the terms of operational programmes. The United Kingdom and other member states have until December 4 to present these to the Commission.

The Government are currently considering what arrangements are appropriate for the drawing up and implementation of the programmes. The views of local authorities, trade associations and other interested parties have been and will continue to be taken into account.

Coal Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list *(a)* the collieries operative in Wales and *(b)* the number of miners employed in (i) Wales and (ii) Great Britain, in (1) 1971, (2) 1981 and (3) 1991.

Mr. Eggar: There are currently four British Coal collieries operating in Wales—Betws, Taff Merthyr and Tower in south Wales and Point of Ayr in north Wales. The total number of men on colliery books employed by British Coal in Wales and Britain in 1971-72, 1981-82 were as follows:

	South Wales	*North Wales*	*Britain*
1971-72	36,100	2,500	274,000
1981-82	24,300	1,200	212,800
1991-92	890	455	43,800

In addition, British Coal currently licences about 140 deep mines, about 100 of which are in south Wales. The licensed sector employs around 1,500 men, of whom about 800 are employed in south Wales. Figures for 1971-72 and 1981-82 are not readily available.

Regional Assistance

Mr. William Powell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list each recipient company and the level of grant provided through regional selective assistance since 1984-85 in the Corby area.

Mr. Sainsbury: Details of offers of regional selective assistance are normally made public only after the company has made a claim and has been paid. Since 1984-85 there are 58 companies in the Corby travel-to-work area who have benefited from regional selective assistance. The firms and the offers made and accepted for £5,000 and above are as follows:

Name of company	*Offer value (£)*
A. G. Thompson (UK) Ltd.	5,000
Advanced Textile Printers Ltd.	125,000
Albion Group Ltd.	25,000
Alfred Engelmann Ltd.	230,000
Aluminium Shapes Ltd.	140,000
Applied Printed Systems Ltd.	6,500
Aqua-Gas Manuf Ltd.	75,000
Austin Productions Ltd.	350,000
Bambo Ltd.	25,000
Blandburgh Nemo Ltd.	150,000
Blaze Advertising & Marketing Ltd.	10,000
BPCC Corby Ltd.	100,000
Ceramic Developments (Midlands) Ltd.	18,000
Certech International Ltd.	160,000
Cheminex Laboratories Ltd.	25,000
Corby Bottlers plc.	65,000
Corby Polymex Ltd.	180,000
County Powder Coaters Ltd.	18,000
Curver Consumer Products Ltd.	1,500,000
Drilltec (UK) Ltd.	65,000
DU Bois plc.	122,000
Dulmison (UK) Ltd.	180,000
Field, Sons & Co. Ltd.	250,000
Fixit (Adhesive) Ltd.	120,000
Heditos Ltd.	20,000
Hedemora Eng Ltd.	13,000
Honicel UK Ltd.	136,495
Impress Printers	25,000
Interoll Ltd.	280,000
Ion Deposition Ltd.	50,000
J. Dyson & Co. Ltd.	15,000
Jarratt Brushes Ltd.	20,000
Johnsen & Jorgensen (Plastics) Ltd.	180,000
Liftcran & Co. Ltd.	115,000
Lincolt Ltd.	25,000
Merley Paper Converters Ltd.	15,000
Mezzanine Floor Co. Ltd.	25,000
Midland Battery Distribution	38,000
N.C.T. & S. Ltd.	100,000
Newteam Ltd.	184,610
Oxford University Press	70,000
Peavey Electronics (UK) Ltd.	90,000
Perfil Ltd.	210,000
Powdertech (Corby) Ltd.	15,000
Premier Python Products Ltd.	25,000
Roscope Ltd.	25,000
Sias Foods (UK) Ltd.	450,000
Solway Foods Ltd.	50,000
Supermix Systems Ltd.	34,000
Suretred (UK) Ltd.	100,000
Taurostone Ltd.	20,000
Tradesource Ltd.	90,000
Unit Two Glass Ltd.	95,000
Weldon Stone Enterprises Ltd.	12,000
White Welding & MFG Inc. (Powerbrace)	160,000
Willett Systems Ltd.	25,000
Woodman Developments Ltd.	12,000
Zeller Plastik UK Ltd.	150,000

Radio

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Government's response to the recommendations contained in the report of the radio spectrum review committee stage 2: 3,400 MHz to 30 GHz, published in September; and when the response will be published.

Mr. Leigh: Following publication of the report, I and my colleagues have had the opportunity to consider the recommendations in detail. We are in full agreement with their intended aim to strengthen the management of the radio spectrum in the interests of more efficient use of this valuable resource.

When the report was published on 30 September 1991, my predecessor announced the Government's response to two of the recommendations and stated that the Government intended to publish a consultative document on the future management of the radio spectrum in the United Kingdom. Some of the issues raised in the report

would benefit from wider consultation and therefore it is my intention that they be included in the consultative document.

The Government's written response to the recommendations is now available from the Library, Radiocommunications Agency, Room 605, Waterloo Bridge house, London SE1 8UA. Telephone 071 215 2352/2140.

I have placed copies of the response in the Library of the House.

International Investment

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's performance in attracting internationally mobile investment projects in 1991-92.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department's Invest in Britain Bureau—IBB—announced in its annual report published today that 1991-92 was another good year for inward investment and jobs in the United Kingdom.

Between 1 April 1991 and 31 March 1992, 332 direct investment projects by foreign-owned companies into the United Kingdom were recorded by the IBB. On the basis of information supplied by the companies at the time of the announcement, it is estimated that these projects will create or safeguard over 50,000 jobs.

These results demonstrate, yet again, the attractiveness of this country to foreign investors. It is very pleasing that our lead position within the European Community as a partner to foreign investors has remained despite the world recession.

The results are also evidence of the successful partnership my Department has with many public and private sector organisations involved in the promotion of inward investment both at home and abroad.

I am arranging for a copy of the report to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

EC Company Law

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress is being made on the implementation of the EC 11th company law directive and the bank branches directive.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Department of Trade and Industry has today issued a consultation document inviting comments on draft regulations to implement the EC 11th company law directive and the bank branches directive.

These draft regulations represent a major step towards full implementation of both.

The 11th company law directive deals with the disclosures, including accounting documents, to be made by the branches established in a member state of companies registered in another member state or non-EC country. The bank branches directive complements the 11th directive by setting special requirements regarding the disclosure of the accounting documents of a credit of financial institution which has established a branch in a member state, but has its head office outside that member state.

The Government have also taken the opportunity provided by these regulations to deal with two other minor matters relating to the accounts of banks. These are amendments to sections 255A and 255B of the Companies Act 1985 as inserted by the Companies Act 1985 (Bank Accounts) Regulations 1991.

Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Library. Views are invited by 23 September 1992.

Company Inspections

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps are taken to maintain confidentiality when pre-publication copies of reports into the affairs of companies by inspectors appointed under section 432 of the Companies Act 1985 are provided to certain persons referred to in such reports; and what assessment he has made of their effectiveness.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Secretary of State has discretion under the legislation to provide copies of unpublished reports of inspectors to persons referred to in the report. When, in the interests of fairness, the Department exercises its discretion to do so, it requires those concerned, including advisers, to give strict undertakings to preserve the report's confidentiality. Where these undertakings exceptionally appear to have been breached, the Department has and will continue to take firm action. It may seek an injunction from the court to prevent further unauthorised disclosure. Where advisers are found to have breached undertakings, the Department will, where appropriate, pursue the matter with the professional body concerned. The Department has recently drawn one such case to the attention of the Law Society and it has concluded its proceedings, which are confidential, in favour of the Department.

Petroleum Licensing

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about further onshore petroleum licensing.

Mr. Eggar: I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses the text of a notice, which will be published as soon as possible in the *Official Gazette*, inviting companies to apply for exploration licences in respect of unlicensed areas in Great Britain and certain near-shore waters. The notice specifies that applications should be made on Wednesday 21 October 1992. Application forms and guidance notes will be available from my Department.

I shall separately be inviting holders of production licences to apply to transfer exploration acreage within their existing licences to the new style exploration licences, subject to agreement being reached on a satisfactory work programme for the area.

Successful applicants will be offered exploration licences containing the conditions set out in the Petroleum (Production) (Landward Areas) Regulations 1991. The licences will grant rights for a term of six years and entitle the licensee to carry out seismic surveys and deep drilling subject to the need to obtain the requisite permission from the appropriate mineral planning authorities and landowners and occupiers.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils had not had their budgets for 1992-93 finalised by 1 July; and if she will publish a list of those TECs.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 1 July 1992 nine TECs had not signed a contract with the Department and therefore had not had their budgets for 1992-93 finalised. The TECs concerned were:

AZTEC
Central London TEC
City and Inner London North TEC
London East TEC
North London TEC
North West London TEC
SOLOTEC
South Thames TEC
West London TEC

However all these TECs have now indicated their willingness to sign contracts subject only to small points of detail. I anticipate that most of these contracts will be signed in the next few days.

Global Warming

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the research being conducted by the Health and Safety Executive into the effects of climate change attributable to the consequences of global warming.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Executive is not conducting any research into the effects of climate change attributable to the consequences of global warming. Research into the effects of climate change is outside the normal remit of the Health and Safety Executive. Government-funded research on this topic is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the achievements of her Department and her policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if she will publish the performance indicators by which her Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

Following this year's general election, policy responsibility for some services for new and small businesses has been transferred from this Department to the Department of Trade and Industry. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade detailed the successes of this Department over the last 12 months in helping small businesses in answer to a similar question from my hon. Friend.

Measures that continue to be operated by the Department to assist small businesses include business start-up—the enterprise allowance scheme—which provides an allowance in the early months of trading and on-going support to unemployed people who start their own businesses. The performance of this programme is measured in terms of numbers taking up support and the survival rate of these businesses. From April 1991, training and enterprise councils have been able to adapt the scheme to suit local economic needs. TECs are now placing greater emphasis on increasing the quality of the businesses they support in an effort to improve survival. More than 60,000 people were awarded an allowance in the 1990-91 financial year, and just under 50,000 in 1991-92. Survey evidence has consistently shown that of those people completing the full term of the allowance approximately 76 per cent. are still trading six months later, that is, 18 months after start-up.

The Department makes significant funds available to TECs to enable them to support the development of small businesses. TECs provide a varied range of help including consultancy support, advice and guidance and training audits. More than 100,000 businesses were assisted in the 1991-92 financial year. TECs increasingly are linking this support to achievement of the Investors in People national standard. Investors in People sets a standard for the training and development of people—a vital requirement for any business large or small. Of the 67 employers that have met the standard so far, 32 are employers with fewer than 200 employees. There are more than 1,100 employers committed to achieving the standard, including many small businesses.

The Department monitors all its programmes and also commissions external evaluations which are published. In May 1992 we published "Small Firms in Britain" which was sent to all Members of Parliament. This report surveys developments in the sector, including key statistical indicators and outlines overall Government policy towards small firms.

Travel-to-work Areas

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the total population covered by each travel-to-work area, together with *(a)* the numbers unemployed, *(b)* the percentage unemployed on the broad definition, and *(c)* the percentage unemployed on the narrow definition, for April 1984, November 1984, April 1990, April 1992 and May 1992, setting out the travel-to-work areas in order of percentage unemployed on the broad definition, and in order of percentage unemployed on the narrow definition for each date.

Mr. McLoughlin: The latest available population data for travel-to-work areas are from the 1981 census of population. These and the other information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the travel-to-work areas covering the 35 per cent. of the United Kingdom population with the highest percentage unemployment using the broad definition on April 1984, November 1984, April 1990, April 1992 and May 1992, distinguishing between those travel-to-work areas covering the top 15 per cent. and those covering the next 20 per cent.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list for the United Kingdom by travel-to-work area, or the smallest area available, the economic activity rate according to the 1981 census data and according to estimates for June 1984, June 1990 and the latest available date.

Mr. McLoughlin: The latest available data on economic activity rates for travel-to-work areas are from the 1981 census of population. These can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if she will list the travel-to-work areas covering the 35 per cent. of the United Kingdom population with the lowest percentage of employees in employment as a percentage of the June 1979 figure, with the lowest percentage first, and distinguishing between the 15 per cent. with the lowest percentages and the next 20 per cent. for June 1984, June 1990, June 1991 and the most recent date available;

(2) if she will list for the United Kingdom by travel-to-work area, or the smallest area available the number of employees in employment as a percentage of the number in employment in June 1979, June 1984, June 1990, June 1992 and the most recent date available listing the travel-to-work areas in descending order with the highest percentage first.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information available for employees in employment in local areas, including travel-to-work areas, is from the censuses of employment for 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1989, as at September of each of those years. This can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Quarrymen

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many quarrymen were employed in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Great Britain in (1) 1971, (2) 1981, and (3) 1991, respectively; and if he will list the quarries operative in Wales in (i) 1971, (ii) 1981 and (iii) 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: From the 1971 census of population, the number of males in the occupation classification

"surface workers not elsewhere classified (n.e.c.)—mines and quarries"

was 2,200 in Wales and 16,270 in Great Britain. From the 1981 census of population, the number of males under the occupation classification

"Miners (not coal), quarrymen and well drillers"

was 930 in Wales and 15,520 in Great Britain. Occupation data from the 1991 census of population should be available in the first half of 1993. The number of operational quarries in Wales in 1991 has been provisionally estimated by the Central Statistical Office to be 262. No equivalent figures are available for 1971 and 1981.

Employment Agencies

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications for new licences were received from employment agencies in April 1992; and in what proportion of these cases a licence was offered to the applicant within eight weeks.

Mr. McLoughlin: In April 1992, a total of 376 applications for new licences were received, 86·7 per cent. of which resulted in a licence being offered to the applicant within eight weeks.

Work Permits

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications for a work permit to employ a non-EC national were received in April; what proportion of these applications were decided within eight weeks; and what proportion of applications on behalf of entertainers, sportspeople and models were decided within four weeks.

Mr. McLoughlin: A total of 3,498 applications for work permits were received in April 1992. Of the 3,390 cases processed in that month, 90·3 per cent. had been decided within eight weeks of receipt.

Six hundred and twenty-three of the total applications decided in April 1992 were for entertainers, sportspeople and models; 85·4 per cent. of these cases were decided within four weeks and 97·4 per cent. within eight weeks of receipt.

This exceeds the Department's published standard of 75 per cent. within eight weeks and was achieved at a time when the section responsible for work permits was in the process of relocating to Sheffield.

Redundancy Payments Service

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what proportion of letters received by the redundancy payments service from members of the public since 1991 have had a reply within five working days;

(2) what proportion of claims received by the redundancy payments service since 18 November 1991 have been paid within 14 weeks.

Mr. McLoughlin: Since the publication of the redundancy payments service charter in November 1991, 97 per cent. of letters have been replied to within five days, and 84 per cent. of claims have been paid within 14 weeks.

Wages Inspectorate

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many complaints from employees were received by the wages inspectorate in March, April and May 1992; and in how many of these cases the inspectorate's investigation was completed within four weeks.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is as follows:

	Number of complaints received	*Number of complaint inspections completed within four weeks*
1992		
March	121	79
April	112	70
May	108	63

Employees are told the results of investigations into their complaint. If the investigation cannot be completed within four weeks the employee is told about the progress of the investigation.

Noise

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what was the implementation date of the Noise at Work Regulations 1989; what action is taken by

the Health and Safety Executive to ensure that employers comply with them; how many employers have been prosecuted under the regulations for each year since they came into force; and if she will specify the regulations involved in each case;

(2) what groups are exempt from the requirements of the Noise at Work Regulations 1989;

(3) how many employees are estimated by the Health and Safety Executive to be exposed to noise at or above 85 dB(A).

Mr. McLoughlin: The Noise at Work Regulations 1989 came into force on 1 January 1990. Since their introduction, health and safety inspectors have promoted awareness of and compliance with the regulations through widespread advisory and enforcement action. Wide publicity has been achieved through a series of free leaflets and extensive guidance. One employer has been prosecuted for breaches of regulations 4, 8, 9 and 11. In addition, 948 improvement notices and 54 prohibition notices have been issued.

The Health and Safety Executive estimates that about 1·7 million workers are exposed to noise levels above 85 dB(A).

The regulations apply to all workers covered by the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, except the crews of sea-going ships and aircraft or hovercrafts moving under their own power. They do not apply to workers in the offshore industry.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many Health and Safety Executive inspectors are specialists in noise control.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Executive has 12 specialist noise inspectors. They are supported by administrative and research staff with special qualifications in noise. All general Health and Safety Executive inspectors have received training in noise control.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much revenue has been received from the sale of literature and videos published by the Health and Safety Executive related to the Noise at Work Regulations 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: Revenue received by the Health and Safety Executive from the sale of publications related to the Noise at Work Regulations 1989 up to 1 July 1992 amounts to approximately £68,000. No videos have been produced by the HSE relating to these regulations.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how the requirements in the noise directive on audiometry are being implemented in the United Kingdom;

(2) what measures the Health and Safety Executive has taken to ensure that employees exposed to noise at or above 85 dB(A) know they are entitled to a free hearing test through the national health service.

Mr. McLoughlin: EC directive 86/188/EC on the protection of workers from noise at work requires that workers exposed to 85 dB(A) or more should have access to hearing checks by a doctor. Anyone who is worried about any aspect of his or her health, including his or her hearing, already has access to the full range of NHS services.

The Health and Safety Executive has published a free leaflet for employees outlining the main requirements of the regulations and advising them about the risks to hearing of noise at work. The leaflet contains advice to workers to consult their doctor if they think there is something wrong with their hearing. The HSE's noise guide No. 1 also draws attention to employers' responsibilities to provide information and advice to employees.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans exist in the Health and Safety Executive or European Commission to reduce the first action level of the Noise at Work Regulations 1989; and what level is proposed.

Mr. McLoughlin: The European Directive on which the Noise at Work Regulations are based is to be reviewed by 1994. The European Commission is considering a proposal for a directive on the protection of workers from physical agents. This would replace the directive on noise and require a revision of the Noise at Work Regulations.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Health and Safety Executive will update its publication, "100 Practical Solutions of Noise Control at Source".

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Executive is currently examining whether a second edition of its publication titled "100 Practical Applications of Noise Reduction Methods" would be useful.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what noise surveys have been carried out in her Department's buildings, since the enactment of the Noise at Work Regulations 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are nearly 2,000 buildings in the Employment Department group. The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Health and Safety

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what legislation her Department is proposing to ensure that workers who exercise their rights under article 8(4) of the framework directive (89/391/EEC) are not disadvantaged.

Mr. McLoughlin: Victimisation of workers who raise safety issues is totally unacceptable. The Government intends to include in a Bill to be introduced later in the current session of Parliament provisions which will go beyond the requirements of article 8(4) of the EC framework directive.

These provisions will include protection for all employees, regardless of length of service or hours of work, against victimisation if they leave their workplace or otherwise take appropriate action in the face of serious and imminent danger.

Safety Directives

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which Minister was responsible at the time *(a)* the manual handling of loads directive 90/269/EEC, *(b)* the display screen equipment directive 90/270/EEC,

(c) the carcinogens directive 90/394/EEC, *(d)* the biological agents directive 90/679/EEC, *(e)* the temporary or mobile construction sites directive and *(f)* the temporary workers' directive 91/383/EEC were agreed; how the United Kingdom voted at the meeting the directives were agreed; and on what date they were agreed.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is as follows:

Directive	*Date of adoption*
90/269/EEC	29 May 1990
90/270/EEC	29 May 1990
90/394/EEC	28 June 1990
90/679/EEC	26 November 1990
91/383/EEC	25 June 1991
Construction sites[1]	24 June 1992

[1] No directive number yet allocated.

All the directives, except 90/394/EEC, were agreed during meetings of the Labour and Social Affairs Council. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who was the then Secretary of State for Employment, represented the United Kingdom at the Councils up to and including 25 June 1991. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment represented the United Kingdom at the 24 June 1992 Council.

Directive 90/394/EEC was adopted at the Telecommunications Council. The United Kingdom was represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, acting on advice from Employment Department Ministers in respect of that directive.

The proceedings of the Council of Ministers are confidential.

Fertilisers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what discussions she has had with the Fertiliser Manufacturers Association concerning the safe storage and recording of deliveries of ammonium nitrate and other fertilisers and associated substances which might be used in the making of explosives;

(2) what instructions or advice she has given to farmers in Great Britain concerning the safe storage and recording of stocks of ammonium nitrate and other fertilisers which might be used in the manufacture of explosives.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has not had discussions with the Fertiliser Manufacturers Association or given advice to farmers on these matters.

Earlier this year, a deputy director general of the Health and Safety Executive and other senior officials met representatives of the Fertiliser Manufacturers Association. Their concern over the apparently unsatisfactory storage of some imported ammonium nitrate fertilisers was discussed. As a result, Health and Safety Executive inspectors are making special visits to a number of places, including farms, to examine conditions of storage.

A guidance note on the storage and handling of ammonium nitrate has been published by the Health and Safety Executive. During visits, inspectors are drawing attention to this and other published guidance. A prohibition notice has been issued in one case, where large quantities of ammonium nitrate fertiliser were being imported under unsafe conditions.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what direct consequences for public expenditure would arise if the latest proposed draft of the EC working time directive is implemented in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* No directive on working time has been adopted by the EC Council. The Government do not accept the need for such a directive and reserve the right to challenge it, if adopted, in the European Court of Justice. The proposed directive as currently drafted would require member states to implement it within three years of its adoption but does not contain specific requirements on administration and enforcement. It is likely that there would be some administrative costs for public authorities. These cannot be precisely quantified, but would be small compared to the potential cost of compliance for employers, which the Government have previously estimated at about £5 billion. This cost would be substantially reduced as a result of the agreements reached at the Social Affairs Council on 24 June. Any remaining costs of compliance to employers in the public sector cannot yet be estimated. Any effect on public expenditure would depend on the arrangements for financing such costs within the overall framework of public expenditure control.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what account is taken in receipt of the mobility component of the disability living allowance in determining the provision of assistance under the fares-to-work scheme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* When determining grants under the assistance with fares to work—FTW—scheme, the higher and lower rate mobility component of the disability living allowance—DLA—are taken into account in the following ways. Recipients of the higher rate mobility component who are able to drive and use it to resolve their mobility problems by driving themselves do not qualify for the FTW grant. Exceptionally, where a client's car is temporarily unavailable due to servicing or breakdown, they may qualify for the grant on a temporary basis. Other instances when the FTW grant can be made available on a temporary basis to such clients are where they are learner drivers or where they are making arrangements to obtain a car through Motability or another source.

Recipients of the higher rate mobility component who are legally barred from driving or medically advised not to drive may be entitled to an FTW grant. The grant, however, would be abated by one third of the mobility component. In all cases where FTW recipients receive the lower rate mobility component, the FTW grant, if payable, is also abated by one third. These abatements carry forward, in respect of DLA, a policy which applied in respect of the mobility allowance and which was designed to avoid double funding. A number of organisations have

made representations arguing that the abatement should not apply, and we are considering the points they have made.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Household Incomes

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) on 8 June, *Official Report*, column *51*, when in July the next edition of the households below average income statistics will be published.

Mr. Lilley: The new edition of the households below average incomes—HBAI—statistics, covering the years 1979 to 1988-89, has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

In order to improve the statistical accuracy of the results, this edition combines data from the years 1988 and 1989. It also incorporates methodological changes which were the subject of consultation with a range of independent experts in 1991, and takes into account recommendations of the Social Security Select Committee.

Like its predecessors, this edition of HBAI is based on the family expenditure survey, FES. The primary purpose of the FES is to provide data for the construction of the retail prices index. Both its sample size and its method of compilation limit its usefulness as a source of data on family incomes, especially for small sub-groups of the population. Analysts in my Department have sought to overcome these limitations so far as possible—for example, by combining data from two consecutive years to enlarge the sample size—but it has become increasingly clear that the only real solution was to improve the data base itself. I have therefore authorised the establishment of a new family resources survey—FRS—which will in due course replace the FES as the main source of income and expenditure data for DSS purposes. Survey data for the FRS will begin to be collected in October 1992 and will in future years both improve and speed up the preparation of analyses such as the HBAI statistics.

Lodgers

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the reasons for the different treatment as regards benefits of men and women aged 60 years who take lodgers.

Miss Widdecombe: Differences in treatment could arise from the unequal state pension ages of men and women. The Government are committed to equalising state pension age and are now actively considering how best to achieve this.

Elderly People

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the effects on elderly people receiving income support of the recent letter circulated by the Benefits Agency saying that they will lose their support grant if they fail to give their consent to the agency's requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The administration of incomes support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Unemployment Benefits

Sir Malcolm Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost to public funds of *(a)* unemployment benefit and *(b)* related social security benefits paid to the unemployed in the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Burt: The information for 1991-92 is not yet available. However, the estimated costs are set out in tables 1 and 5 of the second departmental report—"Social Security, The Government's Expenditure Plans 1992-93 to 1994-95", Cm 1914, published in February 1992.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will amend section 12 of the disability living allowance handbook with regard to the latest scientific knowledge on myalgic encephalomyelitis.

Mr. Scott: The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board, which has been given the function of advising on the topicality and usefulness of the "Disability Handbook", is continuing to monitor the situation with regard to chapter 12 in the Handbook, which deals with myalgic encephalomyelitis.

Unemployment Benefit

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the value of unemployment benefit for a couple with two children aged under 11 years in relation to prices and earnings since 1976.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Date	*Total Unemployment Benefit* £	*Unemployment Benefit[1] at April 1992 Prices[3]* £	*Benefit as a percentage of gross average earnings[4]*
November 1976	27·50	90·82	36·0
April 1977[5]	26·50	80·48	33·7
November 1977	30·30	88·53	36·3
April 1978	28·20	79·35	31·6
November 1978	29·20	78·96	30·5
April 1979	27·20	69·53	26·8
November 1979	33·35	76·83	29·2
November 1980	35·90	71·72	26·6
November 1981	38·00	67·80	25·4
November 1982	41·05	68·93	25·6
November 1983	44·05	70·55	25·6
November 1984[2]	46·00	70·20	24·5
November 1985	49·25	71·27	24·7
July 1986	49·80	70·88	23·6
April 1987	50·85	69·33	22·7
April 1988	52·95	69·47	21·5
April 1989	56·10	68·12	20·8
April 1990	60·40	67·01	20·4
April 1991	66·95	69·82	21·0
April 1992	69·70	69·70	20·7

[1] Over 70 per cent of those registered as unemployed receive income support.

[2] Child dependency additions were abolished from 26 November 1984.

[3] Benefit has been calculated at April 1992 prices for comparison.

[4] Gross average weekly earnings are those of adult males for all occupations (new earnings survey) for the month in question.
[5] Child dependency addition for the eldest child was adjusted to take account of child benefit.

Pension Funds

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will take steps to ensure that auditors of pension funds are totally independent of the employer and do not provide other services to the company, its associates or its owner;

(2) if he will propose legislation under which actuaries of pension funds would be required to obtain independent corroboration of the accuracy of the information on which they base the opting-out certificate for the Occupational Pensions Board;

(3) what consideration his Department has given to the proposal that the Occupational Pensions Board should have the power to place the assets of a scheme under the control of an approved trustee if it believes that those assets are at risk;

(4) if he will take steps to ensure that changes in the contributions to pension funds by either employers or employees are quickly notified to each member of the fund;

(5) if he will extend the responsibilities of the Occupational Pensions Board to include supervision of the training of pension fund trustees;

(6) if he will introduce legislation to ensure that the advance authority of a majority of the trustees of a pension fund is required before any transaction with the employer, individual trustees or persons connected with them is permitted;

(7) if he will draw up proposals to establish a pensions tribunal to consider cases of pensions disputes beyond those which are the proper concern of the pensions ombudsman;

(8) what plans he has to extend the responsiblity, powers and resources of the Occupational Pensions Board;

(9) if he will draw up proposals under which pension funds trustees who find themselves in the minority on a trust board would have the right to seek independent expert advice;

(10) if he will draw up proposals under which auditors of pension funds would be required to append a statement to the accounts to the effect that the custody and signing procedures were satisfactory;

(11) if he will draw up proposals to amend pensions legislation to incorporate a practical system of fines and penalties against those who do not comply with the law;

(12) what plans he has to require pension fund trustees to *(a)* publish the annual report and accounts of the fund within seven months of the end of the accounting period and *(b)* file the report and accounts with the Occupational Pensions Board;

(13) if he will propose legislation under which the responsibilities of pension fund auditors would be extended to include a review of the trustees' report;

(14) if he will introduce legislation to restrict the freedom of management of companies to wind up pension schemes prematurely and unilaterally.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 14 July.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce legislation under which each member of a pension scheme would have the right, to be exercised at least annually, to acquire information on the value of their particular holding in their pension fund's portfolio.

Miss Widdecombe: In its response on 29 June to the Select Committee report on the operation of pension funds, the Government reaffirmed their manifesto commitment to give every member of an occupational scheme the right to an annual statement of the value of their savings.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for disability working allowance had been received at the last date for which figures are available; how many had been adjudicated; what percentage of those adjudicated had been successful; if he will break down the numbers of unsuccessful claims by reasons for rejection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The number of claims received up to 10 July, the last date for which figures are available, was 14,219 of which 13,463 have been adjudicated, and 9·5 per cent. of those were successful. The table shows the reason for unsuccessful claims.

	Number
Capital in excess of £16,000	9
Not in remunerative work	7,133
Income exceeds level at which Disability Working Allowance payable	1,170
In receipt of Family Credit	294
No qualifying benefit	3,420
Others	403

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will break down awards of disability working allowance according to whether the recipient was *(a)* previously in employment or *(b)* in receipt of an incapacity benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available centrally to say how many disability working allowance recipients were previously in employment. We estimate that up to the end of May 123 awards were made to people who had been receiving invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance in the 56 days before the date of claim.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will break down awards of disability working allowance by qualifying benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 13 July at columns *452-53*.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will break down awards of disability working allowance by *(a)* amount of award, *(b)* age, *(c)* sex and *(d)* marital status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 13 July at columns *452-53*. The average amount of awards is £30.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in East Kilbride constituency qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Night Attendance Allowance

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the progress of the claim for night attendance allowance, submitted by Mrs. T. Johnston, of Summerlands court, Summerlands close, Brixham; and whether Mrs. Johnston is entitled to an interim payment while her claim is being considered.

Mrs. Scott: The administration of attendance allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Hardship Payments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost of implementing the recommendation of the Social Security Advisory Committee that hardship payments to young people aged 16 to 17 years should be available as soon as it is accepted that hardship exists without the need for a further claim and interview with a social fund officer.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available. Immediate help is, however, already available to those at risk of severe hardship through the social fund crisis loan. Also, Benefits Agency offices are taking steps to simplify the claiming process.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what statements have been made to the Social Security Advisory Committee by his local office staff concerning the value of requiring young people eligible for hardship payments to apply for a crisis loan for the first one to two weeks; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Burt: The chairman and members of the Social Security Advisory Committee make frequent visits to local offices. Their conversations with staff members are not monitored or subjected to scrutiny by the Department or the Benefits Agency.

Disability Premium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether, following the Commissioner's decision CIS/121/1991, he will amend the income support regulations so that a person who chooses to sleep in the open rather than in a tent does not lose entitlement to a disability premium; and if he will explain his reasons.

Mr. Burt: We have no plans to do so. People who choose to sleep in the open generally incur lower living costs, and do not, therefore, qualify for premiums. Once they have found accommodation, and incur a liability for rent, people who have been sleeping in the open can claim housing benefit to meet reasonable accommodation costs.

Boarder's Premium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy in respect of amending the income support regulations to provide for a boarder's premium.

Mr. Burt: Income support, like all benefits, is continuously kept under review, subject to the Government's public expenditure and other priorities.

National Insurance Benefits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) *Official Report*, columns *85-86*, what were the savings in expenditure for 1991-92 resulting from the changes made to national insurance benefits since 1979, taking into account their cumulative effects.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the cumulative 1991-92 savings resulting from the changes to national insurance benefits listed in my reply of 6 July because since the measures were introduced there have been significant changes in the number and characteristics of beneficiaries, and in general economic circumstances.

Mrs. Ethel Pearse

Mr. Whitney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he intends to appeal against the Court of Appeal judgment in the case of Mrs. Ethel Pearse given on 12 June; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have decided not to appeal against the Court of Appeal judgment. The effect of the judgment is that a married woman who has received her graduated retirement benefit may also be entitled, for the same period, to earn increments to her category B retirement pension if that is deferred. This is contrary to the way in which the legislation had previously been interpreted. Arrangements are in hand to identify all cases which may benefit from the ruling and, where appropriate, to pay the arrrears of benefit. It is hoped that this will be completed by the end of this financial year. We propose to change the regulations so that, for future cases, the receipt of graduated retirement benefit will preclude increments.

Information Technology

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the annual report and accounts of the Information Technology Services executive agency for 1991-92 will be published.

Miss Widdecombe: The annual report and accounts for the Information Technology Services Agency were published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Warble Fly

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of cases of warble fly and the number of herds affected, by region, in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: There were two confirmed cases of warble fly in 1992, one in Cumbria and one in north Yorkshire. There were no confirmed cases of warble fly in 1991.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline his Ministry's guidelines on the procedure for the treatment of warble fly.

Mr. Soames: Warble fly is a notifiable disease, the presence or suspicion of which must be immediately reported to the local divisional veterinary officer.

If signs of infestation are found in any herd, it and all others within 3 km must be treated with an approved warblecide. Until treatment has been carried out, cattle movements are restricted.

Slurry Storage

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what investigations he has made into extending grant aid to roofing enclosed stock areas to reduce the required capacity for slurry storage.

Mr. Curry: The coverage of the grant scheme was carefully considered when it was introduced three years ago. It was decided to offer a high rate of grant focused on the core facilities which most farmers would need. In this way we are able to offer a 50 per cent. grant when the EC norm for this type of grant is 35 per cent. It was precisely because we did not grant aid roofing that we were able to persuade the EC Commission to accept our exceptionally high rate of grant. I have received no indications from the industry that it would be prepared to accept a lower rate of grant in order to allow the scheme to be extended.

Bee Diseases

Sir David Steel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures Her Majesty's Government have adopted to *(a)* investigate the causes of varroa jacobsoni, *(b)* combat the spread of the disease and *(c)* compensate those bee keepers whose livelihood has been affected as a result of the disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: (a) We have established from extensive investigations of infected premises that the mite, varroa jacobsoni is likely to have been in the United Kingdom for four to five years. The cause is most likely to have been an illegal importation of bees from an infected area.

(b) Following the discovery of varroasis in the United Kingdom on 5 April controls were put in place to minimise the spread of the disease and an extensive survey of apiaries carried out to check the extent of the infestation. An infected area has been declared and movement into and out of that area is prohibited except under licence. Inspection and sampling outside the infexted area revealed no evidence of the varroa mite. We are aware, however, that the mite is difficult to detect in the early stages of infestation. We are, therefore, continuing to keep the situation under close review and are prepared to amend the infected area if the disease is found outside its boundaries. The approval of veterinary medicines for the control of varroasis is being expedited and I hope that a licensed product will be available very shortly.

(c) It is not Government policy to offer compensation to bee keepers.

Fisheries Protection

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many fishing protection vessels the United Kingdom was employing at the latest available date; and how many fisheries protection personnel were engaged on such duties;

(2) if he will give the number of fisheries inspectors employed in the United Kingdom, at the latest available date.

Mr. Curry: The Royal Navy's fishery protection squadron currently comprises 13 ships, six to seven of which are likely to be engaged on fishery protection duties at any one time. The Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency (SFPA) has six civilian vessels and the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland has one.

The total number of Government fisheries inspectors —including SFPA marine officers with inspectorate duties but excluding staff on inland duties in Northern Ireland —is 184.

Fish Catch

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the sale value of the total United Kingdom fish catch for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Curry: The sale value of the total United Kingdom fish catch in 1991, including estimates for landings abroad, was £494 million. Landings into the United Kingdom by United Kingdom vessels amounted to £434 million.

Fisheries Management

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations have been made by his Department to non-EC Baltic and Mediterranean countries to improve effective regional fisheries management.

Mr. Curry: The Government have not made direct representations to non-EC Baltic and Mediterranean countries; competence for fisheries negotiations with third countries lies with the European Community. Fisheries in the Baltic are run by the International Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission in which the EC participates and in our presidency role this year we will co-ordinate views of other member states. In the Mediterranean EC member states are taking steps to improve fisheries management within their waters.

Further, on 9 June the EC Fisheries Council agreed initiatives should be taken to enable the other Mediterranean coastal states and a number of non-coastal third states whose fleets fish in the area to participate in the efforts to conserve and manage resources. The United Kingdom is always very supportive of moves to improve fisheries management.

Sea Mammals

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of small cetaceans caught in fishing nets *(a)* in British fishing waters and *(b)* by British fishing vessels in each year since 1975.

Mr. Curry: No detailed or complete statistics are available. A voluntary reporting scheme for incidental catches of marine mammals was introduced on 1 January 1992 to help provide information on these matters.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Curry: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

This Department has continued to contribute significantly to this process. The agreement reached in May 1992 on reform of the common agricultural policy reflected this Government's insistence that support policies under the CAP should increasingly be geared to the needs of the real market and establishes a framework for farmers to plan ahead. United Kingdom producers will particularly benefit from the Government's success in securing the removal from the package of the elements in the original proposals which would have discriminated against them. The measures agreed also ensure continuing support for those farming in some of our most difficult areas.

We are continuing to improve the opportunities for farmers to diversify into alternative income-generating activities by means of such schemes as the farm and conservation grant scheme, the farm diversification grant scheme, the farm woodland premium scheme and the environmentally sensitive areas scheme. There will also be scope for additional action arising from the agri-environmental action programme agreed as part of the wider CAP reform package.

All the schemes operated by this Department are closely monitored. Reports on particular schemes are published from time to time.

Dolphins

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 12 June, *Official Report*, column *320*, what efforts are currently being undertaken by his Department to encourage worldwide measures to ban dolphin encirclement in all fisheries.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom has always strongly supported measures to protect cetaceans in international fora. The practice of encirclement is carried out by purse-seine fishermen in the eastern tropical Pacific, and no United Kingdom or Community vessels are involved. I welcome a recent agreement by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, involving 13 countries with an interest in the eastern tropical Pacific yellow-fin tuna fishery, to reduce drastically the level of dolphin mortality by 1999.

Civil Servants' Shareholdings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Guidance in the Ministry's staff manual asks staff to notify their personnel point/establishment officer of any shareholdings they hold which represents more than 10 per cent. of the issued share capital in any agricultural, food or fishery businesses or of any shareholdings directly related to the area in which they work. Staff should consult their personnel point/establishment officer about the desirability of acquiring or retaining a shareholding if there is any question of possible conflict with the interests of the Department. Information on the number of notifications given within the last five years cannot be provided without disproportionate cost. Next steps agencies follow this guidance but may draw up their own separate guidance to avoid any possible conflict of interest in their area of responsibility.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC.

Mr. Curry: Deregulation considerations are an aspect of all policy discussions. The Minister and I have had a large number of meetings with our EC counterparts since 18 April and deregulation aspects have formed part of our discussions on many policy items. We are particularly conscious of the need to minimise burdens placed on MAFF industries by the EC and during the United Kingdom presidency we will continue to take every opportunity to reinforce this message with our EC counterparts and the Commission.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Curry: My Department's objectives are set out in its departmental report entitled "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1992/93 to 1994/95; Departmental Report by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Intervention Board" (Cmnd. 1903, February 1992). Divisions and branches are organised in accordance with these aims. A more detailed breakdown of objectives is available in "Ministerial Information in MAFF" (MINIM). Copies of both documents are in the Library of the House.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the written reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July 1992, *Official Report*, column *430*.

Sheep Scab (Revocation) Order 1992

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will outline the advice he sought when drawing up the Sheep Scab (Revocation) Order 1992; and if he will place it in the Library;

(2) if he will list the organisations he consulted when drawing up the Sheep Scab (Revocation) Order 1992; and if he will show which of those agreed with his final proposals.

Mr. Soames: I have placed a copy of our letter of 6 January 1992 on the future of sheep scab control in the Libraries of the House, together with a list of organisations consulted. Individual responses remain confidential.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of confirmed cases of BSE for each year since 1986 and each month in 1992 in *(a)* Dyfed, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Great Britain.

Mr. Soames: There were 847 cases of BSE confirmed in Great Britain prior to the disease becoming notifiable on 21 June 1988. Of these, 55 were in Wales, 33 of which were in Dyfed. Since then the number of confirmed cases is as follows, by year of report:

	Dyfed	*Wales*	*Great Britain*
1988	63	131	2,185
1989	238	506	7,136
1990	583	1,078	14,179
1991	1,256	2,232	25,013
January 1992	196	318	3,420
February 1992	156	302	2,871
March 1992	197	351	3,100
April 1992	187	294	2,771

1992 figures are incomplete due to the time between cases being reported and confirmation by histopathology.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of confirmed cases of BSE to date *(a)* in other countries of the European Community and *(b)* world-wide.

Mr. Soames: The following confirmed cases of BSE in other countries have been reported:

	Number
France	5
Republic of Ireland	55
Switzerland	17

In addition, there have been cases in Oman—two—and the Falkland Islands—one—in animals exported from the United Kingdom.

Pesticides

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Advisory Committee on Pesticides' final report on lindane and pentachlorophenol will be available.

Mr. Soames: It is anticipated that the Advisory Committee on Pesticides' evaluation document on lindane will be published before the end of 1992. A full review of pentachlorophenol is being undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive. It is expected that the results of the review will be published by mid-1995.

Fisheries Policies

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce to the Council of Ministers proposals for improving the consideration given to environmental effects of draft fisheries policies.

Mr. Curry: Given EC treaty obligations, environmental matters should be considered in the development of fisheries policies.

Battery Cages

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will use the period of the United Kingdom's presidency of the EC to persuade his European counterparts to introduce measures for a European-wide phase-out of the battery cage.

Mr. Soames: The EC Commission is to propose later this year revised welfare standards for laying hens in battery cages together with new welfare standards for alternative systems. The Government believe that the current Community standards for battery cages are inadequate and we will be pressing for the best possible welfare standards whatever the system of husbandry.

Shellfish Poisoning

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the projects relating to research into paralytic shellfish poisoning and associated problems to which his Department has contributed in the last three years or plans to support in the present financial year; and if he will indicate the amount contributed or to be contributed in each case.

Mr. Curry: During the financial years 1989-90 to 1992-93, £1·7 million will have been contributed to research into paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) and diarrhetic shellfish poisoning (DSP) as follows:

preliminary investigation into the distribution of dinoflagellate cysts in the sediments in the Ardtoe region —£2,000;

study of Alexandrium cysts off the east coast of Britain —£111,500;

culture of toxic dinoflagellates—£15,800;

detection of sodium channel-blocking toxins in British coastal waters—£51,300;

immunodetection of toxic dinoflagellates—£47,000;

isolation and purification of PSP toxin—£156,300;

development of reliable, sensitive and specific analytical methods and rapid assay procedures—£500,000 (PSP); £575,000 (DSP);

the effects of processing, storage, and cooking of shellfish containing PSP on the composition and toxicity of the toxin—£250,000.

Additionally, a surveillance programme is maintained, at a cost in the current financial year alone of £110,000.

Further work worth £1·3 million has been commissioned on scombrotoxin and phytoplankton research.

Dioxin

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department intends to issue guidelines to local people in the area surrounding the Coalite plant in Derbyshire on eating home grown vegetables; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It is unlikely that vegetables would pose any hazard to consumers provided that they are washed or peeled as appropriate in the normal manner. The Department does not therefore propose to issue any guidelines.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Ministry intends to take following the findings concerning the level of dioxin found in the blood of one of the farming families living near the Coalite plant in Derbyshire.

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

Department of Health representatives, together with the local consultant in communicable disease control from North Derbyshire health authority, have already visited the family involved to give them the results and explain their significance.

Although the level of dioxins are higher than normal background levels, they are most unlikely to cause adverse health effects. The family is no longer exposed to the source of the dioxins as they no longer consume their own farm milk, and their blood dioxin levels are expected to decline in the future.

Sheep Dipping

Mr. Mills: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made on the extent to which sheep dipping will continue after the removal of the statutory requirement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: We anticipate that unnecessary dipping will cease. It is impossible to estimate future dipping patterns.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held on 13 and 14 July; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I chaired this meeting of the Council. My hon. Friend the Minister of State and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary in my Department represented the United Kingdom.

Decisions were taken on a number of proposals relating to food quality, forest protection, veterinary checks, prevention against Newcastle disease and organic farming. The food quality proposal had been extensively amended to remove its undesirable features and was accordingly acceptable to the United Kingdom.

The Council had a first discussion on the very important draft regulation specifying how member states should ensure that the reformed CAP is properly controlled. This is important in terms of preventing fraud, and work will be taken forward urgently during the United Kingdom presidency.

European Agriculture Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what matters arising from the decisions taken at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development are due to be discussed at the European Agriculture Council on 13 and 14 July.

Mr. Curry: None at this Council. However, the integration of environmental considerations into agricultural policy will be a priority for the United Kingdom presidency in line with UNCED conclusions.

Fishery Protection

Mr. John Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column 387, if he will set out the information available to his Ministry on the performance by private-contracted vessels of the maritime fishery protection service in Scotland.

Mr. Curry: Surface fishery protection duties in Scotland are carried out partly by the Royal Navy and partly by the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency (SFPA) using civilian vessels. The SFPA will shortly publish its first annual report. This will analyse performance and the effectiveness of the fisheries protection services provided. A key indicator of fisheries protection performance is the number of boardings achieved. The number of boardings of fishing vessels by civilian-manned vessels of the SFPA has increased from 1,125 in 1985-86 to 2,100 in 1991-92.

Surplus Food

Mr. Whittingale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the invitation to organisations to participate in the 1992 surplus food scheme in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Pursuant to my written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon on 10 July 1992, *Official Report*, column *395*, I am placing a revised list of organisations designated under the EC surplus food scheme in the Libraries.

Farmers' Returns

Mr. Marland: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what terms the June returns from individual farmers are made available to public or private sector organisations; if he will list the organisations; and what distinction is made between returns of members of the Tenant Farmers' Association and others.

Mr. Curry: June agricultural and horticultural census returns from individual farmers are protected by the Agricultural Statistics Act 1979. Census forms can be released to a public or private sector organisation only with the prior written consent of the person by whom the information was furnished, and any other person with a financial interest in the holding. No distinction is made between respondents.

Fish (Ozone Depletion)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made on the effect of ozone depletion on fish yields.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

The effect, if any, of changes in ozone levels may well fall within the wide range of natural fluctuations in fish populations. The Government monitor ozone levels and we are keeping the matter under review.

DEFENCE

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's requirement for new tracked and wheeled light tactical combat armoured vehicles; which currently operated vehicles are to be replaced; how many of these vehicles are currently in service; when he proposes to brief industry on the requirement; what are the approximate costs of the new requirement; over what time scale new vehicles are to be procured; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The future requirement for new tracked and wheeled tactical combat armoured vehicles is under review. We plan to replace the majority of the tracked combat vehicle reconnaissance—CVR(T)—with a new vehicle in the early years of the next century; exact quantities will depend upon the results of a feasibility study and developing concept work. An industrial briefing on the new vehicle will be held on 16 September and the project is likely to cost around £2 billion. In addition, we are considering the replacement of the remaining CVR(T), FV430 series' vehicles and the combat engineer tractor (CET) early in the next century. The numbers of these vehicles currently held are:

	Number
FV430 series	2,536
CVR(T)	1,701
CET	140

Trident

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals his Department has received in regard to establishing the Trident refitting facility project —RD 57—at the Rosyth royal dockyard; and when he expects to take a decision on the project.

Mr. Aitken: The RD 57 project at Rosyth royal dockyard is designed to accommodate refits to Vanguard class and other nuclear submarines. Work on the project commenced in October 1987. It is now in the preparatory phase for the main design and build phase. Babcock Thorn Ltd., the management company at Rosyth royal dockyard, has recently put forward proposals for reducing the costs of the facility. These proposals will be considered as part of the current review of future requirements for fleet support, decisions on which are expected later this year.

Rosyth Dockyard

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what period of time he expects cores removed from nuclear-powered submarines to be stored at the Rosyth royal dockyard.

Mr. Aitken: It is normal practice for nuclear submarine used fuel cores to be held in the dockyards for a few months prior to their earliest practicable dispatch to BNFL Sellafield. These cores will continue to be held safely at the dockyards, in storage facilities approved by the nuclear installations inspectorate, until a licensed mode of transport is available. Our aim is to achieve this as quickly as possible.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 13 July, *Official Report*, columns *430-31*. Participation by the Ministry of Defence is not planned.

Nuclear Contamination, Australia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer on 29 June to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), *Official Report*, columns *417-18*, what current participation scientists from his Department have in the Anglo-Australian technical assessment group monitoring the former nuclear test sites at Maralinga, Emu Fields and Monte Bello in Australia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. The Anglo-Australian technical assessment group has completed its work, and its report was published in November 1990. It has now been disbanded.

CIS Forces

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is Her Majesty's Government's estimate of the number of Commonwealth of Independent States or Russian forces currently stationed in each of the countries, excluding the CIS, of the former Warsaw pact.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently estimated to be some 195,000 Russian forces in Germany, 18,000 in Poland, 116,000 in the Baltic republics and 49,000 in Georgia.

United States Air Bases

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the United States of America air force bases Woodbridge and Bentwaters in Suffolk will revert to his Department's control.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: On current plans the United States Air Force will return RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge to full Ministry of Defence control by September 1993.

Britannia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to offering Her Majesty's Yacht Britannia for use as a hospital ship in support of humanitarian aid to the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the annual cost of maintaining Her Majesty's Yacht Britannia for each of the last 10 years; and from which subheads of which votes these costs are taken.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The annual cost of maintaining Her Majesty's Yacht Britannia is as follows:

	£ million at outturn prices
1983-84	8·905
1984-85	5·843
1985-86	6·943
1986-87	4·749
1987-88	22·364
1988-89	9·542
1989-90	6·998
1990-91	9·272
1991-92	11·466
1992-93[1]	8·602

[1] Estimate.

Expenditure falls mainly to subheads 1A, 1G, 1H, 2F4 and 5A3.

Royal Family

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost borne by his Department for the transport of members of the royal family for each of the last 10 years; and from which subheads of which votes these costs are taken.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The tranport costs for members of the royal family are not kept centrally and could not be provided without disproportionate cost and effort.

WE177 Bomb

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department intends to do with the fissile material retrieved from the dismantling of WE177 now declared to be surplus to requirements.

Mr. Aitken: Fissile material recovered from dismantled WE177 warheads will be retained for defence purposes.

Defence Statistics

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reconsider his decision to issue "Defence Statistics" as a non-parliamentary paper.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. "Defence Statistics" has been established to provide for the regular publication of statistical information on defence matters. As an independent Government Statistical Service publication it is not appropriate to produce it as a parliamentary paper. Copies of the 1992 edition of "Defence Statistics" are available in the Library of the House, and through Her Majesty's Stationery Office, on the same basis as other Government Statistical Service publications.

Royal Tournament

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to take additional measures to ensure that off-duty service men and service women in London for the royal tournament do not get involved in violent conflicts with the local civilian population.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Service personnel are fully aware of the high standard of behaviour that is expected of them at all times, on duty or off duty, in attending the royal tournament and elsewhere. Any breaches of discipline that may occur are investigated and action is taken against individuals whenever there is evidence of an offence. No additional measures are necessary.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances British nuclear weapons are declared to *(a)* the Western European Union, *(b)* the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, *(c)* the North Atlantic Co-operation Council, *(d)* the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and *(e)* the United Nations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: British nuclear weapons are declared to NATO. The final decision on their use would in all circumstances rest with the British Government.

Low Frequency Raido Transmission

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his United States counterpart on the use of United States extremely low frequency radio transmission systems for communicating with British submarines.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As part of normal information exchanges officials from my Department have discussed the capabilities of such a system.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which submarines in the service of his Department are capable of receiving extremely low frequency radio signals.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to my answer of 15 February 1991, *Official Report*, column *592*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro).

Porton Down

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many scientific procedures have been carried out on animals at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Aitken: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the site of special scientific interest agreement with English Nature in relation to Porton Down.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of the CBDE to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Queen's Flight

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the annual cost of maintaining the Queen's flight for each of the last 10 years; and from which subheads of which votes these costs are taken.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The annual cost of maintaining the Queen's flight is as follows:

	£ million at outturn prices
1983-84	4·763
1984-85	4·770
1985-86	4·776
1986-87	4·752
1987-88	5·507
1988-89	5·952
1989-90	6·229
1990-91	6·745
1991-92	6·863
1992-93[1]	7·316

[1] Estimate.

Expenditure falls mainly to subheads 1C, 1D, 1E, 1H and 2M.

Public Record Office

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 22 June, *Official Report*, column *71*, how many papers withdrawn by his Department from the Public Record Office in the last five years have been retained by his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Aitken: Further to the reply given to my hon. Friend on 24 July 1991, at column *452*, I can inform him that our new suppliers service has given marketing advice to about 2,500 companies over the past 12 months. Dealings are by post or telephone and at various seminars, exhibitions and meet-the-buyer events around the country.

In February 1992, the MOD introduced a new, fortnightly contracts bulletin setting out works services opportunities for property management and construction. This has been very well received by the construction industry and is proving to be an invaluable aid to small companies which might otherwise be unaware of the MOD's requirements in this sector.

During 1991-92, about 35 defence research contracts, with a total value of £966,000, were placed under our small firms research initiative. Details of other payments made to small firms during 1991-92 are not yet available, but during 1990-91, 6,109 small companies secured headquarters contracts valued at a total of £1·15 billion, of which about half was paid to companies with fewer than 50 employees. In the same period, Ministry of Defence establishments awarded 226,173 local purchase orders, valued at around £103 million, to small companies.

Prisoners of War

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has been given from sources in Seoul and Panmunjom about British prisoners seen in prisoner of war camps during the Korean conflict but not after the cessation of hostilities.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information was received from these sources at the time of the post-hostilities repatriations of British prisoners of war. We have not received any further information recently and have seen no evidence to support claims that British prisoners of war were detained in Korea or elsewhere after the post-armistice repatriations.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the information he has received from the United States Senate relating to British prisoners of war captured during the Korean war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: To date we have received no material from the United States Senate on this subject.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the accounting procedure guidelines by which missing men, or known prisoners of war from the Korean war, are declared dead.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Scientific Instruments

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to offer ships and aircraft as platforms for scientific instruments.

Mr. Aitken: Under the "Joining Forces for the Environment" initiative launched by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence on 1 July, Her Majesty's ships and aircraft could be made available as platforms for scientific instruments provided that the request for assistance has been endorsed by the Natural Environment Research Council, involves no additional costs to MOD and is compatible with operational training requirements.

Departmental Land

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what scientific study Her Majesty's Government are making of Ministry of Defence land which has not for many years been ploughed, sprayed or artificially fertilised.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No scientific studies are currently being undertaken. Where possible, and subject to operational requirements, the Ministry of Defence is prepared to make such land available for scientific studies.

Aerial Photography (Research)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aerial photography and hydrographic readings are to be made available for research.

Mr. Aitken: Provided there are no security or copyright restrictions, aerial photographs and associated material

can be obtained from the RAF film library at RAF Brampton and hydrographic readings from the Hydrographic Office's data centre in Taunton. Charges are made according to the type of request.

Disciplinary Proceedings (Documents)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether he has any plans to amend Royal Air Force service rules to allow documents used in any proceedings against service personnel to be made available to any person nominated by him other than a solicitor;

(2) if he will list those proceedings against members of the Royal Air Force where documents involved in those proceedings cannot be disclosed to anyone other than the officer involved and his solicitors.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the case of disciplinary proceedings, disclosure of documents involved is made to the defence as part of current criminal law practice. In the case of administrative proceedings, disclosure of special narrative reports made under certain of the Queen's Regulations for the RAF is restricted to the subject, officer or airman, or to another member of the RAF selected by the subject or to his solicitor, to assist the subject to prepare a statement in reply to the report.

There are no plans to extend the facility to anyone else.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the disclosure of documents used in any proceedings brought against RAF service personnel to persons other than solicitors.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of any recent representations other than those from the hon. Member.

Radiation Doses

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish figures for the annual individual radiation dose equivalents for 1991 and the cumulative radiation dose equivalents for personnel at Devonport dockyard, Rosyth dockyard, HMS Defiance, HMS Vulcan, Clyde submarine base, Devonport naval base and combined figures for the naval nuclear propulsion programme and for all of his Department's personnel, except the Atomic Weapons Establishment.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 25 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), *Official Report*, column *297*.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Aitken: The Department's objectives were set out in its 1992 departmental report, Cm 1901, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. These top-level objectives are broken down into subsidiary objectives in the internal management plans of several hundred budget holders within the Department, each of whom may control several divisions and branches. It would involve disproportionate time and effort to collate them. However, the objectives of agencies are set out in their framework documents, obtainable from the chief executive. Additional to those addresses given in Cm 1901 are:

Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation DSA
Royal Naval Yard Fleetlands
Gosport
Hants PO13 O8W.

Duke of York's Military School
Dover
Kent CT15 5EQ.

Queen Victoria School
Dunblane
Perthshire
SK15 OJ7.

Defence Postal and Courier Service DSA
Inglis Barracks
Mill Hill
London NW7 1PX

Defence Operational Analysis Centre DSA
Broadoaks
Parvis Road
West Byfleet
Surrey KT14 6LY.

Defence Analytical Services Agency DSA
Room 307
First Avenue House
High Holborn
London WC1V 6HE.

Dumping at Sea

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the quantity of arms dumped at sea off the United Kingdom coast in each of the last five years, indicating the proportion dumped by the various armed services.

Mr. Aitken: The MoD does not dump redundant ammunition and stocks off the coast of the United Kingdom. The only dump site used for disposal at sea lies in the Atlantic some 400 miles off Lands End at a depth of some 4,500 m. The information requested is as follows:

tonnes

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	[1] *1992*
Navy	3,000	280	882	114	2,750
Army	70	1,165	893	936	5,031
RAF	174	99	nil	43	624
Total	3,244	1,544	1,775	1,093	8,405

[1] Figures given for 1992 reflect the total tonnage planned in this year's sea dumping programme.

Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to conduct and receive inspections under the provisions of the conventional forces in Europe treaty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The parties to the conventional forces in Europe—CFE—treaty decided at the Helsinki CSCE summit that the treaty should be provisionally applied from 17 July, for 120 days or until the final state party deposits its instrument of ratification.

Under the treaty, each of the 29 participating states has the right to conduct a number of inspections on the territory of other parties, with the purpose of verifying the number of items of treaty-limited equipment they hold, monitoring the destruction of equipment to match permitted levels of holdings and clarifying any doubts

about compliance with the treaty. During the initial 120-day baseline validation period we are obliged to receive around 30 inspections, and expect to make about the same number ourselves. Inspectors from the joint arms control implementation group—JACIG—will conduct CFE inspections on behalf of the United Kingdom, starting soon after the treaty enters into force. JACIG personnel will also escort inspections of facilities in the United Kingdom. We will co-operate fully with such inspections and welcome the opportunity to demonstrate our compliance with the CFE treaty.

South Atlantic Fund

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has about the future of the South Atlantic Fund.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The South Atlantic Fund is an independent body, for which its own trustees are responsible. I understand from the trustees that they are today announcing that the fund is to close on 31 December 1992. The balance of money in the fund will be disbursed, in appropriate shares, to the single service benevolent funds, which have given assurances that they will use this money to meet any future needs arising out of the Falklands conflict for as long as it is necessary.

Military Survey Defence Support Agency

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the key performance targets for the Military Survey defence support agency for 1992-93.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The key performance targets are as follows:

1. To maintain the operational readiness of the Military Survey defence support agency in accordance with the Army standards and to respond, as appropriate, to emergency and operational requirements.
2. To meet resourced targets for production, training and development for time scale, quantity and standard, as laid down in approved plans.
3. To provide the necessary support for the implementation of the Military Survey modernisation project and to initiate training.
4. To achieve a 2 per cent. increase in efficiency in year while remaining within budget.
5. To implement appropriate phases of the "Options for Change" and manpower reductions in accordance with forecast manpower planning targets.
6. To continue to improve the costing and management of geographic requirements.
7. To implement improved costing and budget systems and identify selected performance measures by 1 April 1993.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Quality

16. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the investment programmes to improve water quality.

Mr. Maclean: During 1991-92 the water companies invested more than £3,000 million, an increase in real terms over 1990-91 of more than 15 per cent. The Director General of Water Services will publish a fuller assessment as soon as he has analysed the July returns from companies.

20. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on drinking water quality.

Mr. Maclean: The chief drinking water inspector's report for 1991 will be published shortly. It will confirm that water supplies in England and Wales continue to be of very high quality.

Water Extraction

18. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last reviewed the mechanism for granting permission for water extraction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The water abstraction licensing system was last reviewed when the Water Act 1989 was passed.

Urban Development Corporations

19. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his latest estimated dates for the winding-up of urban development corporations.

Mr. Redwood: I shall confirm the wind-up dates for the urban development corporations following the end of the annual corporate planning round which is currently under way.

24. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what grant has been paid to the London Docklands development corporation since 1987-88; and what was the total grant to the other nine urban development corporations in England.

Mr. Howard: Since 1987-88, the London Docklands development corporation has received grant in aid of £1,006·650 million. The total grant paid to the other English urban development corporations for the same period is £819·396 million.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance has been given to urban development corporations on the allocation of funds from their budget, for community development and grant aid work with local community groups, in relation to organisations which are an extension of the development corporation itself; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Urban development corporations themselves decide which community initiatives and groups they wish to support but refer to the Department if the projects are outside their delegated spending authority or raise particular issues.

Standard Spending Assessments

21. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding standard spending assessments.

Mr. Robin Squire: We receive a large number of representations on standard spending assessments throughout the year and these are all given very careful consideration.

Water Prices

22. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to alter the constant K in the RPI plus K formula for water price increases.

Mr. Maclean: The Director General of Water Services is responsible for setting limits on water price increases. He will undertake a periodic review of K for all the companies at the first opportunity, and the revised limits will take effect from 1 April 1995.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account the Office of Water Services takes of the level of rainfall in each water company area when agreeing proposed water charges.

Mr. Maclean: Water companies have a duty to ensure that they have sufficient supplies of water available to meet demands from customers. The Director General of Water Services has a duty to ensure that the companies are properly able to finance their functions. In setting new price limits he will take account of factors which influence the costs of companies in different areas.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to require water companies to charge more equal rates to consumers across England and Wales.

Mr. Maclean: The Director General of Water Services is responsible for ensuring that companies can finance their functions and that in setting their charges they do not give undue preference to or unduly discriminate against any class or group of customers. Expenditure by individual companies on the provision of services necessarily varies and each must be able to set charges which reflect its own costs.

Local Government Finance

23. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the amount of capital receipts being held by local authorities in England and Wales.

Mr. Redwood: It is currently estimated that English local authorities held about £0·8 billion of usable capital receipts at the end of March 1992. In addition, authorities are estimated to hold over £5 billion of capital receipts which have been set aside as provision to meet credit liabilities.

Figures for Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

28. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the proposed financial settlement for local authorities for 1993-94.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities on 21 May 1992, *Official Report*, column *195*.

Enterprise Zone, Barrow-in-Furness

25. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on his policy with regard to creating an enterprise zone in Barrow-in-Furness.

Mr. Redwood: Our policy remains that the creation of new enterprise zones will be considered only in exceptional circumstances. We are looking at the case for a zone in Barrow.

Darwin Initiative

26. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in implementing the Darwin initiative and biodiversity undertakings given at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Mr. Howard: The Darwin initiative is still in its early stages. We are currently discussing with interested organisations the best way to proceed with the development of this Initiative.

The United Kingdom is already well placed to discharge its responsibilities under the biodiversity convention, in relation to its own biodiversity. The convention will require us to keep our systems under review and we will do so.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

29. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list his plans to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche).

Housing, Leicester

30. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the number of local authority houses in Leicester in 1979, 1989 and 1991.

Sir George Young: Leicester city council reported a total of 35,945 council dwellings in its April 1979 housing investment programme return. Corresponding figures reported in 1989 and 1991 were 31,639 and 30,172 respectively.

Water Conservation

31. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he intends to take for the conservation of England's water resources.

Mr. Maclean: The statutory responsibility for conserving water resources lies with the National Rivers Authority, and my Department maintains close liaison with the NRA. We shall shortly be publishing a consultation paper to obtain views on a wide range of options for bringing about the more efficient use of water.

Enterprise Zones, Free Ports

32. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds have been allocated by his Department to enterprise zones in free ports during each of the last three years.

Mr. Redwood: None. There are and have been no enterprise zones in free ports or free zones.

Council Tax

33. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with local authorities on the implementation of the council tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: We are holding regular discussions with local authorities at both ministerial and official level and are pleased to see that good progress is being made in the preparations for the council tax.

EC Presidency

34. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the initiatives on environmental policy to be undertaken by his Department as part of the United Kingdom's six months' presidency of the European Community.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given orally today to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley).

"Competing for Quality in Housing"

35. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses he has so far received to his consultation paper "Competing for Quality in Housing".

Sir George Young: Five.

Environmental Issues

36. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the help he proposes to give to local authorities to promote environmental issues.

Mr. Maclean: It is for local authorities to decide how to promote environmental issues, in the light of local circumstances and their overall environmental strategies, and in consultation with all sections of the community.

Low River Flows

37. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next expects to meet the chairman of the National Rivers Authority to discuss low river flows.

Mr. Maclean: The authority's plans for dealing with water resource problems including low river flows were among matters raised at my recent meeting with my hon. and noble Friend to discuss the authority's 1992 corporate plan.

Gravel Extraction

10. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has recently had with environmental groups on the problems arising from the twin industries of gravel extraction and tipping of waste in landfill sites.

Mr. Baldry: My recent discussions with environmental groups have not covered gravel extraction and landfill of waste.

Homelessness

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what was *(a)* the total expenditure and *(b)* the additional specific allocation for tackling homelessness which was provided in the latest financial year with a breakdown by (i) region and (ii) local authority.

Mr. Baldry: Total capital expenditure on measures for tackling homelessness is not separately identifiable. However, in 1990-91 and 1991-92 the Government made £300 million available to local authorities and housing associations in the areas of England with the highest homelessness pressure for schemes to create permanent lettings. A total of £236 million of this was allocated to local authorities. An additional £11 million was allocated in 1991-92 for local authority cash incentive schemes to release council properties for homeless families. These measures seem likely to produce more than 17,000 new lettings. The latest available figures for 1990-91 outturn and 1991-92 allocations, (excluding the additional cash incentive allocation which is not separately identifiable), are given in the table.

Homelessness SCA allocations

Authority	*1990-91 Outturn (£'000)*	*1991-92 Allocation (£'000)*
London		
Barnet	414	620
Bexley	1,031	—
Brent	4,593	5,278
Bromley	436	1,000
Camden	5,891	5,983
Croydon	2,562	3,331
Ealing	3,825	4,549
Enfield	1,988	2,433
Greenwich	3,392	3,109
Hackney	4,884	4,762
Hammersmith	4,132	4,506
Haringey	5,261	6,576
Harrow	1,000	950
Havering	27	250
Hillingdon	2,250	2,317
Hounslow	2,727	2,832
Islington	4,832	5,033
Kensington	2,491	3,424
Kingston	1,300	700
Lambeth	4,252	5,260
Lewisham	2,771	2,568
Merton	500	500
Newham	4,809	4,176
Redbridge	500	440
Richmond	1,243	1,120
Southwark	4,.008	3,771
Sutton	459	1,020
Tower Hamlets	4,043	4,113
Waltham Forest	2,067	2,943
Wandsworth	3,075	2,925
Westminster	4,174	4,511
Total	84,937	91,000
South East		
Adur	—	134
Arun	80	80
Ashford	—	120
Basingstoke	199	—
Bracknell	—	150
Brighton	808	983
Canterbury	437	220
Chichester	—	150
Crawley	—	202
Cherwell	80	100
Dartford	—	200
Dover	186	1,013
Eastbourne	243	300
East Hampshire	425	350
Eastleigh	—	200
Elmbridge	130	180
Fareham	238	175
Gillingham	282	321
Gosport	400	300
Guildford	688	378

Authority	1990-91 Outturn (£'000)	1991-92 Allocation (£'000)
Hart	150	175
Hastings	526	424
Havant	590	285
Horsham	194	200
Hove	100	200
Lewes	80	150
Maidstone	215	450
Mole Valley	—	200
Newbury	—	57
New Forest	940	720
Oxford	391	556
Portsmouth	1,884	1,360
Reading	522	610
Reigate	760	165
Rother	242	200
Runnymede	100	100
Rushmoor	281	457
Sevenoaks	—	368
Shepway	413	243
Slouth	44	500
Southampton	567	1,306
South Oxford	130	177
South Wight	73	—
Spelthorne	700	165
Swale	—	200
Tandridge	—	192
Test Valley	388	200
Thanet	250	290
Tunbridge Wells	360	600
Vale of White Horse	115	120
Waverley	—	220
Wealden	150	220
West Oxford	95	47
Windsor	313	220
Winchester	60	29
Woking	165	200
Wokingham	28	200
Worthing	529	255
	15,549	17,616
Eastern		
Aylesbury Vale	500	120
Basildon	485	438
Braintree	280	564
Brentwood	—	10
Broxbourne	439	—
Colchester	700	500
Dacorum	—	500
East Herts	250	315
Harlow	500	750
Luton	685	500
Milton Keynes	700	—
North Bedfordshire	135	379
North Hertfordshire	—	100
Rochford	—	270
St. Albans	—	740
South Bedfordshire	330	108
Southend	656	403
Stevenage	660	525
Tendring	185	40
Three Rivers	—	50
Thurrock	110	92
Watford	—	120
	6,615	6,524

Dioxin

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the daily intake of dioxin in a human being at which Her Majesty's Government would take action to stop the source of such pollution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

The tolerable daily intake—TDI—for dioxins is 10 picograms toxic equivalents per kilogram body weight per day. This TDI was recommended by a World Health Organisation regional office for Europe expert group in 1990 and subsequently endorsed by the United Kingdom committee on the toxicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment.

It is Government policy that when intakes of any contaminant are found to regularly exceed the TDI, action is taken to investigate the problem and, wherever possible, to reduce exposure to the contaminant.

Spent Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure all liquid and gaseous radioactive wastes created in the reprocessing of imported spent nuclear fuel at Sellafield are collected at discharge sources and returned to the country of origin of the irradiated foreign fuel.

Mr. Maclean: Before liquid wastes are discharged from Sellafield, almost all the radiologically significant material is removed by effluent cleaning plants. The solid wastes and sludges produced by these plants are subject to the normal return arrangements. The remaining liquid and gaseous wastes, which are of little radiological significance, are disposed of under an authorisation from the regulatory authorities, the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Radiation Monitoring

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend the scope of RIMNET—the radiation incident monitoring network—to the Isle of Man; and if he will make a statement on progress made in establishing RIMNET to date.

Mr. Maclean: There has been a monitoring station at Ronaldsway on the Isle of Man since RIMNET commenced operating at the end of 1988. Details of the system currently in operation are contained in the HMSO booklet "The National Response Plan and Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET) Phase 1", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. A contract to upgrade and extend RIMNET was let in March 1991, and is due for completion later this year.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department routinely receives and examines the annual report on radioactivity monitored in the environment by the Isle of Man Government.

Mr. Maclean: No. A copy of this report goes to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at Lowestoft.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what communications his Department has had with the Argus project on monitoring radioactivity in the environment.

Mr. Maclean: Officials within my Department are aware of the Argus project and have discussed its operation with the system operator.

Council Debts

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 20 non-metropolitan councils in the order of the level of their indebtedness, with the relevant figures in each case.

Mr. Robin Squire: The 20 non-metropolitan district and county councils reporting the highest levels of indebtedness are shown in the table.

Credit ceiling[1] at 31 March 1991

	£ million
Lancashire	377
Nottingham	373
Kingston-upon-Hull	328
Bristol	308
Leicester	272
Staffordshire	260
Cleveland	256
Kent	250
Essex	227
Derbyshire	214
Berkshire	210
Leicestershire	206
Devon	192
Cheshire	190
Middlesbrough	183
Nottinghamshire	177
Hampshire	176
Blackburn	166
Humberside	165
Derby	156

[1] The credit ceiling represents the difference between an authority's outstanding credit liabilities and any provision made to meet those liabilities.

Source: Local authority returns. No data are available for Embridge DC.

Pollution Inspectorate

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff there are in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; how many of those are qualified inspectors; where they are located; and what is their annual budget.

Mr. Maclean: There are currently 309 staff in post in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, of whom 162 are inspectors and 147 administrative staff.

The approved complement for 1992-93 has been increased to 377·5 staff. HMIP is currently recruiting additional staff up to this complement.

HMIP staff are located as follows:

	Numbers
Bedford	33·0
Birmingham	3·5
Bristol	42·0
Cardiff	15·5
Chelmsford	2·5
Darlington	8·0
East Grinstead	2·5
Lancaster	18·0
Leeds	28·5
Lincoln	7·5
London	[1]121·0
Newcastle-under-Lyme	1·0
Runcorn	16·0
Sheffield	10·0

[1] Including 18 staff due to move to Reading in autumn 1992.

HMIP's forecast expenditure for 1992-93, on a full economic cost basis, is £27·5 million, including £7·5 million research expenditure.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* inspections and *(b)* prosecutions have been undertaken as part of the work of HM inspectorate of pollution in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: The number of inspections carried out by HMIP is as follows:

Visits to works (England and Wales)

	Number
1987-88	10,164
1988-89	9,782
1989-90	7,887
1990-91	3,867
1991-92	6,327

Note: These figures include visits to or in connection with scheduled and non-scheduled works by inspectors and sampling teams, and visits regarding radioactive emissions to air by inspectors and sampling teams. In addition to the above visits there were a number of meetings with companies in connection with scheduled work but not involving site inspection.

The number of prosecutions taken by HMIP over the last five years are as follows:

	Number
1987-88	3
1988-89	2
1989-90	4
1990-91	1
1991-92	11

All prosecutions except one in 1989-90 resulted in convictions.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has made of each of the nine proposals for power plants and incinerators in the east London corridor; and what assessment is had made about them cumulatively.

Mr. Maclean: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has received five applications under the terms of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to operate new power plants and incinerators in the east Thames corridor and is scrutinising them to satisfy itself that they meet the requirements of the Act. So far, one has been determined. HMIP is aware that other applications might be made and is carrying out an assessment of the possible effect on air quality in east London of each individual plant and the cumulative effect of them all.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 7 July, *Official Report*, column *152*, if he will set out the actions Her Majesty's Government intend to take to fulfil the requirements set out in the amendments to chapter 20 of "Agenda 21" on hazardous wastes as agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Mr. Maclean: We are currently looking at the implications for United Kingdom policy of "Agenda 21", including chapter 20.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to establish further marine biological sites of special scientific interest in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: There is no such designation and we have no plans to introduce one. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 July 1992 to my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) at column *252*.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure automatic public inquiries for all proposals affecting sites of special scientific interest where there is an outstanding objection from the statutory country conservation agency.

Mr. Maclean: No.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what penalties are currently employed by his Department for the damage or destruction of a site of special scientific interest; and if he has any plans to extend such penalties.

Mr. Maclean: English Nature is empowered to enforce the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in cases of damage to sites of special scientific interest. The levels of fines is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, but there are no plans for changes.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current monitoring system utilised for sites of special scientific interest; how much is allocated for such monitoring by his Department; and what plans he has to upgrade such monitoring.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *260*. During 1992-93 English Nature has budgeted to spend £18·1 million on the safeguarding of designated sites, including monitoring activities.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will establish a United Kingdom-wide system of positive incentives for sites of special scientific interest management.

Mr. Maclean: English Nature's wildlife enhancement scheme is a pilot project to assist owners and occupiers to undertake land management which is beneficial to the wildlife interests of SSSIs. English Nature will also be giving grants to county wildlife trusts under its reserves enhancement scheme for a similar purpose. These are important initiatives, but they will need to be evaluated before decisions are taken on whether they should be available more generally.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his practice to include specific references in environmental statements deposited under Standing Order 27A (environmental assessment) to each site of special scientific interest affected by works proposed in private Bills.

Sir George Young: The preparation and content of environmental statements deposited with private Bills under SO 27A is a matter for the promoters of the Bill, subject to the requirement that the statement shall generally contain, in relation to the works authorised by the Bill, the information set out in schedule 3 to the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988. This includes information about the site and the likely effects of the proposed development on the environment by reference to its possible impact on flora, fauna, soil, water and the landscape. While there is no specific requirement for environmental statements to identify SSSIs likely to be affected by the development proposed, they are expected to do so.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received from local authorities about the compilation of the contaminated land register;

(2) what is the current number of registrations on the contaminated land register; and what is the expected eventual size of the register;

(3) what provision exists for the removal of names from the contaminated land register;

(4) how it is intended to fund the decontamination of contaminated land.

Mr. Maclean: During the 1991 consultation exercise on registers of land which may be contaminated, which local authorities are to compile under section 143 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, some 200 responses were received from local authorities and their representative associations. Many further letters on aspects of registers have been received since the end of consultation.

The statutory requirement for local authorities to compile registers has not yet commenced, so no sites have been entered on registers. It is not possible at this stage to forecast the number of sites which will be registered.

Registers are to record all land which is, or has been, subject to specific contaminative uses to be listed in regulations. Sites will not be removed from registers unless it is shown that the entry was due to a factual error concerning the site's use.

Government financial assistance for treatment of contamination at derelict sites is available under derelict land grant. The criteria for this grant give a high priority to schemes involving treatment of severe contamination. The Government are also making resources available to local authorities by means of supplementary credit approvals for investigation and treatment of contamination of land where it is not practicable to recover the costs of these works from those responsible.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 May, *Official Report*, column *198*, to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), when he expects to publish the contaminated land register; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Local authorities will be required under section 143 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to compile public registers of land which may be contaminated and in due course to publish them. The detailed specifications for registers are still under consideration, but an announcement on how the Government intend to proceed will be made shortly.

Compliance Monitoring

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cases of compliance monitoring are currently being undertaken by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution of those previously having been found to have been in breach of pollution standards; and what is the average frequency in such cases.

Mr. Maclean: Compliance monitoring is carried out on all processes authorised under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Radioactive Substances Act 1960. The prescribed inspection frequency depends on the type of process, the operator competence ratings and the pollution release potential of the process.

House Condition Survey

Sir Malcolm Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the results of the 1991 house condition survey; and whether he will now make a preliminary statement on its findings.

Mr. Baldry: The results of the 1991 English house condition survey will be published in 1993. No findings are yet available as data are still being collected and processed.

Grants

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was allocated for improvement and repairs grants to each local authority in England for 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Sir George Young: Resources are not allocated to local authorities solely for expenditure on grants for repairs and improvements. Each authority receives an overall allowance for specified capital grant, as part of its annual housing investment programme allocation, to support private sector renewal work, including house renovation grants. This covers the Exchequer contribution towards their expenditure—75 per cent. in the case of grants. Figures for specified capital grant received by each local authority for 1991-92 and 1992-93 are given in the HIP allocation tables for the local authorities in England, copies of which are available in the Library.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for each quarter from July to September 1990 onwards, what was the number of *(a)* applications and *(b)* approvals in England for (i) renovation grants, (ii) disabled facilities grants and (iii) minor works assistance.

Sir George Young: Figures for the numbers of approvals of mandatory and discretionary renovation grants and disabled facilities grants, together with approvals of minor works assistance, in England are shown in the quarterly publication "Housing and Construction Statistics: Part 2"—tables 2.17, 2.19 and 2.21 respectively. Copies of this publication are in the Library.

The latest edition of this publication gives figures up to the December quarter 1991. Figures for the March quarter 1992 are as follows:

Applications approved: England: March quarter 1992

	Numbers of grants
Renovation grants:	
Mandatory	8,700
Discretionary	1,300
Disabled facilities:	
Mandatory	5,000
Discretionary	60
Minor works assistance	7,800

There are no corresponding figures available for the number of applications for these grants.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table setting out the value of home improvement grants in the private sector for each year between 1981 and 1991.

Sir George Young: Figures showing the amount of housing renovation grants paid to private owners and tenants for each year between 1981 and 1991 are published in "Housing and Construction Statistics". Figures for 1981 to 1988 are in the annual version "Housing and Construction Statistics 1980-1990: Great Britain", table 7.3.

Figures for 1989-91 are in the quarterly version "Housing and Construction Statistics, December Quarter 1991, Part 2: Great Britain". Grants made under the Housing Act 1985 are in table 2.18 and grants made under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, effective from July 1990 in England and Wales, are in table 2.17.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent by local authorities in England on mandatory renovation grants, discretionary renovation grants, mandatory disabled facilities grants, discretionary disabled facilities grants, minor works assistance-staying-put grants, minor works assistance-thermal insulation, minor works assistance patch-and-mend and minor works assistance-elderly relative, for each quarter since July 1990.

Sir George Young: Figures for final payments of mandatory and discretionary renovation grants and disabled facilities grants in England are published in the quarterly publication "Housing and Construction Statistics: Part 2"—tables 2.17 and 2.19 respectively. It also gives information about final payments of minor works assistance as a whole, table 2.21. Copies of this publication are in the Library.

The latest edition gives figures up to the December quarter 1991. Figures for the March quarter 1992 are as follows:

Final payments: England: March quarter 1992:

	£ thousands
Renovation grants	
Mandatory	72,808
Discretionary	5,337

	£ thousands
Disabled facilities grants	
Mandatory	14,262
Discretionary	281
Minor works assistance	4,803

The only information about the different types of minor works assistance available relates to the financial year 1990-91. The figures for final payments are as follows:

Final payments: England: 1990-91

	£ thousands
Minor works assistance:	
Elderly householder to "stay put"	6,328
Thermal insulation	1,610
Elderly person to become or remain resident	315
Temporary improvement of property to be cleared	1

The Department provides a 75 per cent. Exchequer contribution towards local authorities expenditure on grants. The exception to this is for disabled facilities grants to council tenants; expenditure on these grants is eligible for 100 per cent. subsidy from the housing revenue account.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of renovation grants in 1991-92 were paid to *(a)* owner-occupiers and *(b)* tenants.

Sir George Young: The only figures currently available about the tenure of persons receiving renovation grants relate to the financial year 1990-91. During that period, 93 per cent. of grants went to owner-occupiers with virtually all of the remaining 7 per cent. going to private sector landlords and housing associations as landlords.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards waste disposal being *(a)* recycled and *(b)* localised; what action he is taking to give recycled and localised waste disposal advantages over (i) non-recycled and (ii) major centralised waste disposal respectively; and what relevant statistics he has for each category both (1) at present and (2) for the year 2000.

Mr. Maclean: It is Government policy that the production of solid waste should be minimised. Failing that, waste should be reused, recycled or incinerated with energy recovery. It should only be landfilled as a last resort. The provision of waste disposal facilities, whether small and local or large and centralised, is a matter for waste disposal authorities in consultation with the planning authority. Waste collection authorities are also under a duty to prepare recycling plans which are due to be submitted in draft to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment by 1 August. Our target is that 25 per cent. of household waste should be recycled by 2000, compared with about 5 per cent. at present. The collection of statistical information on waste recycling and disposal is currently under review.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has issued to ensure that the actual and full costs of waste disposed by *(a)* landfill and *(b)* incineration are reflected in *(a)* the charges levied by waste disposal authorities and *(b)* the calculation for recycling credits.

Mr. Maclean: Waste disposal authorities, except for the statutory waste disposal authorities which are a special case, do not levy charges in respect of waste disposal. The statutory joint authorities' power to make levies on their constituent councils is set out in the Waste Regulation and Disposal (Authorities) Order 1985, SI 1985 No. 1884. The method to be used for setting the values of recycling credits is set out in the Environmental Protection (Waste Recycling Payments) Regulations, SI 1992 No. 462. Guidance to authorities on operating the system of recycling credits is provided in circular 4/92.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those waste disposal authorities which have set up local authority waste disposal companies in conjunction with the private sector; and in the case of each authority, which private company has been the successful bidder.

Mr. Maclean: No LAWDCs have yet been established.

Waste Incinerators

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on which dates the toxic waste incinerator proposed for Howdon-on-Tyne, and the clinical waste incinerator for Felling-on-Tyne, were called in by him; on what dates the inquiries were held; and what factors determine the length of time before his decision is announced.

Mr. Mclean: Neither of these proposals was called in by the Secretary of State. Both are the subject of planning appeals which were recovered for determination by the Secretary of State. The Howdon appeal was lodged on 28 December 1989 and was recovered on 18 May 1990. The other appeal, at Follingsby was lodged on 15 February 1991 and was recovered on 14 March 1991. The inquiry into the Howdon appeal was one of three linked inquiries held between 11 September 1990 and 1 March 1991. The site-specific inquiry into the Howdon proposals was held between 8 and 31 January 1991. The inquiry into the Follingsby appeal was held between 9 April and 3 May 1991.

The target handling times for appeal cases where the Secretary of State takes the decision are published in planning policy guidance note 1. The aim is to decide 80 per cent. of cases within eight weeks of receiving the inspector's report, although as each case must be considered on its own merits, more complex cases may take longer than eight weeks. The inspectors' report on the linked inquiries which included the Howdon appeal was received on 10 December 1991. It raises many complex issues all of which need to be carefully considered before a decision can be issued. Good progress is being made and the decision will be issued as soon as it is practicable to do so.

The inspectors' report on the Follingsby appeal has not yet been received. It is expected to be received shortly.

Energy Proposals, London

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how each of the nine proposals for power generation and incinerators in the east London corridor are affected by his Department's document, "Planning and Pollution Control"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: This document has been issued for public consultation only. Once finalised, it will be taken into account by local planning authorities in the preparation of development plans, and may be a material consideration in individual decisions under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Dolphins

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken to investigate the cause of the strandings of dolphins on the Cornwall coasts earlier this year.

Mr. Maclean: My Department has had a contract with the Institute of Zoology—IOZ—since August 1990, to co-ordinate the investigation of cetacean strandings in England and Wales. One of the objectives of this contract is to allow for a swift and thorough investigation of stranding incidents. In the first three months of 1992, 105 common dolphins were washed up on the north and south coasts of Cornwall and Devon—substantially more than those recorded in previous years. The IOZ examined the evidence from 38 individual post-mortems conducted by the institute itself and by the MAFF investigation centre at Polwhele. The IOZ has also conducted or arranged tests for evidence of disease and contaminants.

The institute has submitted a report on the incident to my Department which is being placed in the Library of the House. The post-mortem examinations suggest that fisheries entanglement may have been the principal cause of this incident. The animals appeared to be in a good nutritive state and free of serious disease. Tests for a range of contaminants, including heavy metals and PCBs, have shown nothing unusual. There was no evidence of the seal virus which has been known to affect cetaceans elsewhere. There is, however, some evidence of an increase in the number of common dolphins present in south-western waters at the time of the incident.

Water (Environmental Costs)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will propose legislation by which the environmental costs of water extraction would be *(a)* reflected in the charges to the consumer or *(b)* taken out of the profits made by the water companies.

Mr. Maclean: I am considering the possibility of incentive charging for both effluent discharges to water and water abstraction. I hope to issue a consultation paper later in the year.

Waste Tips (Groundwater)

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in monitoring groundwater beneath waste tips; and if his Department will establish a database on the level of pesticide waste in each waste tip.

Mr. Maclean: A research programme is under way to provide a review of the extent and type of groundwater contamination in England and Wales associated with the landfilling of controlled waste. The work will enable the Department to form conclusions about the significance of contamination in relation to drinking water quality standards, contaminant background levels in groundwater and contamination from non-landfill sources. It will result in guidelines for monitoring requirements and complements a broader programme of monitoring groundwater sources being sponsored by the National Rivers Authority.

The results of the study will be in the form of a database which is likely to contain waste input data by broad classification, but not details of pesticide or any other particular waste inputs to individual sites.

Another project currently being carried out is to compile a database of the composition of the liquids produced within landfills and to investigate the occurrence of compounds of environmental significance, including certain pesticides, within these liquids.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he plans to take during the United Kingdom presidency of the European Community to co-ordinate and promote a common information strategy for the public on radioactive waste, as set out in point 6 in the annex to the Council resolution of 15 June on the Community action plan on radioactive waste, published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities No. C 158/3-5, 25 June.

Mr. Maclean: It is expected that the EC Commission will take forward the recommendations of research studies which it has undertaken in this field. In doing so it will be advised by the advisory committee on programme management for the Community plan of action in the field of radioactive waste. The United Kingdom is represented on this advisory committee. The United Kingdom can provide examples of good practice, for example, the highly successful Sellafield visitor centre. The United Kingdom is also implementing the European Community directive on the freedom of access to information on the environment —90/313/Euratom.

Leather Processing

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give urgent consideration to redefining leather processing from part A of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution regime to a part B process under the environmental protection legislation.

Mr. Maclean: No. We are satisfied that control of pollution from leather processes is more appropriate to integrated pollution control, regulated by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, than to local authority air pollution control.

Halon Gas

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations exist governing the use of halon gas in retail products.

Mr. Maclean: EC regulation 594/91 controls the production and consumption—defined as production plus imports minus exports—of halons rather than their use in particular products, reflecting the approach of the Montreal protocol. With the EC, we are proposing that the protocol should phase out halons by the end of 1995, with an 85 per cent. cut by the end of next year. We will also be pressing for a complete phase-out of halons within the Community by the end of 1994.

Sustainable Development Corporation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to encourage the involvement of non-governmental organisations in the Sustainable Development Corporation according to United Nations Conference on Environment and Development accreditation and not to Economic and Social Council accreditation.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom will encourage the General Assembly, at an early stage, to examine ways of enhancing the involvement of non-governmental organisations within the United Nations system in relation to the UNCED follow-up process, and the establishment of the best procedures for such an expanded role.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make representations to the Secretary-General of the United Nations to ensure the establishment of a formula for deciding the membership of the Sustainable Development Corporation which ensures that membership is not limited to Economic and Social Council members.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom will seek to ensure that the General Assembly, at its 47th session, establishes a basis for membership of the Sustainable Development Commission which pays due regard to equitable geographical distribution and the interests of those who are not Economic and Social Council members.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to make representations to ensure that the newly established Sustainable Development Corporation has the strongest available and highest qualified secretariat.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom will ask the United Nations Secretary-General to ensure that the Sustainable Development Commission has a highly qualified and competent support structure within the framework of the United Nations secretariat. We do not believe that a new, independent secretariat should be created.

Recycling

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will assess the restrictions placed on local authorities' spending on recycling and reconsider the standard spending assessment formula to enable local authorities to be assured of sufficient resources to produce the recycling plan.

Mr. Robin Squire: Standard spending assessments make proper provision for the whole range of services for which local authorities are responsible. Provision for waste recycling was taken into account in the 1992-93 local government finance settlement. It is for local authorities to determine their own spending priorities in the light of local circumstances.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those local authorities which *(a)* have submitted their recycling plan within the time scale laid down by his Department and *(b)* have not yet submitted their recycling plan;

(2) of those authorities which have not submitted a recycling plan, what reasons have been given for failure to submit one within the time scale.

Mr. Maclean: Local authorities are not due to submit their draft recycling plans until 1 August 1992.

By 13 July 1992 plans had been received from:

London boroughs
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Kensington and Chelsea

Metropolitan boroughs
- Calderdale
- Kirklees
- Leeds

District councils
- Adur
- Arun
- Bassetlaw
- Braintree
- Broadland
- Chelmsford
- Chester City
- Craven
- Crawley
- King's Lynn and West Norfolk
- Leicester City
- Malvern Hills
- North Devon
- North Kesteven
- North Warwickshire
- Nottingham City
- Restormel
- St. Albans
- St. Edmunsbury
- Shepway
- Southend-on-Sea
- South Wight
- Suffolk Coastal
- Waverley
- West Lindsey

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his current targets for recycling of *(a)* domestic and *(b)* commercial waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are maintaining the target set out in the 1990 White Paper on the environment, "This Common Inheritance", Cm 1200, the recycling of half our recyclable household waste by the end of the century. That translates to about 25 per cent. of all household waste. We have no specific targets for recycling commercial waste where the increasing costs of waste disposal are expected to act as a sufficient incentive to encourage waste producers to look for alternative ways of dealing with their waste. The proposed EC directive on packaging is expected to lead to the adoption of further targets for waste minimisation and recycling.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what economic inducements he has given to creating markets for recycled waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: It is expected that the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will lead to increasing costs of landfilling and incinerating waste. In most cases, this will provide a significant economic inducement to alternative methods of waste treatment, including recycling. To ensure that the market is operating correctly in these areas, the Government are currently undertaking studies of landfill pricing and of economic instruments, the results from which are expected during the summer. In addition, grants to assist in the development of new processes and facilities are available, and have been given, to the recycling industries under the environmental technology innovation scheme and other routes. Some of these projects are concerned with identifying and overcoming technological barriers to market development.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what criteria were used when determining the successful supplementary credit approvals for recycling issues; and by what means those criteria were made known to local authorities;

(2) if he will give his reasons for rejecting Newcastle-under-Lyme's application for supplementary credit approvals; and if he will now reconsider his decision.

Mr. Maclean: The criteria against which local authorities' bids for supplementary credit approvals—SCAs—for recycling schemes for 1992-93 were assessed were set out in the Department's letter of 23 December 1991 inviting local authorities to submit bids.

Priority was given to schemes which: could be shown to produce material for which there is a guaranteed market; involved partnership with the private sector, or a significant element of private finance; presented opportunities for offering employment to people with learning difficulties.

Priority was also given to the further development of schemes which has been awarded SCAs for 1991-92, including those which were justifiably delayed in that financial year.

In announcing allocations to local authorities on 27 April 1992, we made it clear that we had favoured schemes to collect chlorofluorocarbons for recycling, but had given low priority to "bank" schemes where we consider that industry should be pressed to provide the equipment and to new kerbside schemes pending the outcome of the existing pilot kerbside schemes.

Applications from more than 140 authorities worth more than £31 million in total were received for the £15 million of SCAs available for 1992-93. Allocation of project approvals from the total resources available was determined on the basis of a careful examination of every bid, paying particular attention to the priorities set out in the bidding letter.

Resources for recycling SCAs for 1992-93 are fully committed. We shall write to local authorities by Christmas inviting bids for SCAs for 1993-94 for recycling schemes.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which charges for recycling credits agreed by waste disposal authorities meet the guidelines of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Maclean: Section 52(1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 requires a waste disposal authority to pay recycling credits to a waste collection authority in respect of waste retained for recycling of such amounts representing its net saving of expenditure on the disposal of the waste as the waste disposal authority determines. Non-compliance with this duty is a matter for the district auditor.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the charges for recycling credits agreed by each waste disposal authority.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available centrally. Ways in which such information might be collected nationally are currently being considered as part of the Department of the Environment's wider review of waste management statistics.

Ozone-depleting Substances

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times the Government have utilised the powers to prevent emissions of ozone-depleting substances from industrial processes since the passing into law of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The Environmental Protection Act (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations 1991 set out the industrial processes and the main substances to be controlled under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The regulations are enforced by HM inspectorate of pollution and local authorities which are required to ensure that industry uses best available techniques not entailing excessive cost for preventing, or minimising the release of prescribed substances. The substances prescribed for release into the air includes oxides of nitrogen, organic compounds and halogens and their compounds, which are ozone-depleters.

Provisional figures for the first nine months since the regulations came into force show that some 3,000 applications had been received in England and Wales. Details of all these applications are not held centrally.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to introduce a mandatory recovery scheme for the recycling of chlorofluorocarbons.

Mr. Maclean: The Government have already put in place legislation to control the environmentally damaging disposal of controlled waste. In most cases, CFCs become controlled wastes when they are removed from equipment during maintenance or on disposal of equipment containing them. Section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 makes it illegal to dispose of controlled wastes in a manner likely to cause pollution to the environment or harm to human health.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who will be representing his Department at the forthcoming meeting to be held in Geneva between 8 to 17 July to review the working of the Montreal protocol; and what papers or oral submissions his Department will be presenting for consideration at the meeting.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave yesterday to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) in which I outlined the United Kingdom and EC's proposals for bringing forward the phase-out of chlorofluorocarbons, carbon tetrachloride, halons and 1,1,1 trichloroethane and for control of hydrochlorofluorocarbons. My Department is being represented by five officials at the Geneva meeting.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to utilise the chlorine loading method when assessing the potential effect of HCFCs on the ozone layer.

Mr. Maclean: The advantages and limitations of the chlorine loading potential method for estimating the impact of ozone-depleting substances were detailed in the 1990 and 1991 reports of the Department's stratospheric ozone review group. The Department will continue to use the most appropriate methods according to the best scientific information available, including chlorine loading potential.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the estimated production and release levels for CFCs, methyl chloraform and halons in the United Kingdom from the present to 1 January 1996 in terms of thousands of tonnes.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the effectiveness of the Government-supported ICI recycling scheme for recovering CFCs.

Mr. Maclean: There are a number of companies in the United Kingdom that offer CFC recycling facilities. It is for the operators of each scheme to determine its effectiveness.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research work has been undertaken by his Department about the atmospheric behaviour of the CFC substitute HFC 134a and how it is likely to be broken down.

Mr. Maclean: The Department supports studies of the atmospheric behaviour and degradation of HFC 134a and other potential CFC substitute compounds under a collaborative programme by the Harwell laboratory and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The compound is broken down in the atmosphere by the hydroxyl radical and by reaction with oxygen. The results of the studies will be published, and will improve estimates of the impact of HFC 134a as a greenhouse gas and identify breakdown products which may have a role in lower atmosphere pollution.

Director General of Water Services

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received the report of the Director General of Water Services for 1991.

Mr. Maclean: Yes. The report was placed in the Library of the House on 9 June 1992.

Business Concern, Sheffield

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has given to Sheffield development corporation as to whether Business Concern is to be treated as a separate organisation from the development corporation; from which internal budget heading such activity should be provided; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Department advised Sheffield development corporation that Business Concern should be offered grant support only if it was an independent organisation. Funding has been provided from the budget heading covering support for voluntary organisations.

Relocation

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the difference in cost between moving staff from Marsham street in 1994 rather than 1993; and if he will publish the value for money study carried out on the proposed move to docklands;

(2) what has been the cost, including consultancy fees, of the process of finding alternative accommodation for his Department; and what will be the final cost;

(3) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), of 9 July, *Official Report*, column *149*, on redundancies arising from the demolition of the Marsham street building, if he will list the non-mobile grades; and if he will estimate the number and total costs of redundancies in each of those grades;

(4) by what date his Department has been recommended to vacate its current premises in Marsham street;

(5) what accommodation is available to relocate his Department on the Government estate;

(6) what estimate has been made of the cost of refurbishing Marsham street so that his Department can remain there;

(7) what estimate has been made of the comparative costs of remaining in Marsham street, moving to another location on the Government estate, moving to another building in Westminster or moving to docklands;

(8) how many buildings of more than 100,000 sq ft are available to rent *(a)* in Westminster, *(b)* in the City of London and *(c)* elsewhere in inner London;

(9) what accommodation other than that in docklands has been or is being considered as a possible location for his Department.

Mr. Howard: On 2 June, I announced, *Official Report*, column 707, that some 2,000 civil servants in my

Department would move to docklands, subject to fully commercial terms giving value for money for the taxpayer. My advisers are continuing their consideration of accommodation in docklands, and further work is being undertaken by consultants and officials in my Department. I will make a further announcement in due course.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households in the network installer area including the Shettleston constituency have benefited from home energy efficiency scheme grants since its inception in 1991.

Mr. Maclean: Within the network installer area which contains the hon. Member's constituency, 4,828 homes have benefited from HEES grant since 1 January 1991.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses have been improved under the home energy efficiency scheme since its inception in 1991 in the network installer area including East Kilbride.

Mr. Maclean: Within the network installer area which contains the hon. Member's constituency, 7,073 homes have benefited from HEES grant since 1 January 1991.

Community Charge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to advise local authorities to deduct outstanding community tax arrears directly from income support so as to avoid the expense of committal proceedings.

Mr. Robin Squire: It is for individual authorities to decide on the most appropriate method of recovering arrears of community charge and council tax. We believe authorities should consider methods of recovery such as attachment of earnings or deductions from income support in preference to distress as an initial enforcement option; and we have so advised in our practice note, "Recovery and Enforcement of Council Tax".

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the reasons for his delegation's objection to a side declaration reaffirming targets on greenhouse gases at the recent earth summit meeting.

Mr. Maclean: We believe that international efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions should concentrate on the United Nations Framework convention on climate change, which the United Kingdom and more than 150 other countries signed during UNCED. The President of the European Community, in signing the convention, made a statement on behalf of the Community and its member states which, amongst other things, reaffirmed the objective for Community carbon dioxide emissions as originally stated in Council conclusions of 29 October 1990. In common with many other countries, we did not consider that other side declarations were appropriate for UNCED, which was the occasion to bring countries together in making environmental commitments.

Sustainability Plan

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment with which organisations he will consult on the establishment of a sustainability plan in the United Kingdom; and when he expects such a plan to be established.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom will consult relevant non-governmental, business, scientific and local government organisations on the United Kingdom's national report to the Sustainable Development Commission, which we aim to make in 1993.

Fair Rents

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many objections there were to rent officers' registrations of fair rents in London in *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1991; and what were staffing levels for the processing of these cases in each of these years.

Mr. Baldry: Objections by landlords or tenants to fair rents registered by London rent officers are considered by independent rent assessment committees drawn from the London rent assessment panel. The number of such cases received by the panel and the average staffing level of the panel's secretariat during the years in question were as follows:

Year	*Cases received*	*Average number of staff*
1988	6,121	39
1989	4,656	37
1990	4,887	35
1991	7,944	35

During the first six months of 1992 the panel received 3,728 cases and there were 39 staff in post at 30 June 1992.

Sulphur Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the amount of sulphur dioxide emissions monitored from power stations at *(a)* Ince in Cheshire and *(b)* Richborough in Kent in each year since 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The amount of sulphur dioxide in tonnes emitted from the power stations at Ince in Cheshire and Richborough in Kent for each year since 1988 was as follows:

	Ince	*Richborough*
1988	3,822	0
1989	3,954	485
1990	6,999	3,926
1991	8,207	15,186

Both stations have permission from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to burn limited amounts of orimulsion under legislation which preceded the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Future operations at these power stations will require authorisation from HMIP under the 1990 Act. PowerGen applied for authorisation in April 1991. The applications are the

subject of an appeal to my right hon. and learned Friend about commercial confidentiality. They cannot be determined until after the appeal decision, which will be made as soon as possible.

Orimulsion

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement regarding the proposed burning of orimulsion at Pembroke power station.

Mr. Maclean: National Power has applied for an authorisation under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to burn orimulsion at its Pembroke power station. This application is currently being considered by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether power stations in the United Kingdom currently allowed to burn orimulsion are required to have flue gas desulphurisation equipment; whether this equipment will be required of power plants requesting permission to burn orimulsion in future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Two power stations, Ince in Cheshire and Richborough in Kent, operated by PowerGen are allowed to burn limited amounts of orimulsion under the legislative provisions which preceded the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Neither is required to have flue gas desulphurisation equipment.

Applications under the 1990 Act have been made to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution for these stations and for two others operated by National Power, at Pembroke in Wales and Padiham in Lancashire, and are being considered. In determining these applications, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will consider the environmental implications of releases from the processes to all three media: air, water and land. In view of my right hon. and learned Friend's appellate role it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what submissions have been made to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution as to the amount of orimulsion expressed in *(a)* tonnes and *(b)* monetary value that will be used at Pembroke power station if permission is granted.

Mr. Maclean: *(a)* 3,760 kilo tonnes per annum; *(b)* No submissions have been made as to value other than a general comment that it would be linked to a basket of international coal prices.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria will be evaluated by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in coming to a decision regarding the burning of orimulsion at Pembroke power station; whether that decision is subject to appeal and within what length of time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The criteria used by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in its determination of an application are set out in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and related statutory instruments, and span a variety of subject areas.

The recipient of an authorisation under the Environmental Protection Act may appeal to the Secretary of State within a period of six months from the date of issue.

Bearing in mind that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has yet to determine the application for Pembroke power station, I have no plans to make a statement at this time.

Environmental Information

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment since 1 March *(a)* what new classes of environmental information held by his Department have been made available to the public, *(b)* what new rights to participate in the decision-making process on environmental issues have been extended by his Department to the public and *(c)* what new rights to seek remedies in the event of breach of environmental laws or failure to provide environmental services have been introduced by his Department for the public.

Mr. Maclean: The booklet "Green Rights and Responsibilities", published in February, summarised the current environmental rights and responsibilities of individuals. As was announced following the Prime Minister's seminar on 19 June, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State proposes to work with local government to develop a charter for local authority environment services, and in doing so he will review those rights.

Acid Rain

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much acid rain was monitored in each year from 1988 to 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The mean concentrations of the contaminants, which contribute to the acidity of rain across the United Kingdom, from 1988 to 1991 are as follows:

Mean precipitation concentration, μeq/l

Contaminant	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Hydrogen ion	27·4	23·9	19·6	24·0
Ammonium	24·3	26·5	22·8	29·4
Chloride (non-marine)	7·2	4·3	4·8	1·3
Sulphate (non-marine)	40·6	37·07	31·8	38·5
Nitrate	21·4	21·3	17·0	22·5

Major reductions are anticipated in rain concentrations of sulphate and nitrate in future years following reductions in SO_2 and NO_x emissions secured through the implementation of the European Communities large combustion plants directive and directives on vehicle exhaust emissions.

Dr. David Slater

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department was informed of the shareholding of Dr. David Slater in DNV Technica; what consideration was given to possible conflict of interest in *(a)* appointing Dr. Slater as chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and *(b)* awarding a contract to DNV Technica by single tender in August 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Dr. Slater has never held shares in DNV Technica. His interests in the predecessor company Technica Ltd., of which he was a full-time director, were fully disclosed to the Department when he applied for the post of chief inspector of HMIP early in 1991. He made clear in the course of the recruitment process that if he was successful he would sever all connection with Technica Ltd. immediately. As soon as he was declared successful he accordingly divested himself of all interests in Technica Ltd. on 27 March 1991, before taking up his appointment as chief inspector on 1 May 1991.

Technica Ltd. was subsequently purchased by DNV and reconstituted as a wholly owned subsidiary, DNV Technica.

The circumstances of the award of a contract by the Department to DNV Technica in August 1991 were described in my answer to the hon. Member on 2 June at column *388*. That contract was awarded by a different part of the Department and HMIP was not involved or consulted in any way about it. HMIP has never let any contracts to DNV Technica.

Telecommunications

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to introduce amendments to part 24 of schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 and to publish the draft revised planning policy guidance note on telecommunications.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. and learned Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales have today published a draft revision of planning policy guidance—PPG—note 8, "Telecommunications", for public consultation, and propose to lay before Parliament shortly amendments to part 24 of schedule 2 to the GDO. The amendments and the guidance take account of the public response to the consultation paper on telecommunications, which was issued in the autumn last year.

Modern telecommunications are an essential and beneficial element in the life of the local community and in the national economy. They are good for business; they attract new firms to an area and are equally important for broadcasting and new forms of employment. They can enrich life at home and offer new choices in education and entertainment, in shopping and banking. Through facilitation of homeworking, telecommunications can benefit the environment through reducing the need to travel, and hence by reducing vehicle emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants. Planning policy must not only provide for the continued growth of such services but also ensure that other developments do not impede the performance of current broadcasting and telecommunications services.

The amendments to the GDO will take into account the rapid growth of the telecommunications industry and technology over the last few years. We recognise the need for operators to be able to provide an efficient and competitive service. The amendments will therefore seek to satisfy the needs of the telecommunications industry by reducing a number of current planning constraints, while at the same time allowing planning authorities sufficient control to protect amenity from serious damage.

The main deregulatory changes are the granting of permitted development rights, for the first time, for apparatus on buildings below 15 m and for radio equipment housing, subject to given limits, and the removal of the limit of two antennas on ground-based radio masts. However, there will be no relaxation of controls in designated areas, such as conservation areas and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

These changes would be complemented by a determination procedure in respect of masts, radio equipment housing and public callboxes. Before such apparatus can be installed under permitted development rights, the code system operator will have to apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required to the details of the siting and appearance of the apparatus.

The installation will be able to go ahead after 28 days from the authority's receipt of the application according to the submitted or agreed details, unless the authority refuses to grant prior approval within that period. There can be no grounds for refusal under this provision other than siting or appearance; the permitted development right itself cannot be taken away.

The 28-day time limit is the same as which now applies to the current notification procedure under schedule 4 to licences issued under the Telecommunications Act 1984. The Secretary of State expects the greater majority of installations will be able to go ahead, as they do now, without the planning authority needing to intervene, and that intervention should only take place to prevent serious impact on amenity. Early consultation between operators and local planning authorities should help to ensure that the details of siting and appearance are acceptable.

The draft revised PPG updates the current PPG on telecommunications and explains the GDO regulations governing code system operators—part 24—and the location of satellite television and other antenna—parts 1 and 25. It provides guidance to planning authorities on the importance of development plans in providing for telecommunications development, and on the planning considerations that should be taken into account in their development control functions. Early consultation and sufficient information are both important for proper planning decisions. The guidance continues to stress the importance for operators to share masts and buildings wherever practicable, and for planning authorities to ensure that large new buildings do not create radio interference.

MINIS 13

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish his Department's MINIS 13 documents.

Mr. Howard: I am today publishing the MINIS 13 documents and a set has been placed in the Library.

Opencast Coal Mining

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has yet reached a decision on whether to review the planning guidelines on opencast coal in minerals planning guidance—MPG—3; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My Department and the Welsh Office have recently completed a wide-ranging consultation exercise on the practical operation of the planning guidelines for opencast coal in MPG3. Copies of a summary of the responses have been placed in the Library.

The Government are concerned to ensure that the highest environmental standards apply to the minerals industry generally. Whilst I am satisfied that the guidelines in MPG3 have generally worked well, in the light of the responses to consultation, I have concluded that the guidelines will need revision to reflect changes in the legislative and policy framework since 1988. In addition, the Government announced on 9 March their intention to bring forward amendments to the General Development Order 1988, to revise British Coal's permitted development rights for underground working and opencast coal exploration. I believe that it would be right for revised guidelines to deal with all aspects of coal extraction, including deep-mined coal and the disposal of colliery spoil. I therefore propose to bring forward draft revised planning guidelines on coal extraction generally for public consultation in the autumn.

Housing Management

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for developing pilot schemes for compulsory competitive tendering of housing management; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Compulsory competitive tendering for housing management can make a major contribution to improving the service provided by local authorities to their tenants, and it is therefore important that central and local government co-operate closely in developing effective procedures. I have already invited six local authorities, Newham, Westminster, Rochdale, Derby, East Staffordshire and Mid Suffolk, to be pilot authorities. My Department will be discussing with the authorities over the coming months how this project should be carried forward. I expect to invite further authorities to participate in due course.

Mole Valley District Council

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what use he intends to make of his sanction powers under part I of the Local Government Act 1988 in relation to Mole Valley district council.

Mr. Robin Squire: On 6 February 1992, my right hon. and learned Friend served two notices under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988 on Mole Valley district council, setting out his view that in 1991-92 the authority had acted anti-competitively in carrying out work falling within the defined activities described in section 2(2)*(f)* and *(ee)* of the Act—ground maintenance work and the management of sport and leisure facilities respectively.

My right hon. and learned Friend has now considered the responses which the authority has made to the section 13 notices, but he remains of the opinion that the authority acted in an anti-competitive manner in awarding this work to its own work force. He has concluded that the authority's action is such as to justify further use of sanction powers. He has therefore today made two directions under section 14 of the 1988 Act. The effect of the direction given in relation to ground maintenance work is to prohibit the authority from carrying out the work in question beyond 1 July 1993. The direction given in respect of the management of sport and leisure work permits the authority's direct service organisation to bid for the work in a retendering exercise to be completed by 1 July 1993, but requires the authority to seek the Secretary of State's consent if they propose that their in-house work force should carry out the work beyond that date.

Endangered Species

Mr. Efletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the recommendation from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee that a number of species of endangered animals and plants should be added to schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Following recommendations made by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and consultation with other bodies, I have decided that we should add the following species of animals to schedule 5—protected animals—of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and also amend schedule 8—protected plants—of that Act as follows:

Animals to be added to Schedule 5

3 species of beetle (Graphoderus zonatus, Hypebaeus flavipes and paracymus aeneus)
Lesser silver water beetle
Mire pill beetle
High brown fritillary butterfly (already partially protected)
Northern hatchet shell
Lagoon snail
De Folin's snail
Tentacled lagoon worm
Sussex emerald moth
Pink sea fan
Lagoon sea slug
Sturgeon

Plants to be added to Schedule 8

Blackwort
Snow caloplaca
Tree catapyrenium
Laurer's catillaria
Slender centaury
Upright mountain cladonia
Meadow clary
Lizard crystalwrt
Broad leaved cudweed
Shore dock
Marsh earwort
Norfolk flapwort
Pointed frostwort
Dune gentian
Early gentian
Blunt leaved grimmia
Elm gyalecta
Northroe hawkweed
Shetland hawkweed
Weakleaved hawkweed
Churchyard lecanactis
Tarn lecanora
Copper lecidea
Arctic kidney lichen
Ciliate strap lichen
Coralloid rosette lichen
Earlobed dog lichen
Forked hair lichen
Golden hair lichen
Orange fruited elm lichen
River jolly lichen
Scaly breck lichen
Stary breck lichen
Lindenberg's leafy liverwort
Alpine copper moss
Baltic bog moss
Blue dew moss
Blunt leaved bristle moss
Bright green cave moss

Cordate beard moss
Cornish path moss
Derbyshire feather moss
Dune thread moss
Glaucous beard moss
Green shield moss
Hair silk moss
Large yellow feather moss
Multifruited river moss
Millimetre moss
Knothole moss
Nowell's limestone moss
Rigid apple moss
Round leaved feather moss
Schlricher's thread moss
Triangular pygmy moss
Vaucher's feather moss
Welsh mudwort
Stalked orache
Lapland marsh orchid
Caledonia pannaria
New Forest parmelia
Oil stain parmentaria
Perfoliate penny cress
Alpine moss pertusaria
Southern grey physcia
Ground pine
Ragged pseudocyphellaria
Rusty alpine psora
Spiked rampion
Western rustwort
Serpentine solenopsora
Bearded stonewort
Turpswort

Plants to be deleted from Schedule 8

Recurved sea lavender
St. David's sea lavender
Purple spurge

I will be placing an order before Parliament shortly which will bring these changes into effect. Further consideration is being given to three other recommendations made by the JNCC concerning the giant goby, the basking shark and the wild cat hybrid.

Access to Information

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the responses received to the Government's consultation paper on proposals for implementation of EC directive 90/313/EC on the freedom of access to information on the environment.

Mr. Maclean: I have today placed copies of responses in my Department's library. A list of respondents has also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

My Department is carefully considering the responses received. We will consult widely on the proposed regulations to implement the directive and on the guidance we are preparing to accompany the regulations.

Tyne and Wear Development Corporation

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of jobs created by Tyne and Wear development corporation, for each year since 1988, distinguishing *(a)* permanent new jobs, *(b)* permanent jobs relocated from (i) within the city of Sunderland boundary, (ii) the northern region and (iii) elsewhere, *(c)* temporary jobs in (x) construction and related trades and (y) other trades on the development schemes at (1) Hylton Riverside, (2) former Southwick shipyard, (3) North Dock, (4) North Sands, (5) St. Peters way, (6) Hylton park (excluding (1) and (2)), (7) Sunderland forge and (8) Deptford Riverside.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The attached table provides the information requested under sections *(a)* and *(c)* of the question.

Of the 319 permanent new jobs in the specified areas, 84 were from expansion within Sunderland city council administrative area, 37 were created as a result of expansion from within the northern region and 198 as a result of inward investment from outside the region. A detailed breakdown of this information by site is not available.

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Permanent New Jobs			
(1) Hylton Riverside (exc. 6)	—	—	—
(2) Former Southwick Shipyards	—	—	6
(3) North Dock	—	—	1
(4) North Sands	—	—	—
(5) St. Peters Way	—	—	—
(6) Hylton Park	—	30	31
(7) Sunderland Forge	—	—	—
(8) Deptford	102	149	—
Temporary Jobs in Construction and Related Trades			
(1) Hylton Riverside (exc. 6)	17	33	19
(2) Former Southwick Shipyards	—	—	8
(3) North Dock	7	15	22
(4) North Sands	—	7	95
(5) St. Peters Way	—	—	—
(6) Hylton Park excluding 1 and 2	—	—	—
(7) Sunderland Forge	—	—	5
(8) Deptford	7	4	—
Temporary Jobs in Other Trades			
(1) Hylton Riverside (exc. 6)	—	—	—
(2) Former Southwick Shipyards	—	—	—
(3) North Dock	—	—	7
(4) North Sands	—	—	—
(5) St. Peters Way	—	—	3
(6) Hylton Park	—	—	—
(7) Sunderland Forge	—	—	—
(8) Deptford	—	—	—

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which traditional industries on Wearside have received assistance from Tyne and Wear development corporation in each year from 1988 to the present; and if he will make a statement on the overall level of support provided.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* In the period 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1992 Tyne and Wear development corporation provided £2,983,749 in support to industry on Wearside. The breakdown between financial years is as follows:

	£
1987-88	Nil
1988-89	22,714
1989-90	673,357
1990-91	825,197
1991-92	1,642,480

This support has been given to a range of different industries on Wearside.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the names of all companies which have tenancies at the Tyne and Wear development

corporation development scheme at Hylton riverside, the total number of employees with each company indicating *(a)* permanent new jobs created, *(b)* relocated jobs and *(c)* temporary jobs since these companies became tenants.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The table lists companies operating from Hylton riverside, which have received financial assistance from Tyne and Wear development corporation.

	Total employers	*Permanent new jobs*	*Relocated jobs*	*Temporary jobs*
J. L. Automation	8	6	2	—
Sokkisha	7	7	0	—
Coniston Computers	23	10	13	—
Regional Tech Centre	13	7	6	—
Applied Imaging	73	31	42	—

In addition three other firms, not in receipt of financial assistance from Tyne and Wear development corporation, are operating from Hylton riverside. These firms provide approximately 25 jobs in total.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all members of the board of Tyne and Wear development corporation giving *(a)* annual remuneration of each position, *(b)* period of office of each position, *(c)* body, company or organisation represented, *(d)* town, city or village of residence of each office holder and *(e)* the office held by each office holder.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The current members of the board of Tyne and Wear development corporation and the date of expiry of their appointments are as follows:

Name and office	*Date of expiry of appointment*
Paul Nicholson—*Chairman*	14 May 1993
John Ward OBE—*Deputy Chairman*	14 May 1993
Graeme Anderson CBE	14 May 1993
John Barnsley	14 May 1993
Eric Bramfitt	6 November 1993
Tony Flynn	6 November 1993
Ian Gordon OBE	14 May 1993
Ian Gibson OBE	14 May 1993
Professor Patsy Healy	6 November 1993
Dr. Ralph Iley	14 May 1993
Joe L. Mills	14 May 1993
Albert Moore OBE	14 May 1993
Frank Sharratt	14 May 1993

Details of remuneration are given in the development corporation's annual report for 1990-91, which is held in the Library of the House. It is not the convention to reveal the places of residence of individual board members.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the names, position and salary of all senior executives employed by Tyne and Wear development corporation and indicate which executives are seconded, whether from government or other bodies, and the period of time of each secondee.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* The table below shows the names, positions and salary ranges of the chief executive and second-tier officers of Tyne and Wear development corporation.

Name and position	*Salary band*
Chief Executive—Alastair Balls	Within salary band £45,000 to £50,000
Director of Marketing and Business Development (Deputy Chief Executive) —Gordon Ramsey	Individual salary bands within the range £39,000 to £47,000
Director of Development—John Scally	
Director of Operations—Tom Macpherson	
Director of Finance—Neil Mundy	

The chief executive is seconded from Government service. The current secondment period ends in July 1993.

Wild Birds

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will provide a complete list of the numbers of licences granted for the taking of birds of prey from the wild and the numbers of birds of prey taken under such licences, by species in each case, for each of the last five years;

(2) how many quarry licences for falconry were issued in each of the last five years; and what quarry species were involved;

(3) by species of avian predator, and for each of the last five years, what was the number of licences granted for taking and the number of birds so taken from the wild;

(4) how many licences for taking wild peregrine falcons have been issued in each of the last five years;

(5) what was the number of falconry licences issued during each of the last five years, giving the categories and numbers of prey species involved.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* Details of these licences are given in the United Kingdom's annual derogation reports to the European Commission under the terms of the EC directive 79/409 on the conservation of wild birds. Copies of each report for the years 1987 to 1991 have been placed in the Library of the House.

Rural Development

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what Government support programmes or finance are available to rural development areas; and what are the basic services that his Department treats as being necessary for assessing grants to rural development areas.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* In addition to the wide range of national and regional assistance which is available from Government Departments the rural development areas receive

additional assistance from the Rural Development Commission which is sponsored by my Department. This includes the provision of workspace, grants for the conversion of redundant buildings, a business advice service, grants and loans for small rural businesses and support for community groups and projects. Grant applications are assessed on their merits, taking into account the needs of the area, the rules of the grant scheme and the views of funding partners.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority which contains a rural development area the level of *(a)* rural development programme, *(b)* rural housing programme and *(c)* rural transport development fund for each year from 1987-88 at current prices and at 1987-88 prices.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The detailed information requested on the rural development programmes and the rural transport development fund could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the total sum spent on these is as follows:

	At 1992-93 prices	*At 1987-88 prices*
Rural Development Programme		
1987-88	19,831	14,344
1988-89	20,734	14,997
1989-90	18,232	13,187
1990-91	17,344	12,545
1991-92	11,292	8,168
Rural Transport Development Programme		
1987-88	796	576
1988-89	624	451
1989-90	711	515
1990-91	290	209
1991-92	413	299

The rural housing programme has been in operation only since 1991-92. Its schedule of allocations for the first two years with a break-down by local authority can be found in the Library of this House.

Environment Agency

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to establish an environment agency.

27. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to introduce legislation to establish an environmental protection agency.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to introduce legislation to enable the creation of the environmental agency.

Mr. Howard: The Prime Minister announced last year that the Government had decided to set up a new, independent environment agency for environmental protection and enhancement. We issued a public consultation paper on our proposals and we have been considering the submissions made to us.

The consultation exercise showed that there is widespread support for our proposal to establish a single agency to unify the key regulatory pollution control functions affecting air, land and water. In creating this body, we have been concerned to ensure that there is no weakening in the protection and effective management of the water environment as represented by the well-proven concept of integrated river basin management.

We have therefore decided that the agency should bring together all the functions of the National Rivers Authority, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the waste regulation functions of local authorities to form an integrated body.

The agency will cover England and Wales. The Government do not intend to make any changes in existing ministerial policy responsibilities including those of my right hon. Friends the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Wales for the activities to be carried out by the environment agency. The agency will report on its activities in Wales to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, and the Government will be considering further the detailed arrangements that will be needed to ensure an appropriate agency presence in Wales. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will be making an announcement in due course about the arrangements for Scotland.

We propose that local authorities should retain their present responsibility for controlling air pollution from the less polluting industrial processes. However, we shall ensure that close liaison is achieved and maintained between the agency and local authorities in the implementation of part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

In the light of the comments received, we have decided that the distinctive role of the drinking water inspectorate in protecting the health and safety of water consumers should be maintained and its independence enhanced. We are considering how best to do this. It will not, therefore, transfer from my Department to the environment agency.

The agency will be a substantial new public body responsible for major expenditure and resources. We will be looking for ways to ensure that it provides effective protection to the environment, and good value for money.

We are now proceeding with drafting the necessary legislation to create the agency and define its scope. The Government intend to establish the new body as soon as possible. Legislation will therefore be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 16 July 1992

TRANSPORT

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Norris: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance. One of the aims of our transport policy is to provide the right infrastructure so that large and small businesses can operate effectively. Specific measures by my Department which have helped small business include the deregulation of local bus services. We expect the completion of the single market in aviation, agreed last month, to extend the benefits of a liberal aviation market, such as lower fares and a choice of services, already enjoyed by consumers in the United Kingdom, to the whole of the EC. This will benefit businesses as users of air services as well as offering increased opportunities to enter EC markets as operators. The abolition of the dock labour scheme has increased competition between ports and in many of them productivity has grown considerably.

A65 Ilkley Bypass

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make a further announcement about the proposed A65 Ilkley bypass.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I hope to be in a position to make a further announcement on the development of this scheme before the end of year.

Noise

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what legislation, regulations or guidelines exist to limit the impact of *(a)* aircraft noise, *(b)* vehicle noise or *(c)* other noise pollution.

Mr. Norris: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to introduce regulations to control aircraft noise;

(2) what responses he has received from Northern Ireland-based individuals or organisations in response to the consultation paper "Control of Aircraft Noise".

Mr. Norris: The consultation paper "Control of Aircraft Noise" was published last August. More than 550 responses have been received including one from Northern Ireland. The responses are being carefully considered and an announcement of conclusions will be made in due course.

The United Kingdom has supported international agreements to phase out of operation older, noisier subsonic civil jet aircraft certificated to "chapter 2" standards. These aircraft will be phased out between 1995 and 2002 and regulations to that effect will be introduced in due course.

Civil Servants (Shareholdings)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance, other than the "Civil Service Pay and Conditions of Service Code" and the "Establishment Officers' Guide", his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Guidance for members of the Department and its executive agencies is in the departmental staff handbook. Staff are asked to consult with the Department's personnel management directorate if they are in any doubt about the propriety of holding shares.

In the last five years eight members of staff have reported that they have shareholdings.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Norris: This information is set out in the Department's management plan for 1992-95.

Transpennine Roads Study

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 13 July, *Official Report*, column *413*, about the transpennine roads study, when he intends to make a substantive reply to the second part of that question relating to publication of the study.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: As soon as possible.

Marchioness-Bowbelle Collision

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the action he has taken on each of the recommendations contained in the marine accident investigation report of July 1990 into the collision between the Marchioness and the Bowbelle.

Mr. Norris: One of the recommendations in the Hayes report on river safety, announced by the Secretary of State for Transport on 7 July, was that the Department should publish annually an account of the progress made on the implementation of recommendations made after all major disasters. The Department accepted this recommendation.

There were 27 recommendations in the MAIB final report on the collision between the Marchioness and the Bowebelle. Action has been completed in respect of

recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4(b), 6-14 inclusive, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 26 and 27. Action will be completed this year in respect of recommendations 4(a), 5, 15, 17, 20 and 24. Further consideration is being given to recommendation 22. Full details have been placed in the Library of the House.

Motorway Sound Barriers

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to provide effective modern sound barriers to reduce the noise of the new feeder roads off the M25 between the M3 and M4 junctions.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Noise barriers are proposed at a number of locations adjacent to the proposed new link roads between junctions 12 and 15 of the M25. The type of barrier to be used has not yet been decided. A number of possible options are being considered.

Air Accidents

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what figures his Department has relating to the number of accident reports submitted involving *(a)* helicopters and *(b)* fixed wing aircrafts in British airspace over the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: In the past 10 years the Department's air accidents investigation branch has submitted a total of 73 formal investigation reports to the Secretary of State. Forty-seven of those reports were investigations into accidents to fixed-wing aircraft; 26 related to helicopter accidents.

North Devon Link Road

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will authorise 60 mph speed restriction signs to be painted on the surface of the A361 north Devon link road.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No, but I am proposing other steps to encourage compliance with the speed limit. I will write to the hon. Member.

Trailers

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions are laid down regarding the separate registration of towing vehicles and their trailers; and what exceptions exist for nuclear weapons convoys.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Motor vehicles for civilian use are registered by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency under the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971. This does not extend to trailers. Military vehicles are registered by the Ministry of Defence. I am not aware of any exceptions applying to military vehicles in nuclear weapons convoys.

Cross-Thames Rail Link

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the north-south rail link across the River Thames in south-east London.

Mr. Norris: The report on the east London rail study phase 2, commissioned by London Transport and the London Docklands development corporation and published earlier this year, identified a number of possible extensions to the rail network including some that would cross the Thames. I understand that further work is being undertaken on certain of the options identified.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contribution he is seeking from the private sector for construction of the east London river crossing.

Mr. Norris: It is not our policy to seek contributions to the construction of strategic trunk road schemes in my Department's programme except in cases where additional traffic generated by new private development would cause us to provide facilities which are more extensive, or earlier, than otherwise needed.

The east London river crossing was included in the national programme in 1979, to complete the extension of the north circular road to the A2 as part of a coherent network for longer distance traffic within London. No additional facilities have been included in the plans since then to deal with specific development proposals and so no contributions are currently being sought from the private sector.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current estimated cost of building the east London river crossing.

Mr. Norris: The total estimated cost at 1989 prices is about £300 million.

London Ring Rail

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from S. B. Tietz and Partners on proposals for the London ring rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend has just received a copy of the proposals for a London ring rail from S. B. Tietz and Partners and we shall reply to them shortly.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the contribution to decongestion in central London that the Jubilee line extension will make.

Mr. Norris: In net present value terms, at mid-1991 discounted to 1991, the road and rail decongestion benefits of the Jubilee line extension would be around £230 million and £275 million respectively.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the estimated cost of extending further the proposed Jubilee line extension to Woolwich and Thamesmead.

Mr. Norris: London Transport has recently estimated that it would cost around £300 million or £330 million to extend the Jubilee line to Woolwich Arsenal taking a route north of the Royal Victoria dock, or £370 million taking a route south of the Royal Victoria dock. Extending beyond Woolwich Arsenal to Thamesmead would cost an estimated £160 million more. All estimates are in mid-1990 prices.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish details of the cost benefit analysis carried out on the proposals to extend the Jubilee line *(a)* to docklands and Greenwich peninsula and *(b)* further to Woolwich and Thamesmead.

Mr. Norris: *(a)* The results, in present value terms, of a recent cost benefit analysis of the proposed Jubilee line extension from Green Park to Stratford, taking into account the quantifiable benefits conventionally used in the appraisal of rail transport schemes, are given in the table.

Mid 1991 prices discounted to 1991

	£ million
Capital costs	−1,505
Operating cost	−180
Additional revenue	340
Funding gap	−1,345
Public transport user benefits	1,025
Road user benefits	230
Net benefit	−90
Benefit:cost ratio	0·95:1

(b) No recent cost-benefit analysis has been carried out in respect of possible further extensions of the Jubilee line to Woolwich and Thamesmead. At the time of the east London rail study, published July 1989, however, it was clear that the costs of such extensions would far exceed the benefits.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Detling to Malling section of British Rail's previous southerly route for the channel tunnel rail link from which safeguarding has now been withdrawn is outside the preferred corridor referred to in his answer to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling of 9 June, *Official Report*, column *116*.

Mr. Freeman: The Detling to Halling section of the originally safeguarded route was withdrawn on 5 November 1991 by the then Secretary of State because there was no common agreement to the west of Detling between the Ove Arup preferred route and that of British Rail. The Government preferred the Ove Arup approach which involves crossing the Thames near Dartford and arriving at King's Cross via Stratford. The Government have stated that the route indicated on the maps circulated last year was on the line of that put forward by Ove Arup, but have never suggested that the precise Ove Arup alignment could or should be definitive. West of Detling tal,the Government are committed to a preferred route corridor and not a specific safeguardable line. British Rail are considering carefully the cost, environmental and engineering implications of the route and will present to Ministers later this year any proposed diversions from this base reference. Any such diversions would have to be justified and in due course, if accepted, be subject to public consultations and planning approval.

Railway Pensions

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give an assurance that when employees of British Rail transfer with their jobs to a new owner on privatisation their future pension entitlements will be no less than had they stayed as employees of British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: An assurance on pensions is given at paragraph 87 of the White Paper "New Opportunities for the Railways", Cm 2012, which was published on 14 July.

London Underground

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the inner London parliamentary constituencies which do not have a London Underground station; and what plans he has to remedy this.

Mr. Norris: Of the 30 inner London parliamentary constituencies, nine do not contain a London Underground station. These are:

Greenwich	Lewisham, East
Woolwich	Lewisham, West
Eltham	Dulwich
Hackney, South and Shoreditch	Peckham
Streatham	

The location of parliamentary boundaries is not a factor taken into account by London Underground when putting together their investment programme. However, there are several schemes under consideration by LUL which would have the effect of increasing the number of parliamentary constituencies served by the underground.

Lorry Weights

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether, under the Maastricht treaty, decisions to increase maximum lorry weights would be taken by unanimous decision or by qualified majority voting.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The existing legal provision for decisions relating to a common transport policy normally to be taken by qualified majority voting is not affected by the Maastricht treaty.

River Safety

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, following the public reaction to the report of the Hayes committee on river safety and any representations made to him, he will consider publishing a Green Paper reviewing safety on rivers and waterways, other than the tidal Thames, and the ways in which safety can be improved thereon, including consideration that the statutory duty for co-ordinating the safety requirements become the specific responsibility of the relevant navigation authority.

Mr. Norris: As my right hon. Friend announced on 7 July, he is setting up district marine safety committees to review in each of their areas the way in which responsibilities for safety, rescue and accident prevention are currently distributed. Their remit includes safety on rivers and waterways. They will consider ways in which safety can be improved and ensure that improvements are implemented and sustained. It would not be appropriate to prescribe particular solutions at this stage; we intend that the proposals should come from the individual committees and therefore reflect the circumstances of their area.

"Going Round in Circles"

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning his Department's response to the proposals contained in the publication, "Going Round in Circles", published by the Association of London Authorities in December 1991.

Mr. Norris: I have just received the publication to which the hon. Member refers, and I will be considering its contents.

Plutonium (Road Transport)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the procedures for informing the local public of possible health risks associated with the accidental dispersal of radioactive plutonium in the event of a road transportation accident.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Information will be given by the local authorities on advice from the emergency services.

Crown Estate

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the Crown Estate Commissioners in order to discuss those matters over which they control rights of public access and which affect movements of commercial vehicles and public transport.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend has had no such meetings.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider introducing legislation to remove ancient rights of ferry from the Crown Estate Commissioners where this affects any public ferry service.

Mr. Norris: No.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek the agreement of the Crown Estate Commissioners to consult his Department and the relevant local authorities prior to them ordering a cessation of any ferry service over which they exercise ancient rights of ferry.

Mr. Norris: The terms under which the Crown Estate Commissioners grant or withdraw rights to operate ferry services are commercial matters between the commissioners and the ferry operators concerned. This Department has no locus to intervene.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking during the Government's presidency of the Council of Ministers to promote EC legislation on making public transport accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: My Department is committed to promoting and encouraging improved access to public transport for people with disabilities. We are working closely with disabled people as consumers and with the transport industries on the most effective way forward.

The scope for EC action is limited by the subsidiarity principle, in so far as this does not apply, the Government will take forward measures to assist disabled people during the United Kingdom presidency.

Road Maintenance

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what records his Department keeps of the cost of maintenance and repairs for individual sections of motorway and trunk road.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department keeps extensive records of the cost of maintenance and repairs; these costs are being progressively entered into, and retained on, a number of computerised systems, so that information can be extracted for individual sections as required.

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what records his Department keeps of the historic maintenance requirements of different forms of motorway and trunk road construction.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department keeps extensive maintenance records. These are used, inter alia, to ensure that the standards required of new construction reflect current needs and accord with minimum whole-life costs.

It is a requirement under all major new construction and maintenance schemes for records of construction known as "as built drawings" to be recorded. Steps are under way to computerise these records.

Rail White Paper

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received since the publication of his White Paper on British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: None.

Train Failures

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what claims British Rail has against the manufacturers of the 225 trains for technical failure while in service.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail is ensuring that the manufacturer of the InterCity 225 trains complies with the terms of the contracts, which include warranty protections.

MoT Tests

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions he issues as to whether an MoT rejection arising from a particular vehicle component can be reissued for different reasons once the rectification work has been undertaken.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* If a vehicle fails its test on what are classed minor items—for example, horn, indicators, headlamp aim, lamps, rear reflectors, seat belts, but not anchorages, windscreen washers and wipers, emissions—and providing the vehicle is brought back repaired to the station by the end of the next working day only the failure items are retested. However, if the vehicle is failed for other reasons and is brought back repaired regardless of when it is represented the vehicle must undergo another complete MoT test. It is possible that other defects may have occurred in the interim and would subsequently merit another refusal being issued. It is also possible that a retested vehicle may fail if a repaired component still does not meet the required standard.

A565-M57 Link Road

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will confirm the date of the public inquiry into Sefton borough council's proposal to build a link road between the A565 trunk road at Ince Blundell and the M57 motorway at Switch Island.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.
I will write to my hon. Friend.

PRIME MINISTER

EC Expenditure

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the level of expenditure of the EC.

The Prime Minister: Yes. It was agreed by the European Council at Lisbon on 26 and 27 June 1992 that when the Council met again at Edinburgh it would address the Community's finances for 1993 and subsequent years.

Whaling

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 13 July, what response he received when he discussed the hunting of minke whales and the International Whaling Commission with the Prime Minister of Japan; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Japanese Prime Minister noted the concerns that I expressed to him. Mr. Miyazawa and the Japanese Government are well aware of the considerable opposition in this country to whaling.

Poland

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister when the ratification process of the association agreement between the European Communities and the Republic of Poland will be completed; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The association agreement will be concluded between the Republic of Poland, the European Community and its member states. It therefore requires ratification by the Parliaments of member states and the Polish Parliament. The European Parliament must also give its assent. I hope that these procedures can be completed quickly.

Crown Estate

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will introduce legislation to bring the administration of the Crown estate within a Government Department and subject to Ministerial responsibility.

The Prime Minister: No. The Crown estate is administered by the Crown Estate Commissioners under the terms of the Crown Estate Act 1961.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he is consulted on the appointment of the Crown Estate Commissioners.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister when a Government Minister last met the chairman or members of the Crown Estate Commission in order to discuss the administration of the Crown estate.

The Prime Minister: The Chancellor of the Exchequer met Lord Mansfield, the First Crown Estate Commissioner, to discuss the Crown estate's performance and long-term plans, on Wednesday 10 July 1991.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister in what circumstances the Crown Estate Commission is liable to pay the uniform business rate on property and estates it administers.

The Prime Minister: Commercial tenants of the Crown Estate Commissioners are liable to pay the uniform business rate in the usual way. Where the Crown estate occupies buildings for its own employees, the commissioners make a contribution in lieu of business rates to the Inland Revenue Crown property unit. The level of the rate is determined by the valuation office.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Sims: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the total amount paid in grants by Government Departments to voluntary bodies during the financial year 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Government funding to voluntary organisations in 1990-91 amounted to £2,680 million. Of this, £2,058 million was payments to voluntary housing associations; £150 million was payments under major employment and training schemes; and £472 million went to support provision of services and a wide range ofactivities and projects by a variety of voluntary organisations. This last figure, which represents the amount paid directly by Government funding to voluntary organisations, shows that direct Government funding of the voluntary sector increased in cash terms by 26·5 per cent.—16·6 per cent. in real terms—over the level of provision in 1989-90. In the period between 1979-80 and 1990-91, the level of the Government's support for voluntary bodies rose in real terms by 149·5 per cent., an increase in cash terms of 542·25 per cent.

The amount spent under individual departmental programmes was as follows:

	£
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	179,037
Defence	9,688,730
Education and Science	5,725,346
Sports Council	13,454,000
Employment	
Training programmes	177,199,203
Energy	725,462
Environment	
Direct grants	15,965,568
Urban programme	51,300,000
Housing corporation	1,682,000,000
Countryside Commission	1,600,000
Nature Conservancy Council	1,469,000
Rural Development Commission	5,089,000
UK 2000 project grant fund	360,000
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	1,453,658
Overseas Development Administration	87,799,667
Health	
Direct grants	36,498,099
Health Education Authority	1,108,405
Home Office	

	£
Direct grants	33,856,000
Equal Opportunities Commission	19,814
Commission for Racial Equality	508,887
Northern Ireland Office	
Direct grants	17,673,816
Housing associations and societies	36,872,587
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	495,696
Economic Development Grants	
Action for Community Employment	49,230,056
Community workshops	17,739,038
Community volunteering schemes	890,000
Youth community projects	831,479
Young help	1,148,681
Scottish Office	
Direct grants	18,909,379
Urban programme	35,671,000
Housing associations	208,000,000
Countryside Commission for Scotland	1,004,341
Highlands and Islands Enterprise (formerly Highlands and Islands Development Board)	1,197,977
Sports Council for Scotland	1,451,561
Social Security	5,717,883
Trade and Industry	11,604,172
Transport	541,000
Welsh Office	
Direct grants	8,767,755
Urban programme	3,060,000
Joint finance/care in the community	336,000
Development Board for Rural Wales	420,664
Housing for Wales (Tai Cymru)—Grants to housing associations	131,387,947
Sports Council for Wales and Play Wales Management Committee	1,099,155
GRAND TOTAL	2,680,050,063

I am placing in the Library of the House a list of voluntary bodies funded by the Government in 1990-91 other than those funded under youth training and employment training, housing programmes and the urban programme or via non-departmental public bodies. Other recent publications about the relationship between Government and the voluntary sector already placed in the Library include "The Individual and the Community: The Role of the Voluntary Sector", and a leaflet entitled "Government and Voluntary Organisations Support and Partnership". Copies of these publications can be obtained from the voluntary services unit, Home Office, Room 1373, 50 Queen Anne's gate, London SW1H 9AT.

EDUCATION

Civil Servants' Shareholdings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forman: No special guidance is provided. Civil servants in the Department and its agency are expected to report shareholdings where a conflict of interest might arise. There is no record of any having done so over the past five years: the nature of most of the Department's business makes conflicts of interest inherently unlikely.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what visits she has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans she has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC.

Mr. Forman: Education is not regulated at the level of the EC.

Theatres

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what jurisdiction his Department has over those theatres currently controlled by colleges in the further education sector; and if he has had talks with the Further Education Funding Council to guarantee their future survival.

Mr. Forman: My right hon. Friend has no jurisdiction over theatres currently controlled by further education colleges but, under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, his consent would be required for the disposal of such an asset prior to 1 April 1993. It will be for the Further Education Funding Council, when it is formed, to decide how to treat theatres for the purposes of its funding methodology.

Voluntary-aided Primary Schools, Rossendale

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will approve the application for capital grant in respect of an extension to St. Veronica's voluntary-aided primary school, Haslingden, Rossendale;

(2) if he will approve the application for capital grant in respect of developments at St. Mary's voluntary-aided primary school, Haslingden, Rossendale.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend approved a proposal to enlarge significantly the premises of St. Veronica's on 6 February 1992 together with the associated project at St. Mary's. This approval means that he will be prepared to pay maintenance contribution on governors' approved net building expenditure subject to a maximum cash limit based on 85 per cent. of the governors' share of the scheme which estimated total capital costs of £580,000.

English

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* higher education students and *(b)* female students were reading English in the years 1979, 1985 and 1991.

Mr. Foreman: The information is given in the table:

Higher education students studying English (Great Britain)

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
1979	3,981	7,857	11,838
1985	3,513	7,897	11,410
1990	4,314	11,773	16,087

Note: Subject classification changed between 1985 and 1990.

Student Fees

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the cost to the Exchequer of student fees was in the years 1979, 1985, and 1991.

Mr. Foreman: In financial year 1991-92 the cost to the Exchequer of fees for mandatory student award holders domiciled in England and Wales, and of fees paid on behalf of students from the European Community, was some £1,173,084,000. This figure excludes discretionary award holders and the holders of postgraduate awards, for whom the fee element cannot be separately identified. For financial years 1979-80 and 1985-86, only combined fee and maintenance figures are available.

Standard Assessment Tasks

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations have been received against publication of SATs results and how many for publication during the past 12 months.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has not yet issued for consultation proposals for the publication of national curriculum assessment results at school level. It is not, therefore, possible to provide a tabulation of representations for and against publication.

However, over the past 12 months the Department for Education has received many letters about the general issue of the publication of national curriculum assessment results at national, LEA and school level. Precise figures on the numbers for and against publication at the various different levels are not, however, available.

School Budgets

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish figures to show for each local education authority in English in the latest year for which such figures are available what was *(a)* the potential schools budget, *(b)* the amount of subsidy spent on school meals and milk and *(c)* *(b)* expressed as a percentage of *(a)*.

Mr. Forth: The figures in the following table show planned expenditure for 1991-92, and were taken from local authorities' 1991-92 budget statements, published under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

School meals expenditure 1991-92

Local education authority	*(a) Potential schools budget (PSB) (£ million)*	*(b) School meals expenditure not delegated (£ million)*	*(c) School meals expenditure as a percentage of PSB*
Avon	222·7	14·0	6·3
Barking	42·5	2·1	4·9
Barnet	75·4	4·3	5·7
Barnsley	50·7	4·4	8·7
Bedfordshire	150·4	9·6	6·4
Berkshire	168·3	0·9	0·5
Bexley	56·5	2·6	4·5
Birmingham	271·1	18·8	6·9
Bolton	71·0	5·7	8·0
Bradford	141·9	8·5	6·0
Brent	68·9	4·4	6·3
Bromley	64·1	2·9	4·5
Buckinghamshire	148·9	1·4	0·9
Bury	44·2	3·4	7·7
Calderdale	49·8	3·3	6·6
Cambridgeshire	158·6	3·3	2·1
Cheshire	243·6	10·6	4·4
Cleveland	164·9	13·8	8·4
Cornwall	102·1	5·6	5·5
Coventry	81·1	4·4	5·4
Croydon	81·2	1·6	1·9
Cumbria	122·6	4·9	4·0
Derbyshire	235·6	21·6	9·2
Devon	209·3	8·2	3·9
Doncaster	83·6	7·0	8·4
Dorset	132·0	0·5	0·3
Dudley	72·4	2·7	3·7
Durham	157·0	10·5	6·7
Ealing	74·2	2·7	3·6
East Sussex	135·8	9·7	7·1
Enfield	71·7	2·4	3·4
Essex	372·7	5·1	1·4
Gateshead	50·8	3·3	6·4
Gloucestershire	115·4	2·0	1·7
Hampshire	367·1	17·3	4·7
Haringey	55·8	3·9	6·9
Harrow	48·7	1·4	2·8
Havering	65·3	1·5	2·3
Hereford/Worcester	156·4	1·4	0·9
Hertfordshire	246·8	14·3	5·8
Hillingdon	60·8	0·3	0·5
Hounslow	60·6	3·6	6·0
Humberside	238·2	13·5	5·7
Isle of Wight	29·8	1·0	3·3
Isles of Scilly	0·9	0·0	2·6
Kent	343·8	3·8	1·1
Kingston	33·1	1·3	3·9
Kirklees	98·5	7·5	7·6
Knowsley	46·4	2·9	6·3
Lancashire	349·2	19·3	5·5
Leeds	188·0	13·2	7·0
Leicestershire	242·9	12·3	5·1
Lincolnshire	134·4	0·6	0·5
Liverpool	141·6	7·9	5·6
Manchester	123·3	13·0	10·5
Merton	40·6	0·6	1·6
Newcastle	70·8	4·3	6·1
Newham	73·6	3·1	4·2
Norfolk	177·0	10·5	6·0
North Tyneside	53·2	4·1	7·7
North Yorkshire	168·2	9·9	5·9
Northamptonshire	155·8	2·2	1·4
Northumberland	71·1	6·2	8·7
Nottinghamshire	267·3	18·1	6·8
Oldham	65·6	4·6	7·1
Oxfordshire	131·9	5·3	4·0
Redbridge	51·6	1·1	2·2
Richmond	32·2	0·9	2·8
Rochdale	52·2	4·2	8·1
Rotherham	70·7	4·4	6·2
Salford	59·2	3·1	5·3
Sandwell	90·8	5·8	6·4
Sefton	76·7	4·3	5·6
Sheffield	118·5	8·0	6·8
Shropshire	108·6	6·3	5·8
Solihull	54·6	3·2	5·9
Somerset	108·4	1·9	1·8
South Tyneside	38·3	3·3	8·7
Staffordshire	253·5	13·3	5·2
St. Helens	49·0	3·1	6·3
Stockport	71·6	2·3	3·2
Suffolk	152·3	1·9	1·3
Sunderland	76·6	4·8	6·2
Surrey	203·5	12·1	5·9
Sutton	37·7	1·2	3·2
Tameside	56·6	4·4	7·8
Trafford	46·4	3·2	6·9
Wakefield	80·8	7·4	9·1
Walsall	77·6	5·4	6·9

Local education authority	(a) Potential schools budget (PSB) (£ million)	(b) School meals expenditure not delegated (£ million)	(c) School meals expenditure as a percentage of PSB
Waltham Forest	61·4	4·8	7·8
Warwickshire	110·5	5·6	5·1
Westminster	40·4	3·0	7·4
West Sussex	142·2	3·0	2·1
Wigan	86·7	4·5	5·2
Wiltshire	131·8	4·4	3·3
Wirral	83·8	4·1	4·9
Wolverhampton	73·7	4·3	5·8
Totals and National averages	13,230·3	554·2	4·9

Notes:

1. The table lists each local education authority (LEA) which had a local management scheme in operation in 1991-92. Apart from Westminster, the LEAs in inner London are not included. LEAs are not required to operate a full school meals service, but they are obliged to offer free meals to pupils of families in receipt of income support. Charges may be levied in respect of meals for other pupils.
2. The potential schools budget—column *(a)*—is defined as the general schools budget less expenditure on certain excepted items: capital expenditure; expenditure supported by central government grants; and expenditure on school meals, home to school transport and transitional exceptions (eg grounds maintenance).
3. The figure for school meals expenditure in each authority—column *(b)*—is taken from the list of items excepted from delegation shown in each authority's section 42 budget statement for 1991-92. The figures may not be directly comparable for two reasons:
   (i) some authorities have separately identified school milk expenditure as a different excepted item, in which case the figure for milk expenditure is not included, and other authorities have included milk expenditure in the same item without disaggregating the costs, in which case milk expenditure is included; and
   (ii) the extent to which income from charges is taken into account varies considerably between authorities. For example, in some authorities gross expenditure on school meals is offset by income, in other authorities where the meals service is contracted out the income may be retained by the contractor and the gross expenditure by the authority is reduced accordingly.
4. Figures for 1992-93 are not yet complete.

Young Musicians

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will take steps to ensure that the Centre for Young Musicians can continue to provide tuition to musically gifted children from all parts of inner London.

Mr. Forth: The work of the Centre for Young Musicians is widely regarded, not least by my Department which is providing funding over the three years 1990-93 of more than £330,000. I very much welcome the support which inner London boroughs give to the Centre for Young Musicians and hope that London children will continue to benefit from the tuition offered.

Food and Home Economics

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the future of the subject of food and home economics in the national curriculum.

Mr. Forth: Aspects of home economics are covered in a number of national curriculum subjects, including technology and science. While the revision of the programmes of study and statements of attainment of the national curriculum technology order is still in progress, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

Post-16 Students

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has for the assessment of the Government's financial contributions to the provision under section 12 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 providing for schools to admit, from 1993, persons over compulsory school age to courses suitable to their requirements on a full or part-time basis and to charge fees for this service; and if these additional students will be accounted for in the methodology of the post-16 block of education standard spending assessment or otherwise.

Mr. Forman: Funding arrangements in 1993-94 will reflect LEAs' changed duties under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. In calculating the transfer of funds from local authorities to the new further education sector, the Government will leave within local authority standard spending the resources attributable to those courses which fall within LEAs' responsibilities. The Government will announce in due course their proposals for the education elements of standard spending assessments as part of the local authority finance settlement for 1993-94.

Performing Arts

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what grants have been made to Oulder Hill community school, Rochdale, to fund the Business and Technician Education Council course in performing arts.

Mr. Forman: The Government are committed to increasing take-up of vocational qualifications in schools. In 1992-93, my Department allocated Rochdale LEA funds to support expenditure of £13,400 to help schools and sixth form colleges to introduce new vocational qualifications under the grants for education support and training—GEST—programme. Figures on the grants made to individual schools under this element of the GEST programme are not available centrally.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many students eligible for local authority discretionary awards under sections 1(6) and 2 of the Education Act 1962 were offered places on further education courses at educational institutions in 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991;

(2) how many students received local authority discretionary awards under sections 1(6) and 2 of the Education Act 1962 on further education courses in 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Forman: Section 1(6) of the Act covers higher education only.

Under section 2 of the Education Act 1962, LEAs have a discretionary power to bestow awards on persons over compulsory school age attending any course of full-time or part-time further education. LEAs must meet the cost for these awards from their own resources.

The numbers of further education students receiving discretionary awards under section 2 of the Education Act 1962 are as follows:

Thousands

1988-89	*1989-90*	[1] *1990-91*
130·9	130·5	128·5

[1] (Provisional).
Data for 1991-92 are not yet available.

Expansion Funds

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether grant-maintained school and Church schools will be eligible for the expansion funds going to oversubscribed popular schools in 1993-94 on the same basis as local authority-maintained schools.

Mr. Forth: Yes.

Student Support

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans his Department has to conduct investigations into levels of higher education student support, the relationship between income and estimated expenditure and the levels of student hardship and debt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forman: By this autumn, we shall have increased the level of full-year student support by nearly 40 per cent. since 1989-90. We shall commission surveys of students' income and expenditure as and when appropriate.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the number of *(a)* special needs students who have been statemented and attend (i) special day schools, (ii) special needs residential schools and (iii) mainstream schools each year since 1981, *(b)* statemented pupils for each year since 1981, *(c)* those waiting to be statemented for each year since 1981 and *(d)* the number of appeals.

Mr. Forth: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mature Students

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make provision for mandatory awards to be made by local authorities to mature students admitted directly for higher degrees without first doing first degrees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forman: No.

National Curriculum

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what arrangements he intends to make for national curriculum assessments in 1993, in the light of recent consultations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: In the light of consultation and of the advice of the School Examinations and Assessment Council under its chairman, Lord Griffiths, I shall be making later this month orders to govern the assessment under the national curriculum in 1993 of seven-year-olds in the core subjects—English, mathematics and science—and technology, history and geography, and of 14-year-olds in the core subjects and technology. I shall place copies of the orders and accompanying circulars in the Library.

Next year's assessments of seven-year-olds will build on the experience of this year's successful tests. They will consist of:

- mandatory tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, focusing on the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic;
- teachers' assessments of pupils' attainments in technology, and for the first time in history and geography, supported by non-mandatory tests;
- strengthened arrangements to ensure consistency of assessment standards within and between schools.

I have decided to give teachers greater flexibility over the timing of the tests of seven-year-olds in the core subjects which, in 1993, will be able to be delivered from the mid-point of the spring term to four weeks before the end of the summer term. This means that:

- teachers will have longer to deliver the programmes of study if they so choose; and
- those children whose seventh birthday falls in the summer term can be tested later, if teachers wish.

Next year's assessment of 14-year-olds will be the first under statutory arrangements. They will apply to all maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and such independent schools as choose to participate. The key features will be:

- short, written papers in science, mathematics, English and technology, taken simultaneously by all pupils under examination conditions;
- a practical test of pupils' manufacturing skills in technology;
- teachers' assessments of each pupil's classroom work to provide a detailed diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses which will inform GCSE option choices and future teaching;
- provision for subject score consisting of test results, in attainment targets covered by tests, and teacher assessments in other attainment targets;
- a rigorous audit by independent examining bodies of each school's test marking and teacher assessments before results are reported to parents or published.

In response to concerns that test dates for 14-year-olds in 1993 should not clash with those for high entry GCSEs, and that testing should not be concentrated within a single week, I have decided that the tests in 1993 will be spread over the two weeks beginning 7 and 14 June. A detailed timetable setting out which tests will be on which days will be distributed to schools early in September.

These measures are a further step in the Government's programme to ensure that pupils' attainments are assessed according to rigorous standards. They will provide parents and teachers with valuable information on each pupil's strengths and weaknesses, and will be a valuable tool in raising further standards in our schools.

Surplus Places

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will estimate the cost of keeping surplus places in primary and secondary schools in each academic year since 1987-88 in 1991-92 prices;

(2) if he will estimate the number of surplus places in primary and secondary schools in each academic year since 1987-88.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 9 July 1992]:* The table records the estimated number of surplus places over the last four calendar—not academic—years.

Year	*Primary*	*Secondary*
1987	900,000	770,000
1988	860,000	890,000
1989	830,000	950,000
1990	780,000	1,000,000

These figures derive from an assessment of school capacity carried out in 1981 which has been adjusted annually to reflect accommodation brought into and taken out of use. We have recently completed an initial survey of school capacity. On the basis of this survey we estimate that in 1991 there were up to 1·5 million surplus places in England—approximately 800,000 in the primary sector and 700,000 in the secondary sector. Further work needs to be done to establish the reliability of these figures for each LEA.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Non-departmental public bodies which are sponsored by the LCD are listed in the HMSO publication "Public Bodies 1991"—ISBN No. 011 4300 64X. Normal National Audit Office arrangements apply for all the LCD's non-departmental public bodies except in the following cases where the statutory provisions governing the body allow for external auditors to be appointed: the Legal Aid Board, which has appointed Messrs. Chantrey Vellacott for an initial period of two years following a competitive tender; the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board, which is audited by Messrs. Finnie & Co., who were chosen in preference to one other firm and where the contract between the board and Finnies is for no specific duration; and the Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct, where the appointment of auditors is currently the subject of competitive tendering.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Social Security of 13 July, about the appeal of the constituent of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough, Ref. YR691179C, against a disability living allowance decision, if he will make a statement on the delay in arranging a hearing.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Secretary of State's submission in the appeal Ref. YR691179C—Commissioner's ref. CA/016/92—of the hon. Member's constituent was received in the office of the Social Security Commissioner on 20 February 1992. Following the normal procedure, a copy of that submission was sent on 21 February 1992 to the constituent's authorised representative. His written observations were requested and are still awaited.

The constituent lodged a separate appeal—Commissioner's ref. CA/310/92—against the same decision in a different regional office using a different representative. The two appeals are being dealt with together to ensure that they are resolved at the same time.

Distraint

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellors Department if he will review the basis of distraint by bailiffs on goods and chattels of debtors and further limit the range of such articles which can be distrained upon.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The goods and chattels which are exempt from levy and seizure following a judgment of a county court or the High Court were revised by section 15 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 which came into effect on 1 July 1991. This exemption also applies to distress for rent. I have no plans to amend those exemptions further.

I understand however that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is consulting local authority associations and other interested bodies about introducing restrictions which mirror these in cases of non-payment of the community charge and rates.

Legal Aid

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance is available to criminal legal aid; and whether the same guidance is followed by the area offices of the Legal Aid Board when dealing with cases coming to them on review from refusals by the courts.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Justices Clerks Society issued guidance to its members in 1990 and 1991. The Lord Chancellor's Department issued a circular in April 1992 which included advice and guidance for use when considering applications for criminal legal aid. The Legal Aid Board is aware of the guidance which has been made available. However, it remains for the court, or the legal aid area committee in the case of a review, to decide whether legal aid should be granted in any particular case in accordance with the criteria set down in the Legal Aid Act 1988.

Magistrates, Sunderland

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the names of those responsible for choosing magistrates for the borough of Sunderland and their lengths of service in each case.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The members of the advisory committee responsible for recommending candidates for the magistracy for the Sunderland petty sessional division and their dates of appointment are as follows:

Chairman:
G. P. Suffield Esq. JP—Appointed 1982
Members:
Mrs. C. K. Wood JP—Appointed 1982
A. P. Greenshields Esq. JP—Appointed 1982
J. Hall Esq. JP—Appointed 1988
B. Dodds Esq. JP—Appointed 1991
C. J. Jones Esq. JP—Appointed 1991
Mrs. S. K. Whiteman JP—Appointed 1988
Mrs. C. P. M. Clarke JP—Appointed 1991
J. J. Gardiner Esq. MBE—Appointed 1991

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list magistrates in the borough of Sunderland by the wards in which they live.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The question cannot be answered without disproportionate cost. When seeking suitable candidates for appointment the Lord Chancellor expects all advisory committees to achieve a bench which is representative of the community it serves. To this end, he expects them to take into account geographical as well as other factors.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will give the political balance of magistrates for the borough of Sunderland.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The political balance of magistrates for the Sunderland petty sessional division is as follows:

	Numbers
Conservative	65
Labour	48
Liberal Democrat	17
Independent	2
	132

Legal Proceedings

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he proposes to implement provision allowing no-win-no-fee arrangements for legal proceedings.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor and I are now considering the matters which should be included in an order to be made under the provisions of section 58 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. We hope to issue a draft order for consultation in the autumn.

Community Charge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that the returns which make up the community charge enforcement statement are an accurate report of the number of people jailed for non-payment of community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information about community charge enforcement proceedings in the magistrates' courts which is collected by the Lord Chancellor's Department includes the number of warrants issued each quarter committing non-payers to prison. These statistics are based on returns by justices' clerks. They are not routinely checked for accuracy although queries are followed up with the justices clerk concerned on an individual basis. The information collected does not purport to show the number of non-payers received into prison since in some cases payment is made following issue of a warrant.

Magistrates, Walthamstow

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number of magistrates at the Walthamstow magistrates court resident in each electoral ward of the London borough of Waltham Forest and the number resident outside the borough.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The question cannot be answered without disproportionate cost.

When seeking suitable candidates for appointment the Lord Chancellor expects all advisory committees to achieve a bench which is representative of the community it serves. To this end, he expects them to take into account geographical as well as other factors.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the names of the members of the committee responsible for the selection of magistrates for the Walthamstow magistrates court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The members of the advisory committee responsible for recommending candidates for the magistracy for north-east London are as follows:

Chairman:
E. J. Huxtable Esq. OBE JP
Members:
M. P. V. Leigh Esq JP
Mrs. J. C. Barnett JP
R. C. Jeffries Esq JP
A. S. Dowley Esq JP
R. Bryant Esq JP
Dr. J. P. Barker JP
His Honour Judge Owen Stable QC
Mrs. M. Froud JP
Mrs. D. M. Everitt JP
Miss M. D. Churchill JP
Miss C. M. Mather JP
Mrs. D. J. Carradice JP

Top Salaries Review Body

Mr. Head: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what decisions the Government have made about the Top Salaries Review Body recommendations concerning the regrouping of senior circuit judges and others in group 5.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government have accepted the TRSB's recommendations for regrouping. Some of the posts in the existing group 5 will be moved to a new group 5, at the same level as official referees; others will be reclassified in group 6 with a salary lead, although existing incumbents will be paid the new group 5 rate. As announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 July 1992, *Official Report*, column 288, the Government have not accepted the other recommendations affecting the judiciary.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom's presidency of the EC.

Mr. Waldegrave: Deregulation is primarily the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. However, the aims of the citizens charter are relevant to deregulation. During the United Kingdom presidency, our European partners will have an opportunity to learn how the charter is helping to raise standards of public service in this country. In particular, on 3 and 4 December there will be a major conference in London on service for the citizen.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Jackson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Treaties

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to include in his plans for developing the citizens charter a right for citizens to be informed of the effect of the more important treaties.

Mr. Waldegrave: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Researchers

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what consideration he is giving to taking steps to help British researchers, who have recently completed PhDs, to stay in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jackson: The Government provide substantial funding to maintain a healthy science base in this country and to ensure continuing opportunities for our scientists. We are consulting on our longer-term strategy for science and technology, including the career structures available to scientists.

Framework Research Programme

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new ground rules he is proposing for the £4 billion framework research programme.

Mr. Jackson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Benevolent Fund

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) of 15 June, *Official Report*, column *359*, if he will list the total amount transferred to the Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund in each year since 1981-82; and what proportion transferred in each year resulted from the value of intestate estates.

Mr. Waldegrave: Amounts transferred to the Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund in each year since 1981-82 were:

	£
1981-82	NIL
1982-83	150,000
1983-84	150,000
1984-85	150,000
1985-86	200,000
1986-87	250,000
1987-88	400,000
1988-89	494,701
1989-90	335,981
1990-91	531,715

Amounts paid to the duchy of Lancaster by the duchy solicitor, which are represented by devolutions in the duchy's accounts, include accrued interest and unclaimed assets of dissolved companies. The greatest single element is represented by intestate estates.

From these sums deductions are made to cover the duchy's palatinate and special costs. The balance is then paid over to the benevolent fund. It is not possible to calculate the proportion attributable to intestate estates which is transferred to the fund.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dioxin

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department intends to analyse garden soil in the area surrounding the Coalite plant in Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The results of analyses of soil samples taken by the Department on farms near to the Coalite plant have been published. In addition, the results of a soil survey conducted by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in the Bolsover area are expected to be published in due course. These analyses will give a comprehensive picture of dioxing levels in soils in the area and therefore it is not necessary to analyse garden soils.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department intends to carry out analyses of the garden vegetables in the areas surrounding the Coalite plant in Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to him on 15 July 1992. The Department has no plans to analyse garden vegetables.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will release the full analyses done on the soil samples from the farms near the Coalite plant in Derbyshire, including the concentrations of individual dioxin and furan congeners;

(2) if he will release the full analyses done on milk and animal tissues taken from farms near the Coalite plant in Derbyshire, including the concentrations of individual dioxin and furan congeners.

Mr. Soames: Yes. The data are voluminous and I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library of the House when these have been compiled into a suitable form.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the results of the dioxin analyses of herbage samples from Woodhouse farm, Bolsover including toxic and dioxin furan isomers, as well as the total toxic equivalents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Further samples are being obtained and the full results published along with other data derived from the research work carried out on the farm.

Feedstuffs

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will report on progress on the review of animal feeding stuffs regulations being carried out by the expert group on animal feeding stuffs.

Mr. Gummer: The expert group on animal feedingstuffs started its review of animal feedingstuffs legislation in February 1991. I am pleased to be able to say that it has completed this task and that the report is published today together with the Government's response. Copies of both are being placed in the Library of the House.

EC Policies

Mr. Cash: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reforms he will propose to the trade and agricultural policies of the European Community in order to conform with the objectives established in proposed articles 130u(1) and 130v of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Curry: Suggestions for changes to existing policies should follow ratification of the treaty on European union by all member states. However, the Government, in determining their approach to European Community proposals, already take account of the implications for developing countries.

Moorings, Kingswear

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will now confirm the approval in principle given by his Department on 13 February to the Dart harbour and navigation authority and subsequently submitted by it on form FHG2 with updated tender prices and site investigation and design supervision fees for the upgrading of the commercial fleet moorings at Kingswear, south Devon.

Mr. Curry: Officials from this Department wrote to the consulting engineers co-ordinating the grant application for the Dart harbour and navigation authority on 10 July, seeking further information on the terms of the proposed leasing agreement and on the anticipated level of fisheries use. Once these queries have been resolved, a final decision on the grant application will be made.

Rabies

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals have been agreed or are due to be agreed with regard to rabies controls on pet animals being imported into the United Kingdom other than those which are commercially traded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Commission is understood to be considering a proposal for rabies controls on pet animals. The Commission and the Council have agreed that any arrangements for pet animals must provide at least the same level of protection as have been agreed for commercially traded cats and dogs.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the current status of the agreement reached on rabies control; and if he will outline the steps to be taken before it can be implemented.

Mr. Gummer: The directive covering commercial trade in rabies-susceptible animals was adopted formally at the Council of Ministers on 13 July. Detailed implementing rules need to be decided by standing veterinary committee procedure before the necessary amendments to national regulations can be made.

Organic Food

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what analysis has been carried out as to the effect of the introduction of the United Kingdom register of organic food standards on the sale of *(a)* organic fruit and vegetables and *(b)* organic bread; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The United Kingdom register of organic food standards was established in 1987. Since then, UKROFS has been defining organic standards and establishing mechanisms for enforcement. A proper record of the sales of organic produce is only now possible because UKROFS has created standards that define organic produce. UKROFS standards provides an assurance to consumers as to the reliability of the organic produce that is being purchased. This can only be good for the sales of organic produce, such as organic fruit and vegetables and organic bread.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his reasons for deciding that trading standards officers should not be involved in the monitoring, certification and enforcement of organic food standards.

Mr. Gummer: Trading standards officers are involved in the enforcement of organic food standards at retail level. Monitoring and certification at production level is the task of the United Kingdom register of organic food standards together with the various private sector organic bodies. A trading standards officer is a member of the board of UKROFS.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the producers of organic food stuffs about the introduction of the United Kingdom register of organic food standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The United Kingdom register of organic food standards was established in 1987. Its board includes members of the major organic sector bodies in the United Kingdom as well as consumer, trading standards, food processing and retail interests. I have received no recent representations from producers regarding the introduction of UKROFS standards.

Bovine Tissues

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has concerning experiments with bovine tissues from which the infectious agent has not been capable of experimental transfer to test animals; which tissues are used; which test animals were challenged and how many; what were the ages of these animals; and what was the length of the experiment.

Mr. Soames: Transmission studies of a variety of tissues from confirmed BSE cases are in progress. The information in respect of terminated experiments in which no signs of a scrapie-like disease have been observed are as follows:

Mice challenged by feeding at 4-6 weeks of age

Tissue	*Number of mice*	*Duration of experiment (days)*		
		C57Bl[1]	*CRH*[1]	*RIII*
Udder and milk	19	571	(689)	—
Supramammary LN	10	667	—	—
Placenta (A)	18	673	(699)	—
Placenta (B)	24	—	—	754
Spleen (A)	20	690	—	—
Spleen (B)	24	—	—	841
Carcase and mesenteric LN	18	680	(683)	—
Brain and CSF	8	—	(678)	—

[1] C57Bl, CRH and RIII are different strains of laboratory mice LN = Lymph node.

Mice challenged parenterally at 4-8 weeks of age

Tissue	*Number of mice*	*Duration of experiment (days)*
Muscle semitendinosus	24	870
Muscle diaphragma	24	888
Placenta	24	774
Buffy coat (of blood)	24	916
Semen	24	925
Bone marrow	24	793
Spleen	235	918

More than 50 other tissues are currently being tested by parenteral challenge of susceptible mice, but none of these experiments has yet reached its end point.

Farm Woodland Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether farmers are entitled to a free visit when applying for a grant under the farm woodland scheme; whether approval from the Forestry Commission is necessary before grants under this scheme are paid out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: General advice about woodland establishment and management, and detailed advice on the grant aid available for these activities, is available to farmers free of charge from ADAS in England and Wales and from the Scottish agricultural colleges in Scotland. Entry into the farm woodland premium scheme, which offers annual payments to farmers to offset income forgone when trees are planted on agricultural land, is conditional upon the proposed planting having been approved by the forestry authority for establishment grants under the woodland grant scheme.

Whales

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to raise the issue of the protection of whales through international forums other than the International Whaling Commission.

Mr. Gummer: It is the policy of this Government to work for effective measures for the conservation and protection of whales and other cetaceans through the International Whaling Commission and other relevant international forums.

Small Cetaceans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *241*, whether the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development discussed the International Whaling Commission's report on small cetaceans.

Mr. Gummer: The report on significant direct and incidental catches of small cetaceans by the scientific committee of the International Whaling Commission was submitted by the IWC to the UNCED secretariat in July 1991. The report was not discussed at the UNCED conference. However, papers before the conference recognised the work of the International Whaling Commission in conserving and managing whale stocks, its studies on other cetaceans and the role of other relevant organisations—for example, those established under the Bonn convention.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Finance Bill

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what extra costs were incurred by his Department as a result of the Standing Committee considering the Finance Bill sitting after the House adjourned on 16 June, 23 June and 30 June.

Mr. Dorrell: It is not possible to give a precise figure for the extra costs involved to Her Majesty's Treasury as a result of the Finance Bill Standing Committee sitting after the House adjourned on 16, 23 and 30 June. However, the total overtime and allowances entitlement for staffing costs would be in the region of £1,000 if they were claimed.

Inland Revenue Investigations

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the powers of the Inland Revenue when conducting investigations into the tax affairs of private individuals and small businesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no plans to review the powers used by inspectors of taxes in their normal investigation work. I would, however, refer my hon. Friend to my remarks during Standing Committee B's consideration of the Finance Bill, at columns 431-32.

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what degree of convergence of economic performance among the member states of the European Community Her Majesty's Government plan to seek under the terms of the proposed amendment to article 2 of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom believes that all member states should take the necessary steps to achieve sound public finances, price stability and flexible labour markets. These are the necessary conditions for non-inflationary growth and the reduction of unemployment.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the power granted to the Council to enforce its recommendations for broad guidelines of the economic policy of member states as defined by the proposed article 103(2) of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Nelson: Under article 103, the Council may formulate a draft for the broad guidelines of the economic policies of the member states and the Community. The Council's action towards member states deemed not to be complying with the guidelines is, however, limited to non-binding recommendations.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the requirement that the economic policies of member states be regarded as a matter of common concern in the proposed article 103(1) of the treaty of Rome will affect the management of the Government's economic policy.

Mr. Nelson: Article 103 develops existing procedures for multilateral surveillance of member states' economic policies. It provides for economic policy guidelines to be recommended by the Council, but these guidelines will not be binding upon member states. The Government do not expect the management of the United Kingdom's economic policy will be affected as they are already committed to sound fiscal and monetary policies and to achieving permanently low inflation.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the criteria for convergence of economic performance among the member states of the European Community as required by the proposed amendment to article 2 of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Nelson: The criteria are set down in article 109j of the Maastricht treaty. They include a high degree of price stability, convergence of long-term interest rates, no "excessive" budget deficit and membership of the narrow band of the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures the Government propose to take in order to achieve *(a)* the high level of social protection, and *(b)* the high level of employment required by the proposed amendment to article 2 of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Nelson: The Government's policies are directed to the achievement of sustained non-inflationary growth. This is the best means of promoting employment growth and social protection.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have to alter its policies of indirect taxation as part of the harmonisation of legislation in this area under the proposed article 99 of the treaty of Rome.

Sir John Cope: The Government have no plans to alter their policies on indirect taxation in the context of the provisions of article 99 of the treaty of Rome. This article, as the legal base for fiscal matters, provides for unanimity in decision making, and is not materially altered by the draft Maastricht treaty.

Pension Plans

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to bring deposit-based insurance and pension plans within the scope of the Financial Services Act 1986.

Mr. Nelson: I have no plans to bring deposit-based personal pension plans within the Financial Services Act 1986. Personal pension plans constructed as long-term insurance contracts already fall within the definition of investments under the Financial Services Act.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom's presidency of the EC.

Mr. Dorrell: My ministerial colleagues have met their EC counterparts and European Commissioners on a number of occasions since 18 April. The importance of minimising the burdens on business of Community legislation is well understood by this Government. During the United Kingdom presidency, the Government will continue to press the case for minimising burdens on business.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies have been undertaken as to the effect of economic and monetary union.

Mr. Nelson: Studies include the European Commission report "One market, one money: An evaluation of the potential benefits and costs of forming an economic and monetary union", which is available in the Library. An account of the agreement at Maastricht was published in the Treasury bulletin for winter 1991-92, which is also available in the Library.

Benefits

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the gain to public funds if *(a)* all social security benefits and welfare payments and *(b)* all social security benefits and welfare payments other than child benefit were made inclusive in the taxable income of recipients.

Mr. Dorrell: The estimated direct revenue yield in 1992-93 from making all social security benefits and welfare payments liable to tax is about £2 billion. Excluding child benefit and one-parent benefit would reduce the yield to about £1 billion.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the main recommendations and conclusions of the Treasury's staff review of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on 13 July 1992, *Official Report*, column *418*.

VAT

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, under the Maastricht treaty, decisions to establish uniform rates of value added tax and uniform VAT exemptions would be taken by unanimous decision or by qualified majority voting.

Mr. Lamont: European Community decisions relating to the rates and structure of VAT are covered by the provisions of article 99 of the treaty of Rome, and as such are subject to a unanimous decision by member states.

This position is not affected by the draft Maastricht treaty.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all grants and subsidies received by farmers upon which VAT is chargeable; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* Some grants to farmers can be regarded as consideration for a supply of services and hence taxable because the recipient undertakes to refrain from doing something such as producing milk. Farmers receive grants and subsidies from a number of Government Departments, but no central list is maintained by any one Department and such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has anything to add to the statement made by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 7 May, *Official Report*, column *168*, in respect of capital expenditure by local borough and district councils which has not been authorised in some manner by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Portillo: No.

Civil Servants

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil servants in grades 7 and principal and above were employed at 1 October 1981 and 1 October 1991.

Mr. Nelson: The information readily available relates to 1 January 1981 and 1 April 1991 and is published in "Civil Service Statistics", copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

With the introduction of unified grading between 1984 and 1986 principal grade and equivalents were replaced by grade 7, senior principal by grade 6. Data comparable to unified grades are not available for years before 1986.

Iraqi Funds

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the total value of Iraqi funds blocked in the United Kingdom;

(2) what steps he is taking so that the claims of creditors who carried out legitimate trade with Iraq prior to the invasion of Kuwait can be met from Iraqi funds frozen in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) on 13 July, *Official Report*, column *422*.

EC Budget Control

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total cost of fraudulent practices involving EC finances in the Community as a whole and in the United Kingdom; and what action he is taking to ensure that the budgetary control committee's efforts in the European Parliament are made worth while.

Sir John Cope: Because of the nature of fraud, it is impossible to estimate the total cost of fraud against the European Community budget. However, in its annual report on the fight against fraud in 1991, the Commission has provided the following figures of irregularities notified to the Commission for the European Commission as a whole and for the United Kingdom:

Own resources notifications: 2nd half 1990 to 1st half 1991

	Mecu	*£ million*[1]
Total	59·4	41·4
of which United Kingdom	13·1	9·1

European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund, guarantee section notifications: 1991

	Mecu	*£ million*[1]
Total	67·2	46·8
of which United Kingdom	5·1	3·6

Structural funds notifications: 1 November 1990- to 31 December 1991

	Mecu	*£ million*[1]
Total	1·5	1·0
of which United Kingdom	0·2	0·15

[1] Converted at the central rate in the ERM of £1 = 1·435 ecu.

In part, these figures reflect the success of detection and efficiency of notification.

I shall meet the European Parliament's budgetary control committee in the autumn. This will be an opportunity to discuss fully the Parliament's concern to make sure that the Community makes every effort to combat irregularity including fraud. The Government are determined to ensure that further progress is made to reduce the scope for irregularity including fraud and will carefully consider any suggestions which the European Parliament may have.

Computer Organisation (Transfer)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the transfer of Chessington computer centre and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency to the Minister for the Civil Service will take place.

Mr. Lamont: The transfer of responsibility for the Chessington computer centre will take place today. A transfer of functions order in respect of the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency is being laid today and the transfer will take place on 6 August. A supplementary estimate to reflect these changes will be presented in due course.

Death Benefits

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if provision has been made for the payment of improved death gratuities and dependants' benefits to beneficiaries under the European Parliament (United Kingdom representatives) pension scheme.

Mr. Portillo: The European Parliament (United Kingdom representatives) pension scheme—EP (UKR) PS—follows the parliamentary contributory pension fund—PCPF—in its provisions. The Parliamentary Pensions (Amendment) Regulations 1991 made changes to the death gratuities and dependants' benefits payable with effect from 2 April 1991 under the PCPF in respect of members who died on or after 6 April 1988. An order amending the provisions of the EP (UKR) PS will be made as soon as possible. Payment will, however, be made in the meantime to those who will be eligible to benefit from the new provisions.

Parliamentary approval will be sought later this year in an order under the European Parliament (Pay and Pensions) Act 1979. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £50,000 will be met from repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund. Once the order has been approved, the Contingencies Fund will be repaid upon approval of the Contingencies Fund repayment vote in 1993-94.

Government Holdings

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes to examine options for the sale or redemption in 1992-93 of part of the Government's holding of privatised companies' debt or loan stock.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government are considering options for the redemption or sale of part of their holding in privatised companies' debt and loan stock. No decisions have been taken about the timing of the debt or loan stock which will be realised, although it is likely that about £1 billion will be involved. We have begun to appoint advisers to examine the options.

Expenses incurred in connection with the redemption or sale of part of the Government's holding will be met from receipts. Parliamentary approval for this new service will be sought in a winter supplementary estimate for Her Majesty's Treasury's sale of shares in British Telecommunications plc vote—class XVIII, vote 19. Pending that approval, expenses will be met from advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Once the realisation exercise is complete, and the final costs are known, a supplementary estimate will be presented to provide substantive provision for expenses and compensating provision for appropriations-in-aid. The balance of the receipts will be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if any amendments are proposed to the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992.

Mr. Dorrell: The Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970 contains a provision under which, if certain conditions are satisfied, assets transferred from one company to another as part of a company reconstruction or amalgamation are deemed to have been disposed of for an amount that gives rise to neither a gain nor a loss. This provision enables the rationalisation and reorganisation of businesses to take place without the immediate tax charge that would ordinarily arise when assets are transferred from one company to another.

When the original legislation was consolidated in the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992, there was an error in a cross-reference involving the measures relating to transfers of life assurance business. If not corrected, this would exclude a transfer of insurance business to or from the United Kingdom branch of an overseas life assurance company from the relief conferred by the original legislation.

No transfers of insurance business have been affected by the legislation in the consolidated act so far, and the Chancellor proposes to introduce legislation in next year's Finance Bill to correct the error in the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992. The legislation will apply to transfers of insurance business which take place after today.

Civil Servants' Shareholdings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Building Societies

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Income Tax (Building Societies) Regulations 1986 on composite tax rate for building societies raised additional taxation on *(a)* cash flow or *(b)* accruals.

Mr. Dorrell: The regulations changed the way in which building societies accounted for composite rate tax. They included provision to ensure that accrued interest taken into account under the old system did not come into account again, when paid, under the new system. The Inland Revenue estimates that tax due in 1986-87, the first year of payment under the new rules, plus instalments of transitional tax due later, was about £100 million less than would have been due in that year had the old system

continued. This difference is a little greater than the figure of £76 million given to my hon. Friend in response to an earlier question—*Official Report*, 15 July 1992, column *40*: the Inland Revenue has corrected some errors in entering the data underlying that earlier reply. The full information for societies grouped by reference to their accounting date is shown in revised form in the table:

Accounting periods ending	*Number of societies*	*Amount of tax that would have been due in 1986-87 if old system had continued* £ million	*Amount of tax due in 1986-87 under new system plus instalments of transitional tax not due till later* £ million	*Increase or decrease in tax payable under new system* £ million	*as percentage of old*
April 6 to 30 August (end of first complete quarter)	6	8	14	+6	+75
September to November	7	340	409	+69	+20
December to 5 April	131	2,596	2,421	−175	−7
Total	144	2,944	2,844	−100	−3
of which instalments due after 1986-87			35		

Mortgage Lenders

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will outline the present system for regulating the activities of centralised mortgage lenders; and whether he will specify the total amount of mortgage lending undertaken by such bodies in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: Because they do not carry on a deposit-taking business, centralised mortgage lenders are not subject to regulation under the Banking Act 1987 or the Building Societies Act 1986. However, the Consumer Credit Act 1974—for which responsibility lies with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade—and the subordinate legislation made under it provide a system of licensing and other control of traders concerned with the provision of credit. It is likely that centralised mortgage lenders will require consumer credit licences and be subject to the controls on licensing administered by the Director General of Fair Trading.

Table L9.4 in the June 1992 edition of "Financial Statistics" gives details of loans for house purchase by "miscellaneous financial institutions", the bulk of which is believed to be accounted for by centralised mortgage lenders. At end-1991, the stock of loans for house purchase by miscellaneous financial institutions totalled £25·9 billion.

Crown Estate Commissioners

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many fishing ports are owned or managed by the Crown Estate Commissioners.

Mr. Lamont: None. Where the commissioners own land required for a port, it may be leased to the operators of the individual ports.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many miles of the coastline of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland are owned or managed by the Crown Estate Commissioners.

Mr. Lamont: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Ministerial Staff

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff were employed in all ministers' private offices in May 1979; and how many are employed today.

Mr. Nelson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Tilbury Ferry

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General if he will institute proceedings against the Crown Estate Commissioners for failure to provide a ferry service between Tilbury and Gravesend.

The Attorney-General: No.

Social Security Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received from the Independent Tribunal Service regarding the payment of fees to members of social security appeal tribunals; and how he has responded to those representations.

The Attorney-General: I have received no such representations.

South African Security Personnel

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration has been given to launching prosecutions arising out of the activities of Captain Pamela du Randt and Mr. Leon Flores under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts.

The Attorney-General: This matter has not been the subject of consideration by the Crown prosecution service. The investigation of alleged criminal offences is a matter for the police who are responsible for the initial decision whether to charge. In appropriate cases the police may consult the CPS.

HEALTH

London Health Services Inquiry

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress Professor Sir Bernard Tomlinson is making in his inquiry into London's health services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Tomlinson inquiry is making good progress and is on course to report in the early autumn. To ensure that our decisions on its recommendations are acted upon decisively and rapidly, I will, in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education, establish a special unit to implement our decisions and to help manage the process of change. The special unit will be part of the National Health Service Management Executive. I will give further details when the Tomlinson inquiry reports.

Maternity Services

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have elected for *(a)* hospital birth and *(b)* home birth for each year since 1990; and if she will provide an estimate of the number of birth complications at each location.

Mr. Sackville: The figures relating to place of confinement for births in 1990 and 1991 are shown in the table.

Information is collected centrally on the method of delivery, including caesarian sections and instrumental deliveries, but this is not available in terms of the location of the delivery.

Maternities 1990-91 England—Place of confinement

	1990	*1991*
Hospital	654,594	647,710
Home	6,953	7,439
Elsewhere[1]	503	554
Total	662,050	655,703

[1] Elsewhere includes:
All psychiatric institutions.
Homes for unmarried mothers.
Remand Homes.
Reception Centres.
Private Houses (other than the mother's usual residence).

Source: OPCS Birth Statistics Table produced by SD2B June 1992.

Paediatric Pathologists

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the health regions of England which currently have paediatric pathologists in post; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not held centrally. Information on doctors' specialties is held with varying degrees of disaggregation in the Department of Health's medical manpower census. Doctors with responsibilities in paediatric pathology are often recorded either as paediatricians or pathologists and the regional count of paediatric pathologists is therefore incomplete. A recent ad hoc inquiry relating to perinatal pathology found that every region had at least one perinatal or paediatric pathologist in post.

Abortion

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the numbers of national health service abortions under 13 weeks since the last menstrual period, and the numbers of these operations involving admission and discharge on the same date, performed on women resident in each regional health authority and in each district health authority area in England and Wales in the latest available year.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Overseas-qualified Doctors

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish an estimate of the number of overseas-qualified doctors currently working in the United Kingdom according to each standard United Kingdom region.

Dr. Mawhinney: The table gives the number and whole-time equivalent figures for hospital and community health service medical staff who qualified overseas, by region, in England and Wales, as at 30 September 1990, the latest date for which figures are available.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

	Hospital medical		*CHS*		*Total*	
	Number	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Number*	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Number*	*Whole-time equivalent*
Northern	708	632·0	95	45·1	803	677·1
Yorkshire	892	684·1	80	46·9	972	731·0
Trent	800	670·8	107	59·5	907	730·3
East Anglia	314	278·9	26	20·5	340	299·4
North West Thames	869	729·7	178	82·3	1,047	812·0
North East Thames	1,011	814·0	187	90·4	1,198	904·4
South East Thames	897	741·3	145	77·1	1,042	818·4
South West Thames	528	436·4	87	54·0	615	490·4
Wessex	372	325·7	37	24·3	409	350·0
Oxford	456	378·4	30	17·7	486	396·1
South Western	396	351·6	15	10·5	411	362·1
West Midlands	1,150	962·9	173	87·8	1,323	1,050·7
Mersey	522	430·7	85	43·6	607	474·3
North Western	1,228	1007·1	241	116·0	1,469	1,123·1
London Post-Grad Teaching Hospitals	295	209·2	0	0·0	295	209·2
Wales	728	603·8	44	33·6	772	637·4

	Hospital medical		CHS		Total	
	Number	Whole-time equivalent	Number	Whole-time equivalent	Number	Whole-time equivalent
Special Hospitals	21	21·0	0	0·0	21	21·0
Total	11,187	9,277·8	1,530	809·1	12,717	10,086·9

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the achievements of her Department and her policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if she will publish the performance indicators by which her Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Sackville: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

Chronic Illness

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all chronic illnesses which are readily indentifiable and require life-long medication.

Dr. Mawhinney: The definition of which illnesses are chronic and which require lifelong medication are matters of clinical judgment, depending in part on the individual patient's condition.

There are a small number of conditions for which lifelong medication is recognised as essential and for which there is exemption from prescription charges. The limited list of these specific medical conditions was drawn up in 1968 with representatives of the profession and updated in 1983.

The conditions are as follows:

a permanent fistula which requires continuous surgical dressing or an appliance;
Diabetes mellitus;
Myxoedema;
Hypoparathyroidism;
Diabetes insipidus or other form of hypopituitarism;
Addison's disease or other form of hypoadrenalism;
Myasthenia gravis
Epilepsy for which one requires continuous anti-convulsive therapy;
a continuing physical disability which prevents one from leaving home without the help of another person.

Continence Services

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the progress being made by the task force established to oversee implementation of the agenda for action on continence services;

(2) what action her Department is taking to collect models of good practice for the delivery of continence services and supplies; and how these are being disseminated to the relevant authorities;

(3) if she will make a statement on whether her Department will be carrying out a public awareness initiative of incontinence;

(4) what progress her Department has made on the improvement in training and education of all people providing continence services as recommended in the agenda for action on continence services;

(5) how provision for incontinence services is being addressed by local authorities and health authorities under the new community care and health arrangements; and what advice her Department is giving to those authorities on the need for joint planning in this field.

Mr. Yeo: The task force is taking forward the recommendations on cost effectiveness, GP, nurse and other professional training, and publicity. Research is being commissioned on the effectiveness of different service models, with a view to helping health authorities adopt best practices. The Department is making a one year grant of £35,000 towards setting up a resource centre to be known as the Continence Foundation. In the spring of next year, the Royal College of Physicians plans to hold a conference on continence services with the Department's support. The results will be published and practical service needs emphasised. A public awareness campaign is planned for 1993-94 to encourage people to come forward for advice and assessment. Discussions on professional training continue with the professional bodies responsible for curricula and training delivery including the English National Board, on nursing. Material is being considered for distribution to GPs and GP trainers later in the year. The National Health Service Management Executive continues to keep local NHS services under review.

Health Authority Appointments, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of chairmen and non-executive directors of health authorities and trusts in Doncaster neither live nor work within the Doncaster metropolitan borough council; and if she will make it her policy to take account of residential qualifications in making future appointments.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not held centrally. Chairmen and non-executives are normally expected to live or work in the area served by the health authority or trust.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what inquiries and written reports from relevant agencies are required following an outbreak of legionnaire's disease in a hospital.

Dr. Mawhinney: A case of legionnaire's disease in a hospital would be investigated by the hospital's control of infection doctor, and his colleagues, who may seek advice from external sources, including the local consultant in communicable disease control, if he considers this necessary. In the event of an outbreak an infection control action group would be established, the local consultant in communicable disease control would be involved, and the group would prepare a report for the health authority and/or local authority. In addition the Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1988 impose a duty on the local authority proper officer, who in many cases is the

consultant in communicable disease control, to immediately inform the Chief Medical Officer of any serious outbreak of any disease. A voluntary system of reporting of cases or outbreaks of communicable disease to the PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre also exists in England and Wales.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the numbers of hospital-acquired cases of infection from legionnaire's disease nationally in 1990 and 1991; and in which hospitals they occurred.

Dr. Mawhinney: A total of 187 cases of legionnaire's disease were reported in England and Wales to the national surveillance scheme for legionnaire's disease at the PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre in 1990. Three of these cases were associated with hospitals and four other cases may possibly have been associated with a hospital stay.

In 1991 there were 111 cases—provisional—of legionnaire's disease in residents of England and Wales. Three of these cases were associated with a hospital and a further 10 cases may possibly have been associated with a hospital stay.

Cases are reported under a voluntary national surveillance scheme and identification of individual hospitals would jeopardise national infectious desease control.

Geriatric Patients

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines her Department has issued to health authorities about moving geriatric patients without relatives outside their home district for continuing care.

Mr. Yeo: The guidance on discharge procedures, HC(89)5, a copy of which is available in the Library, makes it clear that patients and, with their agreement, carers and relatives, are fully consulted at all stages on the arrangements made for their future care needs. This is also one of the nine national standards set out in the patients charter. A thorough assessment of the health and social care needs of each patient should be carried out, prior to discharge, to ensure that any services required are provided in the most appropriate way.

Disability

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will discuss with regional health authorities the training of informal care providers in the prevention and treatment of pressure sores and incontinence for the physically disabled;

(2) what plans she has to help local health authorities to set realistic objectives and targets for services for physically disabled people;

(3) what plans she has to encourage the funding of rehabilitation programmes under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990;

(4) what plans she has to discuss establishing new methods of measuring the performance of services for the disabled.

Mr. Yeo: Rehabilitation spans the responsibilities of health authorities, social services departments and a number of other agencies including the employment services. Health authorities fund rehabilitation services out of their general allocations and existing guidance sets out the range of services we would typically expect to see.

The professions involved have done much to promote rehabilitation in recent years, and we are considering what further action is needed to develop services to meet the needs of people with disability or chronic illness and to identify and disseminate good practice including methods of measuring the performance of services, the setting of realistic but challenging targets and the provision of training.

Health authorities are responsible for purchasing services to meet the health care needs of their populations. The assessment of needs for rehabilitation services is a complex matter. Special co-ordination is needed in the case of young people leaving full-time education and seeking to live as independently as possible. The Department will shortly make available to health authorities an epidemiologically-based assessment of the needs of young adults with physical disabilities to assist in deciding what services to purchase.

We will encourage the development of good practice in the prevention and management of complications which often impede rehabilitation. We reaffirm the view expressed in our consultative document on the Health of the Nation, Cm 1523, that an annual reduction of at least 5 to 10 per cent. in the incidence of pressure sores is a reasonable target for health authorities and will initiate steps to identify and disseminate the best ways of achieving this. In July 1991 we published the agenda for action on continence services, which commended to health authorities the elements of an effective local service. We shall be taking further steps to keep key professions well informed and adequately trained on good practice, and to identify the prevention and treatment services which are most effective, taking account of the role of informal care providers.

We will also be taking action to encourage the development of clinical protocols, standards of good practice, targets and performance indicators for services used by the people with impaired hearing or vision.

We are providing £1 million to improve rehabilitation services following brain injury, and we are also funding a major research study of the 12 sites around the country receiving these funds to evaluate their services.

There is insufficient knowledge about appropriate performance targets to make rehabilitation one of the key areas in our White Paper on the health of the nation but the Department will work with relevant experts to ensure that rehabilitation can become a national key area in due course. In the meantime we will pursue with regional health authorities where developments have progressed sufficiently the possibility of its adoption as a key area in those regions.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to discuss the dissemination to the physically disabled of the services available to them under the national health service.

Mr. Yeo: From 1 April 1992, the patients charter requires regional health authorities to set up general information services for the public. This will empower the patient to make more informed choices about health care, with improved access to information about the range of treatments available, greater knowledge of their condition and detailed information on waiting times.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to improve respite care for the physically disabled.

Mr. Yeo: We are looking to health and local authorities to develop respite care services as part of the implementation of the White Paper, "Caring for People". We recognise the contribution which such services can make to providing practical support for carers.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to implement sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Yeo: The requirements of these sections are now, to a very large extent, reflected in our new and wide-ranging reforms of community care, which demonstrate our commitment to high quality care and which are responsive to the needs and wishes of service users and carers. The need to implement these sections of the Act will be reviewed in the light of several years' experience of the community care arrangements.

Resource Management

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure was incurred on developing resource management in England by each health authority in each year since 1988-89; and what financial benefits have been identified and evaluated to date.

Mr. Sackville: The sums made available by the Department to regional and special health authorities to develop resource management in the years 1989-90 to 1991-92 are shown in the table. Regional and district health authorities and individual hospitals have provided some additional funding for individual projects. In 1988-89, the Department contributed £2·3 million to projects in six acute resource management pilot sites.

The resource management programme aims to secure improvements in patient care through better management of resources at hospital level, and is not concerned solely with financial benefits. Assessment of benefits is an integral part of resource management projects in individual hospitals, but there has been no comprehensive national survey of those assessments.

£ million

	1991-92		*1990-91*		*1989-90*	
Regional health authority	*Revenue*	*Capital*	*Revenue*	*Capital*	*Revenue*	*Capital*
Northern	3·377	1·885	2·541	1·648	1·677	1·350
Yorkshire	4·145	1·079	2·992	4·748	2·106	1·849
Trent	3·352	2·157	2·768	2·229	1·434	2·786
East Anglian	1·735	1·889	1·345	0·706	0·300	0·440
North West Thames	3·277	2·351	2·382	3·527	0·022	—
North East Thames	4·249	3·677	2·895	2·789	—	—
South East Thames	3·148	2·128	2·364	2·848	1·414	0·822
South West Thames	2·543	0·638	1·496	0·242	—	—
Wessex	2·125	2·431	1·786	0·549	0·448	0·050
Oxford	2·418	1·461	1·819	2·766	0·970	0·470
South Western	2·245	1·183	1·566	2·810	0·005	—
West Midlands	5·100	4·998	3·606	4·600	0·865	0·050
Mersey	2·219	0·076	2·206	1·924	1·178	1·363
North Western SHAs	4·358	4·719	2·835	3·414	1·045	0·060
National Heart and Lung	0·165	0·475	0·211	0·011	—	—
Hammersmith	0·165	0·181	0·094	0·171	—	0·110
Hospitals for Sick Children	0·165	—	0·186	0·461	0·025	—
Total[1]	44·786	[2]31·286	33·092	35·433	11·489	9·350

[1] Expenditure incurred by the Department of Health centrally is not included in the totals.
[2] Excludes £10·616 million made available to 30 NHS trusts via external financing limits.

Dentistry

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will now issue guidance on the criteria to be used by family health service authorities in measuring cross-infection rates in dental surgeries.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no plans to do so.

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on her plans to recruit salaried dentists in the event of large numbers of dentists leaving the national health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: Health service guidance contained in HSG(92)27, a copy of which is in the Library, was issued to family health services authorities in June 1992 and advises on the action to take if they wish to employ a salaried dentist. It is for the FHSA to decide, in the light of the circumstances in its locality, whether it should seek to employ a salaried dentist. Any application made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for approval of such employment will be dealt with speedily. There is no reason to believe that large numbers of dentists intend to leave the national health service.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the new schedule of dental fees which she announced on 25 June was sent to the Government's printers with instructions to print it; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Tuesday 23 June 1992; this being the date on which, pursuant to regulation 19(3) of the National Health Service (General Dental Services) Regulations 1992, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State amended the statement of dental remuneration.

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give an estimate of the anticipated delay in treating national health service patients requiring orthodontic treatment costing in excess of £200, as a result of the new regulations requiring prior approval to be

sought from the Dental Practice Board for patients *(a)* under 18 years of age, *(b)* 18 to 25 years of age and *(c)* 25 years of age and older.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 13 July at columns *517-18*. The age of the patient is irrelevant to this process.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will negotiate a new system of dental remuneration.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) on 9 July at column *337*.

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many orthodontic national health service patients required treatment costing in excess of £200 in each year since 1987 for patients *(a)* under 18 years of age, *(b)* 18 to 25 years of age and *(c)* 25 years of age and older.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider raising the limit of £200 per patient on orthodontic treatment not requiring prior approval from the Dental Practice Board; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We see no reason to raise the prior approval limit in respect of orthodontic treatment. The changes to regulations and the scale of fees which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 23 June took account of concerns raised by orthodontists, in ways which will significantly reduce the effects on orthodontists of lowering the prior approval limit. The Dental Practice Board has estimated that some 70 per cent of all orthodontic treatment will be able to proceed without the need for prior approval.

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff have been employed by the Dental Practice Board in each year since 1987; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

Year ending 31 March	*Staff*[1]
1986-87	1,631
1987-88	1,497
1988-89	1,369
1989-90	1,268
1990-91	1,220
1991-92	1,126

[1] Full-time equivalent of permanent and temporary staff including allowance for overtime employed on average during the year.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will instruct the Staffordshire family health services authority to employ a salaried dentist as a matter of urgency.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for family health services authorities to decide whether they should apply for authority to appoint a salaried dentist.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out the objectives of each division and branch of her Department.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health's objectives for 1992-93 and beyond are set out in a statement of aims, goals and priorities, publication of which was announced by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State, in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) on 10 March at column *434*. Each part of the Department has its own more detailed objectives flowing from the statement.

GP Fund Holding

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has issued on the scope of community health services to be covered by general practitioner fund holding from April; and whether health visitors, district nursing, occupational therapy, speech therapy, physiotherapy or community psychiatric nursing services are to be included in general practitioner fund holding financed services.

Dr. Mawhinney: Guidance is to be issued soon. Occupational therapy, speech therapy and physiotherapy are already included in the fund holding scheme. Health visiting, district nursing, community psychiatric nursing as well as community mental handicap nursing are to be added from April 1993.

Mental Illness Hospitals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the specialist mental illness hospitals planned for closure by 1997, by district health authority concerned, together with the total number of beds currently in each and the number of beds currently occupied by patients.

Mr. Yeo: It is planned that the following mental illness hospitals should close by 1997:

Hospital	*District health authority*	*Number of beds*
St. Mary's Morpeth	Gateshead	389
Clifton	York	97
De La Pole	East Yorkshire	390
Scalbor Park	Airedale	140
Highroyds	Leeds	36
Stanley Royd	Wakefield	359
Pastures	South Derbyshire	326
Carlton Hayes	Leicestershire	394
Mapperley	Nottingham	259
Middlewood	Sheffield	298
Whittingham	Preston	400
Barnsley Hall	Bromsgrove and Redditch	42
St. Mary's	Hereford	30
St. Matthews	South East Staffs	180
Central	South Warwicks	215
Ruberry Hill	South Birmingham	200
Hollymoor	Solihull	100
St. Crispin's	Northants	294
Littlemoor	Oxfordshire	270
Old Manor	Salisbury	216
Coney Hill	Gloucester	304
Tone Vale	Somerset	355
St. Lawrence	Cornwall	373
Horton	Riverside	620
Friern	Hampstead	350
Hellingly	Eastbourne	119
St. Augustine's	Canterbury and Thanet	282

Hospital	District health authority	Number of beds
Tooting Bec	West Lambeth	600
Maidstone (Psychiatric wing)	Maidstone	390

The number of beds in each hospital currently occupied by patients is not held centrally.

Clinical Standards Advisory Group

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the membership of her Clinical Standards Advisory Group; and what is the scope of its work on hospital-acquired infection.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Clinical Standards Advisory Group is as follows:

Sir Gordon Higginson (Chairman)
Professor June Clark
Professor Rhys Davies
Sir Terence English
Miss Pam Hibbs
Miss Jennifer Hunt
Mrs. Rosemary Jenkins
Miss Elizabeth McLean
Professor John Murray
Professor John Richmond
Professor Michael Rosen
Mr. Derek Seel
Professor Andrew Sims
Dr. Nuala Sterling
Professor Victor Tindall
Dr. Colin Waine
Professor Sir Dillwyn Williams

The group has been giving preliminary consideration to the possibility of a study on hospital-acquired infections. We look forward to receiving in the near future the group's specific suggestions on the scope of any such study.

Computers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the value for money of the expenditure on computers by health authorities in England over the last five years; and what action has been taken by the chief executive to ensure such purchases of systems and hardware are adequately evaluated.

Mr. Sackville: The implementation of computer systems is a local responsibility. Local managers take investment decisions in line with their business requirements, and in doing this are expected to obtain value for money. They are expected to identify the potential benefits of any investment before decisions are taken and to assess whether those benefits are actually realised.

The National Health Service Management Executive is responsible for providing leadership and advice and establishing a strategic framework for computer developments. In particular the executive has been developing national standards within which local managers can evaluate commercial systems. The aim is to publish revised guidance on procurement, investment appraisal and benefits realisation later this year. Further support is being provided through a national training strategy for managers which will develop the skills required to choose, implement and manage information systems.

Regional Health Authority Members

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the present remuneration and expiry of term of office of each member of each regional health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: All regional health authority non-executive members receive remuneration of £5,000 per annum. The names and terms of office of non-executive members of regional health authorities are as follows:

Regional health authority/ Name of member	Term of appointment
Northern	
Mr. A. G. Brown	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Professor M. D. Rawlins	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. P. H. Reay	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. R. C. Spoor	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Yorkshire	
Mr. J. A. Ferguson	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
Professor S. B. Brown	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
Cllr. W. Kilgallon	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. J. A. Barden	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. M. A. J. Morgan	27 May 1991 to 31 October 1993
Trent	
Mr. M. Dassau	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Dr. K. J. R. Edwards	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. P. B. Wildgoose	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. G. R. H. Clemons	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. D. Bertram	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
East Anglian	
Mrs. J. L. Hopwood	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Professor D. K. Peters	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. J. B. Mowson	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. L. Rice	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. S. E. Sida-Lockett	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
North West Thames	
Mr. D. Bucks	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. J. B. Hanham	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. M. G. Storey	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. E. J. Davies	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Professor S. Sutherland	1 May 1992 to 31 October 1994
North East Thames	
Maj. Gen. R. P. W. Wall	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
Mr. P. Holwell	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
Baroness Gardner of Parkes	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
Dr. J. F. Moorhead	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
South East Thames	
Mr. A. J. L. Barnes	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. I. D. Gainsford	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Professor P. M. Higgins	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. R. F. Holland	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. W. Mitchell	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
South West Thames	
Dr. G. S. Spathis	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. J. R. Harris	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. G. J. Howe	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. J. K. Pearman	1 January 1992 to 31 December 1994
Mrs. M. McNaughton	1 January 1992 to 31 December 1994
Wessex	
Mrs. J. Perons	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Professor J. M. Higgins	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. R. C. Donnelly	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. A. S. D. Service	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. P. A. Waring	1 April 1992 to 31 October 1994
Oxford	
Mr. P. D. M. Gell	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Professor H. Harris	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. C. J. N. Ward	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. V. Rubenstein	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. W. A. Rooke	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993

Regional health authority/ Name of member	Term of appointment
South Western	
Mr. D. F. Strachan	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Sir John Kingman	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
Mr. C. Spence	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
Mr. L. M. Urquhart	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
Dame Margaret Fry	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1992
West Midlands	
Cllr. B. Stoten	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Professor Sir Michael Thompson	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. E. M. Worley	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. T. D. Morris	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. S. M. Beesley	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mersey	
Mrs. R. H. Hawley	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Professor A. M. Breckenridge	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. J. F. Kane	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mr. N. L. Banner	18 March 1991 to 31 October 1993
Mr. B. Jenkins	1 November 1991 to 31 October 1993
North Western	
Mr. E. Parker	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Professor R. D. H. Boyd	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Mrs. J. A. Hytner	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993
Dr. A. K. Banerjee	26 July 1990 to 31 October 1993

Wheelchairs and Artificial Limbs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to discuss the timely provision of wheelchairs and artificial limbs.

Mr. Yeo: The purchase of appropriate services for the provision of wheelchairs and artificial limbs is a matter for district health authorities. The quality of service is monitored by regional health authorities and the NHS Management Executive keeps it under review.

Sexual Health

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what performance indicators she now requires from the annual reports of directors of public health in national health service districts on activities promoting sexual health.

Mr. Sackville: In July 1991 regional health authorities were asked to undertake a comprehensive review of their family planning services. Regions were asked to report by the end of June 1992 on the criteria they have set purchasing authorities for securing more effective family planning services and the specific targets that will be set for district health authorities and family health services authorities for 1993-94. Criteria and targets will depend on the priorities set as a result of assessment of local needs. Careful consideration will be given to the reports from regions and, in the light of these, to the future development of family planning service provision.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what visits she has made to her EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans she has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have had no such meetings. We expect to meet a number of the Health Ministers of other member states during the presidency to discuss matters on the agenda of the Health Ministers Council.

Civil Servants' Shareholdings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, her Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if she will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in her Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within her Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department's staff rules place a duty on every member of staff who comes into contact with a matter concerning a business organisation in which he or she has an interest, including shareholdings, to disclose that interest to his or her senior manager and to ask that some other official deal with the matter. Staff rules are given to and apply to all civil servants working in the Department, including its agencies. Individuals and their managers are expected to consult the Department's establishment officer about the desirability of acquiring or retaining shares where this might give rise to a potential conflict of interest. The Department's establishment officer has been consulted on such matters on two occasions since the Department separated from the former Department of Health and Social Security.

Wheelchair Access

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will hold discussions about providing access for people in wheelchairs to national health service buildings which they need to enter.

Mr. Yeo: Health authorities should ensure compliance with the patients charter standard that buildings can be used by people in wheelchairs. The Department has issued guidance to health authorities on the design of premises to take account of the special needs of physically disabled people.

Hospital Accounts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to collect information on the number of firms refusing to supply, or delaying supplies, to health authorities or trusts because of delays in settling accounts.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Medical Practitioners

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the expected costs of compensation for individual medical practitioners whose legal status is not recognised by the current United Kingdom system of accreditation, as a result of EC directives 75/362 and 75/363 and of the Frankovitch case in the European Court of Justice.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is not possible to make such an estimate.

Hospital Trusts

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out her reserve powers to override the decisions of hospital trust management.

Dr. Mawhinney: The powers of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make directions to national health service trusts are laid down in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, schedule 2, paragraph 6.(1) and 6.(2). These powers will not be used routinely, and only under the most exceptional circumstances will there be any intervention in trusts' affairs.

Dog Bites

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been treated for dog bites in national health service hospitals in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: There were 1,134 hospital admissions for dog bites in 1989-90. Information about dog bites treated in accident and emergency departments is not collected centrally.

Census

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider bringing forward the publication of the 1991 census data for Staffordshire to make it available for submissions by local authorities in the county to the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 14 July. All county monitors will be published by October, and corresponding small area statistics will be available this year.

Heart Disease

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the waiting period for examinations for heart complaints *(a)* on Merseyside and *(b)* in Liverpool at the most recent date; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Donald Wilson, chairman of Mersey regional health authority, for details.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths have occurred *(a)* in Liverpool and *(b)* on Merseyside in each of the past five years from heart disease; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is shown in the table.

Deaths in Liverpool and Merseyside from heart disease (ICD 390-429), 1987 to 1991

Year	Liverpool	Merseyside
1987	2,120	5,913
1988	1,975	5,778
1989	2,010	5,949
1990	1,844	5,542
1991	1,838	5,588

Residential Homes

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will be giving guidance to local authorities about the legal implications that will arise after 1 April 1993 from residential homes having contracts with both local authorities and residents.

Mr. Yeo: The Department issued guidance last year to local authorities about contracting with residential homes in "Purchase of Service—Practice Guidance and Practice Material for Social Services Departments and Other Agencies", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Baseline Statistics

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the baselines referred to in the "Health of the Nation" White Paper for *(a)* the death rates for coronary heart disease and stroke in 1990, *(b)* the death rate for CHD for those aged 65 to 74 years in 1990, *(c)* the death rate for stroke for those aged 65 to 74 years in 1990, *(d)* the death rate for breast cancer in those invited for screening in 1990, *(e)* the incidence of invasive cervical cancer in 1986, *(f)* the death rate for lung cancer under the age of 75 years in 1990, *(g)* the suicide rate in 1990, *(h)* the suicide rate of the severely mentally ill in 1990, *(i)* the incidence of gonorrhoea in 1990, *(j)* the rate of conceptions amongst under 16-year-olds in 1990, *(k)* the death rate for accidents among children under 15 years in 1990, *(l)* the death rate from accidents among children aged 15 to 24 years in 1990 and *(m)* the death rate from accidents among people over 65 years in 1990, for each national health service region and each health district.

Mr. Sackville: Information relating to coronary heart disease, stroke, breast cancer, cervical cancer, lung cancer, suicide and road traffic accidents is available in the public health common data set for 1991, published by the Department of Health. Copies are available in the Library.

Information at regional and district level about the severely mentally ill, incidence of gonorrhoea, under-16 conceptions and all accidents is currently not available in the form requested. The Department will be working with regional health authorities to develop baseline data for these areas.

Tuberculosis

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the number of people contracting tuberculosis *(a)* in each of the last five years and *(b)* in each of the last six months;

(2) what evidence her Department has of any causal link between poverty, poor housing and tuberculosis;

(3) if she will make a statement about the incidence of tuberculosis in the United Kingdom;

(4) what plans she has to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis.

Mr. Sackville: For notifications of tuberculosis in England and Wales for the last five years I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 7 July at column *150*. The breakdown for the first six months of 1992 is:

	Number
January	508
February	453
March	460
April	574
May	462
June	494

Notifications of TB fell progressively from 1948 to 1987, since when the numbers have levelled out. Rates are higher in inner cities, to which several factors contribute. Discussions are proceeding between the Department and the national health service on how TB can be reduced in those areas.

The national schools' BCG immunisation programme is to continue at least until 1995-96, when the results will be known of a Public Health Laboratory Service survey of tuberculosis in the general population. Immunisation will continue to be offered also to other high-risk groups as set out in the HMSO publication "Immunisation Against Infectious Diseases". A copy of the 1992 edition will be placed in the Library as soon as it is available.

Royal London Hospital

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will request the board of the Royal London hospital trust to inform her how and in what manner its plans for reduction of staff and services will *(a)* affect the level of services provided by the hospital to future in and out-patients resident in the borough of Newham, *(b)* the operation of Newham district hospital and the support available to it and *(c)* medical education; and if she will publish their reply.

Dr. Mawhinney: The provision of hospital and community health services for the residents of the borough of Newham is a matter for Newham health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Newham health authority, Mrs. R. Walters, for further information.

Weight Loss

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department will carry out an investigation into the prescription of fenfluramine hydrochlorides, and in particular, duromine, as an aid to weight loss.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will investigate the use of prescribed drugs for the prime purpose of weight loss.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. Guidelines on the prescribing of these drugs are contained in the British National Formulary which is sent to all doctors.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has any plans to issue guidance to doctors in private practice on the question of prescribed drugs being made available for the prime purpose of weight loss.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. The British National Formulary already contains guidance on this point.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to review NHS contracts so as to restrict the involvement of doctors in the commercial activities of slimming clinics, in particular their power to prescribe drugs in such circumstances.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the number of qualified NHS doctors who are involved in the commercial activities of organisations calling themselves slimming clinics.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not held centrally.

Community Care

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has *(a)* to evaluate local authorities' community care plans, *(b)* to provide local authorities with her Department's comments on their plans and *(c)* to intervene should a local authority be found to have failed to follow guidelines in consulting other agencies in the preparation of its community care plans; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities' final draft community care plans were evaluated during the course of the April round of regional health authorities/social services inspectorate monitoring, and comments were made to authorities on their overall progress towards implementation. The Social Services Inspectorate is undertaking a further analysis of the final plans and, where serious gaps in the planning process have been identified SSI is notifying the authorities concerned and seeking remedial action.

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authorities met the deadline of 1 April for submitting their community care plans to her Department.

Mr. Yeo: Only a very small number of authorities failed to meet the deadline for publication of community care plans. Of these, one has not yet published its plan but all the others did so soon after 1 April.

Southmead Health Care Trust

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the level of staffing of junior doctors at Southmead health care trust, Bristol and the current number of hours they are required to work;

(2) if she will take action to ensure that full houseman cover is available at Southmead health care trust.

Mr. Sackville: The appropriate level of medical staffing is a matter for the trust to determine, having regard to the ceilings set in "Achieving a Balance" and the advice given in "The New Deal on Junior Doctors' Hours".

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the proposed closure of the paediatric renal unit at Southmead health care trust, Bristol.

Mr. Sackville: I understand that in the light of representations which have been made about the proposed closure of the unit, the Southmead health services trust has decided to re-examine the decision to close it. A further review of the options for the future of the unit will now be carried out and it will stay open, at least until the review is complete.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will call for a full report from the Southmead health care trust, Bristol on representations made to the trust management by doctors on emergency medical cover in the hospital.

Mr. Sackville: I understand that the chief executive of the Southmead trust has asked the acting director of operations to undertake an immediate inquiry into the allegations about patient deaths. I am confident that the trust board will take whatever further action is necessary.

Mr. Mike Shannon

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the issues considered when deciding the redundancy pay of Mr. Mike Shannon, former chief executive of Warrington district general hospital; and what was the payment paid to him.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. D. Hannah, the chairman of Warrington health authority, for details.

Nurses (Grading)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to promote a fast track approach to dealing with the outstanding number of nurse clinical grading review appeals.

Mr. Sackville: The Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council has recently reached agreement on streamlining the appeals process including a facility for referring appeals direct from the employing authority to national level. The National Health Service Management Executive's director of personnel wrote to regional general managers and chief executives of NHS trusts on 31 March 1992 urging them to adopt the new procedures.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Radioactivity Monitoring

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what seashore monitoring for radioactivity is carried out by his environment department.

Mr. Atkins: The environment service of the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland monitors the gamma dose rate in the air over intertidal sediments around the coastline of the Province. The results are consistent with normal background levels of radioactivity.

The environment service also arranges for analyses of sea water, seaweed, fish, nephrops and winkles on a quarterly basis. These results are published annually and indicate that the radioactivity is of negligible radiological significance to the Northern Ireland public.

Ferry Links

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to improve ferry links between Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: In recent years, there has been considerable investment in infrastructural improvements to the ports of Belfast and Larne supported by grants from the European regional development fund. This has enabled a continuing improvement to the ferry services operating between Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Rural Housing

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to improve rural housing in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but the chief executive has advised me that following extensive consultations the Housing Executive completed a review of its rural policy and in June 1991 published a revised policy statement titled "The Way Ahead". This sets out a strategy for improving rural housing in the short, medium and long term. The executive, as part of its short-term strategy, has already designated 67 rural priority areas in which grants are actively targeted and where an enhanced grants package is available for the provision of mains water, sewerage and electricity services. Allied to this, the demolition criterion has been relaxed and the provision of amenity blocks introduced which will allow a greater number of properties to qualify for grant aid. The scope of the improvement grant scheme has also been widened to include a replacement option where this is shown to be more feasible on technical grounds than improvement.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed in *(a)* the shipbuilding industry and *(b)* the tourist industry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: At present, there are approximately 2,100 workers employed in the shipbuilding industry in Northern Ireland. The information requested on the tourism industry is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current level of unemployment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: At 14 May 1992, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 103,796 unemployed claimants in Northern Ireland, representing 14·2 per cent. of the work force.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Atkins: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses in Northern Ireland, through improvements to the business climate, deregulation and specific programmes of support and assistance. Direct comparisons between 1990-91 and 1991-92 are not possible as the Northern Ireland industrial development agencies concentrated on implementing the Government's

new economic development strategy for Northern Ireland in 1991-92. This focuses on assisting companies to develop their growth potential and competitiveness. Measures operated in 1991-92 by the Department of Economic Development through the Industrial Development Board and the Local Enterprise Development Unit, to assist small business include:

Activity	*Performance*
Sectoral activity	Examination of competitive performance begun in 20 sectors (new programme) 6 sectoral task forces established (new programme)
Strategic development planning scheme	21 companies assisted (new programme)
Growth opportunities	40 companies assisted (new programme)
Marketing, quality, research and development, product development support	805 companies supported
Exhibitions, trade missions	396 companies participated

Moneyrea

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total electorate of Moneyrea ward in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Hanley: The parliamentary electorates taken from the electoral register published on 15 February each year are as follows:

Electoral Register	*Electorate*
1982	1,796
1983	1,827
1984	1,818
[1]1985	2,049
1986	2,087
1987	2,114
1988	2,110
1989	2,138
1990	2,241
1991	2,337
1992	2,336

[1]The Local Government (Boundaries) Order (NI) 1984 gave effect to the recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner altering ward boundaries.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the enrolment at Moneyrea primary school in each of the past 10 years; and how many children were refused places in this school in each of those 10 years.

Mr. Hanley: The number of pupils enrolled at Moneyrea primary school in January in each of the last 10 years was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1983	145
1984	138
1985	132
1986	134
1987	139
1988	134
1989	136
1990	133
1991	129
1992	136

I will write to the right hon. Gentleman about the number of children refused places once the school has reopened after the summer break.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the estimated population of Moneyrea ward in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Vehicle Inspectors

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many spot inspections, as distinct from annual inspections, were carried out by the Department of the Environment from 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992 on vehicles belonging to private operators; and if he will publish the results of such inspections.

Mr. Atkins: From 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992, the Department of the Environment carried out roadside examinations on 1,203 vehicles, including lorries, buses and private cars. As a result of these examinations, 241 minor defects were drawn to the operators'/owners' attention. Seventy-four delayed prohibitions and 18 immediate prohibitions were issued in respect of more serious defects.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many spot inspections, as distinct from annual inspections, were carried out by the Department of the Environment from 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992 on vehicles belonging to Ulsterbus; and if he will publish the results of such inspections.

Mr. Atkins: My Department does not record the roadside examination of vehicles by the names of the operators.

Pharmacies

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at what locations new pharmacy retail outlets have been approved by the pharmacy practices committees of the Eastern health and social services board in each year since 1989; and in 1992 up to 30 June; and how many applications were refused for each of those periods.

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce regulations to control aircraft noise.

Mr. Atkins: Aircraft noise at airports is subject to control under the provision of section 12 of the Aerodromes Act (Northern Ireland) 1971. There are no present plans to invoke these provisions.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will undertake a review of the machanisms for controlling aircraft noise.

Mr. Atkins: I have plans to do so as part of a general review of current airport legislation.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Mates: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Civil Servants (Shares)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mates: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Police Stations (Lay Visitors)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the value of lay visitors to police stations in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mates: The lay visiting scheme was established by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland in April 1991. It is non-statutory and was set up to enable members of the community to observe, comment and report upon the welfare of persons in police custody and the operation by the police of the rules under the police and criminal evidence legislation governing the welfare of those held in custody in police stations. The scheme constitutes an important and effective element in promoting community confidence in the police and has demonstrably been a success.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the cost of the lay visitor system in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mates: I understand from the Police Authority for Northern Ireland that during the financial year 1991-92 the approximate cost of administering the lay visiting scheme was £27,000.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many visits were made by lay visitors to police stations in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mates: I understand from the Police Authority for Northern Ireland that from April 1991, when the lay visiting scheme was established, to 31 March 1992, 230 visits were made to designated police stations.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many lay visitors have attended police holding centres in Northern Ireland; and what is the number of lay visitors in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mates: The Police Authority for Northern Ireland currently has 46 lay visitors, none of whom has visited the holding centres since their terms of reference apply only to police stations designated under the police and criminal evidence legislation.

Youth Training

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of youth training trainees in Northern Ireland who left schemes without receiving any recognised qualifications for the previous five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Atkins: The number of youth training trainees in Northern Ireland who left schemes without receiving any recognised qualifications was 6,541 in 1990-91—66 per cent. and 7,893 in 1991-92—47 per cent. Data on recognised qualifications gained were not collected prior to April 1990.

Higher Education

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total amount spent on higher education excluding student awards for the last five years in current and real terms and the percentage that is of total Government spending.

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Student Entitlements

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated cost of restoring student entitlement to *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* unemployment benefit in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Water Disconnections

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by district office the number of water consumers disconnected from the mains water supply because of arrears in each year since 1987 and the number reconnected after arrears were paid.

Mr. Atkins: The table shows the number of consumers disconnected in each water service division since 1987. Figures for the number of reconnections after payment of arrears are not available.

Division	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Northern	78	76	31	22	99
Southern	120	139	69	40	100
Eastern	79	132	125	163	96
Western	41	61	67	33	90

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of

private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Mates: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Questions

Mr. Page: To ask the Lord President of the Council what calculation has been made of the savings that might be achieved if Ministers were to make available to the proposed data network for Parliament, standard replies, with appropriate updates, to routine inquiries made by hon. Members on behalf of their constituents.

Mr. Newton: No calculation has, as yet, been made of any potential savings but the Information Committee will be considering the potential advantages of a data network for Parliament and the possible uses to which it might be put. I understand that it hopes to report to the House later in the Session. Any decision to install such a network would need the agreement of the House and of the Finance and Services Committee.

Office Cost Allowance

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to implement the report of the Top Salaries Review Body in respect of the office cost allowance.

Mr. Newton: I set out the Government's plans in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) on Thursday 9 July, *Official Report*, column *284* and in the debate on Tuesday 14 July.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993 the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office has no plans to mark this occasion.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the achievements of the Privy Council office in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Newton: The functions of the Privy Council Office do not include the provision of assistance to small businesses.

EMPLOYMENT

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Local Office Stourbridge

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) when her Department first considered building a new jobcentre and benefits office in Coventry street, Stourbridge; when it was decided not to go ahead with the scheme; what was the estimate of the cost of the scheme; how much had been spent by her Department and the Property Services Agency in preparing the scheme; and what was the proposed date of opening of the centre;

(2) when her Department considered building a new jobcentre and benefits office at Scotland house, Stourbridge, how much it will cost; how much area it will take up; and when it will be ready to open.

Mr. McLoughlin: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Civil Servants (Shares)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, her Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if she will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in her Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within her Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department of Employment group personnel handbook and the Employment Service personnel handbook give the following specific and identical guidance on dealings in securities and other assets. Staff must not use or appear to use their official position for personal gain. They must not buy or sell something when, as a civil servant, they have information concerning its value which is not publicly known. They should also avoid dealing in an asset at a time when their official activities involve them in giving advice, or taking decisions which may affect its value.

Comprehensive information is not readily available on the number of occasions on which staff have reported shareholdings to established officers.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will set out the objectives of each division and branch of her Department.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Inspectors

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the ratio of field inspectors to registered premises for *(a)* the factory inspectorate, *(b)* the agricultural inspectorate, *(c)* the quarries inspectorate, *(d)* the nuclear inspectorate and *(e)* the mines inspectorate in (i) 1980, (ii) 1985 and (iii) 1990.

Mr. McLoughlin: The ratios of field inspectors in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)[1] to registered premises were:

	1980 (1 January)	*1985 (1 April)*	*1990 (1 April)*
(a) Factories	1:466	1:695	1:690
(b) Agricultural[2]	—	1:2,116	1:1,619
(c and e) Mines and quarries[3]	1:98	1:117	—
(c) Quarries	—	—	1:667
(e) Mines	—	—	1:21

[1] The register of premises maintained by HSE is thought to be seriously incomplete because of the rapid turnover in businesses and because a number fail to notify as required by the Factories Act 1961. Moreover at least 100 inspectors inspect transient sites—mainly in construction—rather than fixed premises. The ratio has to be considered in that light. Informed estimates of the total number of premises subject to HSE inspection suggest total numbers in excess of 1 million.

[2] Agricultural inspectors joined the Health and Safety Executive from Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Food (MAFF) in 1976. The register of workplaces was held by MAFF until after the beginning of 1980.

[3] Combined figures for mines and quarries (quarries inspectorate joined the factory and agricultural inspectorate division on 1 November 1989).

(d) Nuclear installations inspectors in the Health and Safety Executive are all based in headquarters. The numbers of inspectors in the nuclear safety division and the number of relevant sites were as follows:

	1980 (1 January)	*1985 (1 April)*	*1990 (1 April)*
Inspectors	99	105	160
Sites	28	29	30

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many mines inspectors are due to retire in each year between 1992 and 1996.

Mr. McLoughlin: The numbers of mines inspectors currently employed by the Health and Safety Executive who will have reached retirement age in each calendar year between 1992 and 1996 are as follows:

	Number
[1]1992	1
1993	3
1994	2
1995	1
1996	1

[1] From 1 July.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the ratio of qualified factory inspectors to trainees on 1 April in each year between 1987 and 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: The ratios of qualified factory inspectors to trainee factory inspectors at 1 April were:

	Ratio
1987	6·7
1988	8·1
1989	7·1
1990	4·7
1991	3·5
1992	3·4

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* factory inspectors, *(b)* agricultural inspectors, *(c)* quarries inspectors, *(d)* nuclear inspectors, *(e)* mines inspectors and *(f)* factories inspectors resigned between 1987 and 1990, inclusively; and how many years of experience had they between them, in total.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of inspectors who resigned from 1 January 1987 to 31 December 1990 were:

	Number
Factory inspectors	42
Agricultural inspectors	5
Quarries inspectors	1
Nuclear inspectors	3
Mines inspectors	0

These inspectors had, in aggregate, 416 years of civil service employment.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the labour costs associated with *(a)* the factory inspectorate, *(b)* the agricultural inspectorate, *(c)* the specialist inspectorate, *(d)* the quarries inspectorate, *(e)* the nuclear inspectorate and *(f)* the mines inspectorate; and for (i) clerical and administrative staff and (ii) inspectors under each category both in actual amounts and as a percentage of the Health and Safety Executive's total labour costs in each year from 1987 to 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information is not available in the form requested. The table gives payroll budgets for the divisions of the Health and Safety Executive, in which inspectors are principally employed. Separate figures for inspector grade and other staff are not available.

Payroll Budgets—HSE Divisions[1]

	£000s	*Percentage of HSE total*
1987-88		
Field operations division	22,019	36·2
Mines inspectorate	3,836	6·3
Nuclear safety division	4,821	7·9
Technology division	6,236	10·3
1988-89		
Field operations division	24,414	36·5
Mines inspectorate	3,722	5·6
Nuclear safety division	5,815	8·7
Technology division	6,875	10·3
1989-90		
Field operations division	25,673	35·9
Mines inspectorate	3,373	4·7
Nuclear safety division	7,377	10·3
Technology division	7,004	9·8
1990-91		
Field operations division	37,308	44·4
Mines inspectorate	3,085	3·7

	£000s	Percentage of HSE total
Nuclear safety division	9,394	11·2
Technology division	5,500	6·5
1991-92		
Field operations division	41,368	40·2
Mines inspectorate	3,218	3·1
Nuclear safety division	10,446	10·1
Technology and health sciences division	8,631	8·4

[1] Because of reorganisations of HSE's divisional structure, figures for different years are not directly comparable.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factories there are which are liable for visits from the factories inspectorate.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 31 March 1992, the latest date for which information is available centrally, 417,316 fixed premises—which include all registered factories—were registered with HSE's factory inspectorate. There are no reliable estimates of the number of unregistered factory premises. All fixed premises, whether registered or not, are liable to a visit by HSE inspectors.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the last new mines inspector was recruited.

Mr. McLoughlin: The last mines inspector was recruited in November 1988.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many trainee *(a)* factory inspectors, *(b)* agricultural inspectors, *(c)* quarry inspectors, *(d)* nuclear inspectors, *(e)* mines inspectors and *(f)* factories inspectors were employed, giving the number for each year from 1987 to 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: Only two grades of staff in the Health and Safety Executive are designated as training grades: factory inspectors class II—for the first two years—and assistant agricultural inspectors—for the first three years. The numbers employed were:

	Trainee factory inspectors	Assistant agricultural inspectors
1 April 1987	81·0	36
1 April 1988	65·0	25
1 April 1989	75·0	23
1 April 1990	111·0	26
1 April 1991	144·5	43

A wide range of training, both internal and external, is provided both for new recruits and for more experienced staff in the various occupational groups employed by HSE.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many premises were registered with *(a)* the factory inspectorate, *(b)* the agricultural inspectorate, *(c)* the quarries inspectorate, *(d)* the nuclear inspectorate and *(e)* the mines inspectorate in (i) 1980, (ii) 1985 and (iii) 1990.

Mr. McLoughlin: The table shows the available information on the number of workplaces registered with the factory, agricultural, quarries, nuclear installations and mines inspectorate in 1980, 1985 and 1990.

Number of workplaces registered

	1980[1]	1985[1]	1990[1]
Factory inspectorate	309,915	395,860	386,144
Agricultural inspectorate	—	319,567	239,632
Quarries inspectorate	[2]9,021	[2]8,800	6,000
Nuclear inspectorate	28	29	30
Mines inspectorate	—	—	729

[1] Figures for 1 January 1980 and 31 March 1985 and 1990.
[2] Combined figure for mines and quarries—quarries inspectorate joined the factory and agricultural inspectorate division on 1 November 1989.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current number of factory inspectors.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 1 July 1992, the Health and Safety Executive employed 705 factory inspectors.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many Health and Safety Executive inspectors with over *(a)* 10 years, *(b)* 15 years and *(c)* 20 years experience have left the Health and Safety Executive since 1 January 1987.

Mr. McLoughlin: Since 1 January 1987, the following numbers of inspectors have resigned:

(a) 28 with 11 to 15 years experience,
(b) 10 with 15 to 20 years experience,
(c) 3 with over 20 years experience.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many premises registered with the Health and Safety Executive have not been inspected since 1 January 1986.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information about the number of fixed premises registered with the Health and Safety Executive that have not been inspected since 1 January 1986 is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of the Health and Safety Executive's expenditure was provided directly from the Government in grant aid for the years *(a)* 1975-76 and *(b)* 1990-91.

Mr. McLoughlin: The proportions of the Health and Safety Executive's expenditure provided by grant in aid for the years 1975-76 and 1990-91 were 98 per cent. and 75 per cent.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what specific resources have been allocated to the Health and Safety Executive to ensure that employers will comply with regulations enacting *(a)* the framework directive—89/391/EEC—*(b)* the workplace directive—89/654/EEC—*(c)* the manual handling of loads directive—90/269/EEC—*(d)* the use of personal protective equipment directive—89/655/EEC—*(e)* the display screen equipment directive—90/270/EEC—*(f)* the carcinogens directive—90/394/EEC—and *(g)* the biological agents directive—90/679/EEC.

Mr. McLoughlin: In recent years, the Government have provided the Health and Safety Commission—HSC—with the resources it has sought for the Health and Safety Executive in public expenditure survey bids. HSE's staffing is now at its highest level ever.

In the course of its inspection, advice and enforcement activities, the HSE promotes compliance with all relevant health and safety legislation. HSE's plans for implementing the large number of new EC requirements are set out in the HSC's plan of work for 1992-93 and beyond.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* occupational nurses were employed by the Health and Safety Executive in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 1 April 1979, HSE employed 86·5 doctors and 91 nurses. Corresponding figures for 1991 were 56·5 and 53·5 respectively.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans the Government have to increase the staffing levels of the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 1 July 1992, the Health and Safety Executive's staffing was at its highest level ever, at 4,404 including 1,499 inspectors. As set out on pages 42 and 43 of the Health and Safety Commission's plan of work for 1992-93 and beyond, published in March this year and available in the Library, it is planned to increase total staffing to 4,523, including 1,592 inspectors, by 1 April 1993.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many complaints in total from employees concerning health and safety at work were dealt with by Health and Safety Executive area offices in the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. McLoughlin: The table shows the information which is available on the total number of complaints received and dealt with by the agricultural, factory and quarries inspectorates—AI, FI, QI—in the Health and Safety Executive area offices for the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91:

Year (1 April—31 March)	*Number of complaints*
1988-89	[1]15,217
1989-90	[2]19,591
1990-91	18,625

[1] AI and FI only.
[2] Includes QI figures from 1 November 1989 when the inspectorate joined the factory and agricultural inspectorate division.

Information is not separately available on the number of complaints received from employees about health and safety at work.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish the Health and Safety Executive report entitled report of the working group on improving the impact of the division's work; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many telephone inquiries the Health and Safety Executive public inquiry points dealt with in total in the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of telephone inquiries dealt with by the public inquiry points are as follows:

	Number
1988-89	67,664
1989-90	92,537
1990-91	92,134

Pregnant Employees

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what plans she has to amend the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 so that an employee can claim unfair dismissal because of a pregnancy without qualifying condition;

(2) what plans she has to seek to amend the law, to make the dismissal of pregnant women unlawful without qualifying condition, and to introduce 14 weeks' maternity leave, without qualifying condition.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government's election manifesto undertook to give effect to the provisions of the EC directive on pregnant workers which gives the right to 14 weeks' maternity leave and protection against dismissal on grounds of pregnancy. The Government will, of course, honour their manifesto commitment. However, the directive has yet to be adopted.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent representations she has received regarding the employment rights of pregnant women; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Since the general election my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has received 12 letters from Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament about the pregnant workers directive, including one passed to this Department from the Prime Minister's office. My right hon. Friend has also received three letters from MPs about other aspects of maternity rights. In addition, my right hon. Friend has received a number of letters from trade unions and others.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps her Department is taking to publicise to employers and employees their obligations and rights with regard to pregnant women.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department has published a booklet which sets out the maternity rights available to employees and the obligations of employers. The booklet is widely available at Employment Service offices. There is also a simple fact sheet on the same subject mainly intended for employers.

Unfair Dismissal

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will amend the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 to abolish the necessity to have a qualifying period of two years' continuous employment to claim unfair dismissal, where an employee alleges that the reason for the dismissal was an attempt to enforce a statutory right.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many complaints were made to industrial tribunals in each of the last five years for which

records are available for unfair dismissal because of pregnancy; how many and what percentage were settled before hearing; how many and what percentage reached a hearing; and how many and what percentage were successful.

Mr. McLoughlin: The table sets out the information on claims to industrial tribunals of unfair dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy under section 60 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 in the five financial years to 31 March 1991.

Year	*All cases*	*Settled before hearing*	*Per cent.*	*Reached full hearing*	*Per cent.*	*Successful at full hearing*	*Per cent.*
1990-91	47	36	(76·6)	11	(23·4)	4	(8·5)
1989-90	44	34	(77·3)	10	(22·7)	5	(11·4)
1988-89	92	60	(65·2)	28	(30·4)	12	(13)
1987-88	115	85	(73·9)	28	(24·4)	12	(10·4)
1986-87	169	126	(74·6)	43	(25·4)	25	(14·8)

Child Care

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps she is taking to encourage the improvement of child care after school and during holidays.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government have announced their intention to pay grants through training and enterprise councils for the establishment of after-school and school holiday child care schemes. The Department is consulting relevant organisations about implementation of this grant programme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has had discussions with the working group which advises her on women's issues and expects to announce further details of the programme later this year.

Qualifications (Recognition)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which diplomas, certificates and other formal qualifications will be subject to directives for mutual recognition under article 57 of the treaty on European union.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The treaty on European union —Maastricht—does not directly affect the principles of mutual recognition. It changes the procedure for agreement on any new directives, which might be proposed in future.

There are already two directives which cover this area under the Single European Act which is based on articles in the treaty of Rome.

The first general directive for mutual recognition came into force on 4 January 1991 for degree level qualifications —although as yet not all member states have implemented it.

The second general directive has been agreed and will be in force in June 1994. It extends the system for recognition to include qualifications awarded on completion of higher education courses of one to three years and equivalents including national and Scottish vocational qualifications.

Ratification of the European economic area agreement will extend mutual recognition to the European Free Trade Association countries.

Training

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what steps she intends to take to ensure that the United Kingdom provides national retraining programmes and professional child care for women at the workplace, on an equal basis with other EC member countries;

(2) what steps she intends to take to bring the level of investment in training for women in the United Kingdom to a level comparable with that in other EC countries.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We already have substantial arrangements for training for women, in particular within the employment training programme. There are flexibilities within the programme which allow women to reconcile their training with their domestic commitments and which offer support towards the cost of child care.

Investment in training provision is further encouraged by the investors in people initiative, which rewards employers who develop all their employees, and by a new national training award for the training of women.

I will also be introducing a grant to help set up out-of-school child care provision, which I hope will have the involvement of employers. My Department will continue to encourage employers to provide workplace child care facilities for all employees with children.

Against this background, I have written to all training and enterprise council chairmen specifically asking them to help by devising local strategies to take forward action on women's issues. Training will have a key role in these.

At a European level, the United Kingdom is an active member of the IRIS network of training schemes for women which promotes interchange of ideas and good practice, and through which good United Kingdom practice is widely shared with our European partners.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will provide tables showing the latest results from the youth training leavers survey for each TEC—training and enterprise council—area in England and Wales and each LEC—local enterprise company—area in Scotland broken down to show the number and proportion of youth training leavers who *(a)* had worked towards a vocational qualification or credit, *(b)* had gained a vocational qualification or credit, *(c)* had not gained a vocational qualification or credit, *(d)* were awaiting results and *(e)* had completed their training.

Mr. McLoughlin: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what occasions the European Commission has refused to pay grants from the social fund to the United Kingdom to assist industrial training; and what were the reasons for each refusal.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Commission has yet to make certain 1992 payments in respect of the fund's objectives 2

and 5b—areas of industrial and rural decline—and has provided no reasons for this delay. The Commission has now agreed to release all 1992 advances in respect of objectives 3 and 4—long-term unemployment and young people.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will provide tables showing the latest results from the youth training leavers survey for each TEC area in England and Wales and each LEC area in Scotland broken down to show the number and proportion of youth training leavers who were *(a)* in a full-time job with their work experience employer, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* employed in their own business, *(d)* in a part-time job, *(e)* in voluntary work, *(f)* on a full-time course at a college or training centre, *(g)* on another youth training scheme, *(h)* doing something else or *(i)* unemployed.

Mr. McLoughlin: I will write to the hon. Member.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she plans to publish *(a)* the monthly reports of supply and demand of youth training places in each TEC area which are required from 7 July and *(b)* the quarterly statistical stock takes by her Department of the youth training supply and demand position on the guarantee in each TEC area.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information on the numbers of young people covered by the YT guarantee will be subject to the new monitoring arrangements which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment announced in the House on 7 July. Information gathered in the quarterly stock takes is in the form of estimates that are not sufficiently reliable to merit publication.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the number of young persons in the Durham constituency who have gained full-time employment after completing the youth training scheme.

Mr. McLoughlin: It is estimated from the latest available information that 60 per cent. of youth training trainees who completed their agreed training in the Durham training and enterprise council area during April to September 1991 were in full-time employment six months after leaving.

Severe Hardship Payments

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases were referred to a training and enterprise council guarantee liaison officer after a young person had been on severe hardship payments for eight weeks; and of these how many young people were found a youth training place by the guarantee liaison officer, in *(a)* January, *(b)* April and *(c)* July.

Mr. McLoughlin: The following information has been provided by the Benefits Agency:

(a) January 258 referrals;
(b) April 579 referrals;
(c) July (information not yet available).

The information relates to referrals to TECs in England and Wales and local enterprise companies in Scotland.

Information on the numbers of young people who were found a YT place by a guarantee liaison officer as a result of the referral is not available.

Travel-to-Interview Scheme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when she expects to announce the results of the review of the travel-to-interview scheme; if she will introduce provision for assistance for multiple job search expenses within the daily travelling distance; what changes to the eligibility rules and total resources allocated to the scheme are being considered; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Neil Mulberry

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the date on which she will provide redundancy payment to Mr. Neil Mulberry.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have written to my hon. Friend, giving full details of this case.

Noise at Work Regulations 1989

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate has been made of the cost to employers of complying with the Noise at Work Regulations 1989 in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Commission published a consultative document in 1987 on the draft Noise at Work Regulations. This included an assessment of the costs and benefits of the proposed regulations, which estimated their total cost to be between £240 million to £320 million, spread over a working lifetime. The main costs were likely to arise from the requirement for noise assessments—£20 million—personal protection programmes for those exposed to noise above 85 dB(A)—£127 million—and those for noise reduction measures for exposures above 90dB(A)—£85 million to £175 million.

Social Fund

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations she intends to make over delays in processing European social fund payments for voluntary sector projects.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Following vigorous representations by the Department, the European Commission has now agreed to release all ESF moneys due to the United Kingdom in respect of first advances for projects operating in 1992 under objectives 3 and 4 of the fund—long-term unemployment and young people. Representations continue over the Commission's inexcusable and unexplained delay in releasing 1992 advances in respect of certain programmes under objectives 5 and 2b—areas of industrial and rural decline.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the proposed budget of the European social fund.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The European Commission has proposed that the total European social fund budget for 1993 should be some £4,185 million—at the current exchange rate.

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what amendments have been made to SI 1991 No. 2431 on the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, in regard to item II in schedule 2, following the fifth report of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, 1991-92, HC 14-v.

Mr. McLoughlin: I will write to the hon. Member.

Employment Service

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the main achievements of the Employment Service as a next steps agency in 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am delighted to announce that the Employment Service met or exceeded the great majority of its performance targets in 1991-92. It helped 1·332 million unemployed people back into work; and exceeded its targets for paying benefit accurately and on time. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has received the ES annual report and accounts for 1991-92 from the chief executive.

As a next steps agency, the ES operates under a published framework document agreed with my right hon. Friend. The start of the review of the current ES framework document, due for completion by the end of March 1993, was delayed by the general election. My right hon. Friend has, therefore, extended the life of the current ES framework document by six months. At the same time, she has extended the contract of employment of the current ES chief executive, Mr. Mike Fogden, by six months, to March 1993. My right hon. Friend has also agreed a number of technical amendments to the current ES framework document, which take effect immediately.

I have arranged for copies of the ES annual report and accounts for 1991-92 and the full textual changes to the ES framework document to be placed in the Library.

DEFENCE

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 6 July, *Official Report*, column *45*, if he will list each of the sites that exceed the threshold for exemptions from the Radioactive Substances Act 1960.

Mr. Aitken: My Department is reviewing holdings of radioactive substances which exceed statutory exemption limits. The review is expected to be complete by the end of this year. It would be premature to provide the list the hon. Gentleman requests until that time.

Polaris

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what studies have been carried out into methods of disposal of Polaris missiles;

(2) by what means Polaris missiles will be disposed of.

Mr. Aitken: Disposal of Polaris missiles will be undertaken as the force is phased out and progressively replaced by Trident. Various methods for the disposal of the missiles are currently under consideration.

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to fit global positioning system units on British Trident missiles.

Mr. Aitken: None. However, global positioning system units will be fitted to each of the four Vanguard class Trident missile submarines, and will act as a check system for the submarines' primary inertial navigation system.

HMS Vanguard

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will define the terms "in-service date" and "formally operational" as used by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the difference between the in-service date of HMS Vanguard and the date upon which it will be fully operational.

Mr. Aitken: The in-service date is defined normally as the date by which the equipment will contribute to the operational capability of the service concerned. For Royal Navy vessels other than strategic ballistic nuclear submarines, the in-service date represents the date of acceptance from the contractor of the first of class; such vessels become formally operational after a series of trials. For Vanguard class submarines, trials will precede the in-service date, at which point they are expected to become fully operational.

Weapons (Soviet Union)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the purchase and subsequent dismantling of weapons of the former Soviet Union in order to prevent these weapons from being sold on the open market.

Mr. Aitken: This option has been rejected. It would not deal with the problem of the huge size of the military industries of the former Soviet Union, and could act as an incentive to further arms production.

Porton Down

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the establishment of an ethics committee to oversee scientific procedures on animals at the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down.

Mr. Aitken: All scientific procedures carried out on animals at this establishment are undertaken within the provisions of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. This imposes strict controls on the use of living animals in research and requires each programme of work to be justified in advance. The Act also established an Animals Procedures Committee which advises the Home Secretary on such matters as the legitimate requirements of science and industry and the protection of animals against avoidable suffering and unnecessary use in scientific procedures. I see no need to establish an ethics committee.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what would be the defence implications of United Kingdom participation in a multilateral, verifiable fissile materials cut-off.

Mr. Aitken: Unlike the nuclear super powers, the United Kingdom does not have large stocks of surplus fissile material upon which to draw. United Kingdom production will continue to be kept at the minimum level necessary to satisfy our nuclear deterent and naval reactor needs.

Civil Servants' Shareholdings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The rules of conduct governing share ownership are set out in departmental standing instructions available to both industrial and non-industrial staff. These make it clear that there is to be no conflict of interest between private and official interests.

My Department's next steps agencies are subject to these same rules.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what visits he has made too his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom's presidency of the EC.

Mr. Aitken: My right hon. and learned Friend has made no such visits. However, as the Minister with responsibility for deregulation matters within the MOD, I can confirm that this Department will play its full part in taking forward the Government's commitment to deregulation and competition.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when it is expected the Royal Navy will take delivery of the Ferranti data link stimulator for the type 23 frigate.

Mr. Aitken: The data link stimulator is scheduled to be delivered to the type 23 shore integration facility early in 1993.

Minesweepers

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the consequences for the training of reservists of the withdrawal from service of two Royal Navy River class minesweepers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have been no consequences for the training of reservists as such following the withdrawal from service of two River class minesweepers, although some reservists now have to travel to other units for their sea training.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many River class minesweepers are in service with the Royal Navy; and where they are based.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are a total of 12 River class minesweepers. Two—HMS Ribble and HMS Helmsdale—are maintained in reserve at Portsmouth. HMS Blackwater is deployed operationally as part of the fishery protection squadron and is based at Rosyth. The nine remaining vessels are used by the RNR and are based as follows:

HMS Waverney	South Wales
HMS Helford	Ulster
HMS Orwell	Tyne
HMS Carron	Severn
HMS Humber	Mersey
HMS Spey	Forth
HMS Dovey	Clyde
HMS Itchen	Solent
HMS Arun	Sussex

Army Recruitment

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost of the present recruitment campaign for the Army running in national cinemas.

Mr. Aitken: The cost is £255,000.

Army Redundancies

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimate of the costs of the present programme of redundancies in the Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The cost to the Army in 1992-93 of the first tranche of redundancies is in the order of £210 million. As I said in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) on 8 July 1992, *Official Report*, column *185*, details of the criteria of phase 2 of the redundancy programme will be announced shortly but it is likely that it will affect some 6,500 personnel. Final decisions on the size and make-up of this tranche, and of any further measures, have not yet been made.

Nuclear Storage Bases

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the convoy which arrived at Coulport nuclear storage base on 10 July.

Mr. Aitken: It is not our practice to comment on operational matters.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what obligations the EC directive 89/618/Euratom places upon the United Kingdom Government in relation to the transportation of convoys to nuclear storage bases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The United Kingdom Health and Safety Commission has issued a Consultative Document—CD37—setting out its proposals for the adoption of EC directive 89/618/Euratom within United Kingdom regulations. The Ministry of Defence will of course comply with the proposed United Kingdom regulations in the form in which they are finally implemented.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what obligations and procedures exist to provide advance notice to *(a)* the public and *(b)* relevant local authorities of convoys destined for nuclear storage bases;

(2) what discussions took place with the appropriate local authorities concerning the convoy which went through their districts on the way to the Coulport nuclear weapons storage base on 10 July.

Mr. Aitken: Any arrangements for liaison in connection with military convoys depend on the nature of the cargo being carried.

Gurkhas

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it remains his policy to reduce the brigade of Gurkhas to around 2,500 men after the withdrawal from Hong Kong in 1997.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Menwith Hill

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 July, *Official Report*, column *364*, what communications are leased exclusively for defence purposes; and what are the indirect links between Menwith Hill station and Hunterstones tower.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Various communications links are leased exclusively for defence purposes, but I am unable to comment further on their precise nature for reasons of national security.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) under what defence agreement information from the defence microbiology division at the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down, is passed to the United States Department of Defence;

(2) how many personnel from the United States Department of Defence are stationed either permanently or temporarily at the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down; and for what purpose;

(3) what quantity of VX nerve gas is currently stocked by his Department;

(4) in what years CS gas was produced at his Department's establishment at Nancekuke, Cornwall; and in what quantities it was manufactured each year;

(5) pursuant to his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, column *359*, what other uses have been made of shellfish toxins by his Department; and whether his Department has collaborated with the United States Department of Defence in the studies and tests involving shellfish toxins;

(6) how many times personnel from the United States Department of Defence have visited the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down, in each year since 1979; and what was the purpose of these visits;

(7) in which years his Department's scientists carried out studies and tests on quantities of VX nerve gas prepared by the United States of America; what was the purpose of these tests and studies; and how many British service personnel have been subjected to tests involving VX nerve gas;

(8) what use the chemical and biological defence establishment Porton Down, has made of the protein saxitoxin;

(9) how many tests have been carried out since 1967 involving the incapacitating agent BZ and British service personnel; when these tests were carried out; whether all the personnel were volunteers; and whether BZ is currently stocked by any of his Department's establishments;

(10) what information about its research into CR gas the United Kingdom has passed onto the United States of America; under which defence agreement this information was exchanged; and when the information was transferred.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These matters are for the chemical and biological defence establishment under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tests and studies his Department has conducted on the chemical agents picloram and cacodylic acid; when these tests and studies were carried out; whether they were carried out on humans; and whether the results of these tests and studies have been passed on to the United States Department of Defence.

Mr. Aitken: The substances picloram and cacodylic acid are herbicides. No work has been carried out on these materials by my Department.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Ministry of Defence scientists first conducted research into CR gas; and in which Ministry of Defence establishment these scientists were working.

Mr. Aitken: This is a matter for the chemical and biological defence establishment under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy on the use of CR gas *(a)* within the United Kingdom and *(b)* outside the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The MOD's policy for the use of CR gas is in accordance with the draft text of the chemical weapons convention currently being negotiated in Geneva.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Britain and the United States exchanged technical and scientific information on *(a)* binary nerve gas technology and *(b)* VX nerve gas; and under which defence agreements these exchanges took place.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 21 May 1992, *Official Report*, column *255-56*, concerning international agreements on chemical and biological defence.

Under the agreements relating to research information has been exchanged on a continuing basis on the potential hazard from chemical and biological agents including VX nerve gas and possible binary gases with the aim of ensuring that the protective measures for the United Kingdom armed forces are as effective as possible.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 June, *Official Report*, column *411*, at which establishment in Australia the environmental testing of the S10 respirator took place in the 1980s; and whether any other British equipment related to chemical and biological warfare has been tested in Australia or New Zealand since 1962.

Mr. Aitken: Environmental testing of the S10 respirator was carried out by the Australian materials research laboratory.

I understand that the Australian Government carried out tests of United Kingdom agent monitoring equipment in the mid-1980s in support of Australian defence requirements.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many research projects at the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down have been funded by the United States Department of Defence since 1979; and what is the total worth of these projects.

Mr. Aitken: This is a matter for the chemical and biological defence establishment under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much CR gas is stocked by his Department; and how much stock has been purchased from external sources or produced internally by his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It would not be in the national interest to disclose the size of our stockpile or its source.

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key performance targets have been set for 1992-93 for the chief executive of the chemical and biological defence establishment.

Mr. Aitken: The chief executive of the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down is responsible for research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. He has been set the following challenging key performance targets for 1992-93:

Improved Delivery of the Programme

1. In 1992-93 to achieve, within agreed timescales, 85 per cent. of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment programme milestones required by the service chiefs of staff and other customers.
2. In 1992-93 to achieve 80 per cent. of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment programme milestones required by service chiefs of staff and other customers to agreed cost and to seek progressive improvements in performance in future years.
3. To sustain the CB research programme and the capability of CBDE to respond effectively to operational emergencies by maintaining scientific and technical staff to at least 66 per cent. of the total planned manpower.

More Efficient Use of Resources

4. To increase the overall efficiency of CBDE by more than 2·5 per cent. over the financial year 1992-93 with emphasis on improving output efficiency.
5. To establish a database by 31 March 1993 to enable the percentage of indirect to direct costs to be determined more accurately with a view to improving value for money for MoD by reducing the percentage of indirect costs in subsequent years.
6. To complete the programme of efficiency reviews of the remainder of the support services by 31 March 1993 and initiate market testing, where appropriate, and to implement the recommendations which would lead to greater efficiency.

Development of Management Systems

To extend the improved resource allocation and cost attribution system by inclusion of major and minor works and maintenance costs by March 1993.

Quality and the Customer

8. To improve the means of assessing the quality of the scientific and technical outputs by March 1993 and to apply this to the outputs for MoD and other key customers by March 1994.

Members of Parliament (Consultation)

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his reply to the hon. Member for South Antrim on 14 July, what facilities are extended to the relevant hon. Member when consultation is decided upon.

Mr. Aitken: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Crown Estate Commissioners

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much property is leased by his Department that is owned or managed by the Crown Estate Commissioners; and how much was paid in rent, leases or fees to the Crown Estate Commissioners for such property for each of the last five years.

Mr. Aitken: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Bullying

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the reason Private Patrick Callaghan and Private Bryson Dart of the 1 Battalion Worcester and Sherwood Foresters have been kept in custody in Cyprus; for how long they have been kept in custody; when they can be expected to face an inquiry after their allegation of bullying; what promises were made to them and their families that there would be no retribution following their allegations; and why they are not allowed to carry on with their normal duties while awaiting the investigation.

Mr. Aitken: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he will take following Private Anthony Evans's case to ensure ethnic minorities in the British Army are not subjected to bullying or racism in the future.

Mr. Aitken: It has been made clear throughout the services that bullying and racism will not be tolerated. Measures have been introduced to eradicate this form of unacceptable behaviour.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what compensation Private Anthony Evans, formerly of the Royal Regiment of Wales, will receive for the loss of his Army career and the mental and physical injury he suffered during his service in the Army.

Mr. Aitken: The Army Board is awaiting comments from Anthony Evans's solicitors on the findings of the board of inquiry held to consider his allegations. Once those comments have been received the Army Board will consider the question of compensation.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent of bullying and racism in the British Army; and what steps have been taken to eradicate them.

Mr. Aitken: The Army takes a serious view of all forms of bullying and racism; all service personnel are aware that behaviour of this kind will not be tolerated. Any allegations or complaints of ill-treatment are investigated. Depending on the strength of the evidence, disciplinary action will be taken against the perpetrators.

A range of measures to combat bullying and racism have been introduced, including the banning of initiation ceremonies. These measures include the establishment of additional posts in the training organisation to allow officers and NCOs to devote more time to their supervisory role. Posts have also been established for the Women's Royal Voluntary Service to help combat bullying.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what disciplinary action will be taken against Army personnel involved in Private Anthony Evans's case; and when it will be made public.

Mr. Aitken: Disciplinary action was taken in 1991 by the commanding officer against those held to be responsible. The disciplinary action taken is a private matter between those individuals concerned and their commanding officer.

Defence Structure

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes are planned to the defence structure of the United Kingdom in order to support the European union as a cohesive force in international affairs in accordance with article J1(4) of the treaty on European union.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We plan no such changes. The Maastricht agreements make clear that the Western European Union will

"elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications"—(article J.4.2.),

and that the union's common foreign and security policy "shall respect the obligations of certain Member States under the North Atlantic Treaty and be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework"—(article J.4.4.).

Troops (Sunderland Polling Station)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why troops were posted at Dykelands road polling station in the Sunderland, North constituency on 9 April.

Mr. Aitken: The Dykelands road polling station is situated within a Territorial Army centre occupied by 251 Field Ambulance (V). For security reasons it was necessary to position TA soldiers at the entrance in order to search the bags of those entering and to escort them to the room which was being used as a polling booth. Both male and female soldiers carried out these duties and they were unarmed.

Antares

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Commander in Chief Fleet has completed his consideration of any further disciplinary action following the court martial arising from the sinking of the Antares; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. The Commander in Chief Fleet is considering the matter.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instruction non-commissioned officers and soldiers have in the provisions of the Race Relations Act 1976.

Mr. Aitken: During basic training, soldiers receive instruction on a wide range of interpersonal skills, which includes the avoidance of all forms of discrimination and stresses their unacceptability in the armed forces.

Nuclear Proliferation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the policy underlying the omission of mention of United Kingdom obligations under article VI of the nuclear proliferation treaty in the preparation of paragraphs 135-137, on nuclear proliferation, on page 22 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992", Cm 1981.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom's obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty are a matter of public record.

Nuclear Warheads (Expenditure)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under which top level budget holder, as set out in figure 13 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992", Cm 1981, is the expenditure included on *(a)* nuclear warhead testing and *(b)* nuclear warhead design and development.

Mr. Aitken: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to paragraphs 342-348 on defence and the environment, in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992", Cm 1981, if he will set out the present programmes managed by his Department for the minimisation and disposal of toxic and radioactive wastes and details of future plans developed by his Department to deal with these wastes, respectively.

Mr. Aitken: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Members (Identification)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what arrangements have been made to help police officers at the entrance to the Palace of Westminster and its outbuildings to recognise and identify recently elected hon. Members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: While the Administration Committee has general oversight of arrangements for access to that part of the Palace under the control of the House, day to day responsibility rests with the Serjeant at Arms. I shall ask him to write to the hon. Member.

Executive Agencies' Answers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what plans he has to change the arrangements for publishing answers to hon. Members' questions received from the next steps agencies.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: At its meeting on 8 July the Committee resolved that, from the first sitting day after the summer recess, letters sent to Members by agency chief executives in response to parliamentary questions should be printed among the written answers in the daily *Official Report*, beneath a standard form of reply given by the Minister with responsibility. The Cabinet Office has been advised of this decision and is understood to be considering its implications.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sport

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to make a further announcement about the business sponsorship incentive scheme for sport.

Mr. Mellor: The scheme is due to be launched in September this year. All those likely to have an interest will be sent detailed guidance on the scheme and the application procedure.

Sports and Arts

Ms. Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the pursuits his Department has classified as *(a)* sports and *(b)* arts within the remit of his Department.

Mr. Mellor: My Department makes no such classifications. We are concerned with the promotion of all sport and active recreation and with the encouragement of artistic activities generally which bring pleasure to many.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Mellor: Divisions and branches within my Department pursue objectives in support of my responsibilities, which cover the arts, the Government art collection, broadcasting, film, tourism, heritage and sport. The spread of responsibilities between divisions is as follows:

Arts Division

Arts Council. Crafts Council. Business sponsorship of the arts. Local authority arts funding issues and arts taxation. EC and Council of Europe cultural policy.

Museums and Galleries Division

National and local museums and galleries in England.

Libraries and Information Division

Libraries and information services. British Library, public libraries in England.

British Library St. Pancras Project

Management of British Library's St. Pancras Project.

Works of Art Unit

The mobile heritage; export licensing of antiques.

Broadcasting Policy Division

Broadcasting constitutional matters, review of BBC charter, Broadcasting Act 1990, radio, satellite and cable policy.

Media Division

International and financial aspects of broadcasting policy programme standards, television licensing, press freedom and regulation, films policy, including British Screen Finance, European Co-operation Fund, Audio Visual Eureka, film certification, United Kingdom Film Commission and MEDIA programme.

Sports and Recreation Division

Sport and recreation policy; sponsorship of Sports Council and Football Licensing Authority; safety in sports grounds; local authority and private funding of sport; children's play; international matters including Manchester Olympic bid.

Heritage Division

Financial aspects of heritage policy. Sponsorship of English Heritage, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England and other heritage bodies. Policy on the conservation and use of historic buildings and monuments. European and International Liaison on the built heritage.

Royal Estate Division

Contracting out work in the Royal Parks. Establishment of Royal Parks Agency. Regents Park Zoo. Sponsorship of the Royal Armouries, Historic Royal Palaces Agency, Royal Fine Arts Commission and Royal Household Works Programme. Ceremonials.

Royal Parks Division

Management of the Royal Parks.

Tourism Division

Development of tourism's contribution to economic and employment growth, ensures the Tourist Boards cost effectively fulfil their objectives, and represents the industry's concerns to Whitehall, outside organisations and the European Communities.

Finance Division

Financial Management; accounting systems; Estimates; Public Expenditure Survey forecasts; additional responsibility for National Lottery Bill.

Implementation and Review Division

Implementation of the new Department; project management; information technology; provision of internal services; review/co-ordination of Department-wide matters.

Personnel Division

Personnel management; equal opportunities; welfare; pay; superannuation; conditions of service.

Historic Royal Palaces Agency

An Executive Agency set up 1 October 1989. Responsible for managing the Historic Royal Palaces open to the public.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom's Presidency of the EC.

Mr. Mellor: I have made no such visits since 18 April. However, I can confirm that this Department will play its full part in taking forward Her Majesty's Government's commitment to deregulation.

Barcelona Olympics

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what ministerial and other representation Her Majesty's Government will have at the Barcelona Olympics.

Mr. Mellor: I shall be attending the Olympic games in Barcelona as will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister,

my right and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage. Her Majesty's ambassador in Spain will also be attending.

European Arts Festival

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many copies of the guide to the European arts festival have been printed; what are the actual costs of its preparation, printing and distribution, respectively; and what steps were taken by Her Majesty's Government to encourage or assist in promoting the events listed therein.

Mr. Mellor: More than 1 million copies of the festival programme have been printed and are being distributed throughout the country. Design and other preparatory costs were £14,000; printing, £98,000; and distribution, £41,000.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, ministerial colleagues and I were present at the launch of the festival on 1 July. We look forward to attending a number of events during the festival. We will take every opportunity to draw attention to this rich and varied programme that should appeal to everyone. I have written to all Members of both Houses enclosing a copy of the programme.

My Department continues to work closely with the festival director in promoting the festival overall. The promotion of individual events rests mainly with the local organisers, with the full support of the festival team.

Civil Servants (Shareholdings)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions since April on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the Next Steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science on 7 July, *Official Report*, column *101*. My Department has not issued any further guidance to staff; nor have any shareholdings been reported to our establishment officer.

Historic Royal Palaces

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what targets he has set for the Historic Royal Palaces agency.

Mr. Key: The following targets have been set for the Historic Royal Palaces agency for the financial year 1992-93:

	Target
Financial Targets:	
Commercial surplus	£ 3·8 million
Call on taxpayer	£10·0 million
Visitor Rating Targets:[1]	
Value for money	0·7 to 1
Enjoyment	1·3 to 1·7
Helpful and friendly staff	1·3 to 1·7
Efficiency Target:	
2 per cent. saving on running costs	
Conservation Target:	
Complete surveys and draw up programme of works for:	
Contents by March 1993	
Buildings by November 1993	
Citizen's Charter:	
To implement its provisions within the Agency	
Contracting Out:	
To complete the studies agreed by Ministers last December	

[1] Visitor ratings are assessed from market research interviews with 900 visitors, undertaken by independent consultants each summer. 2·0 is Extremely Good; 1·5 is Very Good; 1·0 is Quite Good; 0 is OK; −1·0 is Quite Poor; −2·0 is Very Poor.

Tourism Council

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the outcome of the Tourism Council meeting in Luxembourg on 4 June.

Mr. Key: I represented the United Kingdom. Ministers agreed on a decision for a Community action plan to assist tourism for a three-year period, commencing on 1 January next year. Ministers also noted two factual Commission documents which outline Community policies and measures affecting tourism and the Community resources available for tourism.

Crown Jewels

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the ownership of the Crown jewels.

Mr. Mellor: The Crown jewels are owned by the sovereign in right of the Crown.

Welsh Television

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has had concerning renegotiation of the television franchise for Wales and the west; what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority on the future status of undertakings made in the course of successful franchise applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: None. These are matters for the Independent Television Commission.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has had concerning the maintenance of a Welsh identity in the commercial television franchise for Wales after 1 January 1993 *(a)* in the Welsh language and *(b)* in the English language.

Mr. Mellor: We have received no such representations in either Welsh or English.

Football (Safety)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations he has had with the Football Licensing Authority concerning amendments to the model safety certificates for *(a)* premier and first division, *(b)* second and third division English League clubs and *(c)* Scottish Football League clubs.

Mr. Mellor: None.

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what grounds Her Majesty's Government agreed to the proposed article 128 of the treaty of Rome under the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Mellor: The Community has increasingly become involved in cultural activity. Article 128 of the Maastricht treaty establishes this for the first time on a clear legal basis. The text underlines the importance of respect for national and regional cultural diversity and the fact that Community action will support and supplement action by the member states. At United Kingdom insistence, action can be taken only on the basis of unanimity.

Imperial War Museum

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress he is making in completing the redevelopment plans at the imperial war museum, Lambeth road; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* I commend the success of the first development phase at the museum, which was completed in 1989. I have received the imperial war museum's 1992 corporate plan which indicates the programme and objectives for the next stage of development at the Lambeth road building, and this will be assessed against all other spending priorities on museums and galleries. It is hoped that an announcement on the Government's spending plans will be made in November this year.

DTI Inspections

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors;

(2) if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. Mellor: The information is not held centrally in the form requested. My Department takes all the relevant factors into account when considering such appointments.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the table, which lists the executive non-departmental public bodies directly funded by the Department of National Heritage and gives details of their audit certification arrangements. The method of selecting auditors, including competitive tendering, varies between institutions. Reviews of appointments may be held annually or at other periods up to five years.

Executive non-departmental bodies audited by the National Audit Office:

Arts Council of Great Britain
Board of Trustees for the Royal Armouries
British Library
British Museum
British Tourist Authority
Broadcasting Standards Council
English Tourist Board
Imperial War Museum
Museums and Galleries Commission
National Gallery
National Heritage Memorial Fund
National Maritime Museum
National Museum of Science and Industry
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside
National Portrait Gallery
Natural History Museum
Registrar of Public Lending Right
Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts
Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England)
Sports Council
Tate Gallery
Victoria and Albert Museum
Wallace Collection

Executive non-departmental bodies audited by private firms

Body	*Auditor*
British Film Institute	Stoy Hayward
Broadcasting Complaints Commission	BDO Binder Hamlyn
Crafts Council	Stoy Hayward
Football Licensing Authority	To be appointed imminently
Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry	BDO Binder Hamlyn
Historical Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (English Heritage)	Price Waterhouse
Museum of London	KPMG Peat Marwick McClintock
National Film and Television School	Stoy Hayward
Redundant Churches Fund	DM Vaughan & Co.
Sir John Soane's Museum	Pannel Kerr and Foster
South Bank Theatre Board	Pannel Kerr and Foster

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disposable Income

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average disposable income of households, and of adults and children, within households, at 1989 prices, for each year from 1979 to 1989, inclusive, for the poorest and for the richest 20 per cent. of households, before and after equivalisation, based on the data collected for the households-below-average-income analysis.

Mr. Burt: The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The information that is available is in the table. HBAI presents figures in a standard format: only for years 1979, 1981, 1987 and 1988-89—that is, 1988 combined with 1989—before and after housing costs;

equivalised for household size and composition; using the median as the average measure for subdivisions of the income distribution; and at April 1992 prices. This is in line with the recommendations made in the stocktaking report produced last year after consultation with independent external analysts.

It is not our practice to produce unequivalised information.

Average equivalised income at April 1992 prices

Before housing costs:

	1979 £	*1981* £	*1987* £	*1988-89* £
Bottom 20 per cent.	96	94	100	100
Top 20 per cent.	289	298	376	402

After housing costs:

	1979 £	*1981* £	*1987* £	*1988-89* £
Bottom 20 per cent.	81	78	80	81
Top 20 per cent.	253	262	329	355

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the mean net disposable income, at 1989 prices, of the poorest 10 per cent. and 20 per cent. of United Kingdom households combined for each year 1979 to 1989, inclusive, before and after equivalisation and before and after taking housing costs into account, when ranked respectively *(a)* without adding the full value of free and subsidised school meals *(b)* adding that value and *(c)* adding that value and also the value in kind of services and other goods specifying the services involved.

Mr. Burt: The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The information that is available is in the table. HBAI presents figures in a standard format: only for years 1979, 1981, 1987 and 1988-89—that is, 1988 combined with 1989—before and after housing costs; equivalised for household size and composition; using the median as the average measure for subdivisions of the income distribution; and at April 1992 prices. This is in line with the recommendations made in the stocktaking report produced last year after consultation with independent external analysts.

It is not our practice to produce unequivalised information, nor to present mean averages for subdivisions of the income distribution.

Average equivalised income at April 1992 prices

(a) income excluding free school meals

Before housing costs:

	1979 £	*1981* £	*1987* £	*1988-89* £
Bottom 20 per cent.	95	93	99	100
Bottom 10 per cent.	83	82	87	85

After housing costs:

	1979 £	*1981* £	*1987* £	*1988-89* £
Bottom 20 per cent.	80	77	78	80
Bottom 10 per cent.	68	65	67	65

(b) income including free school meals

Before housing costs:

	1979 £	*1981* £	*1987* £	*1988-89* £
Bottom 20 per cent.	96	94	100	100
Bottom 10 per cent.	84	83	88	86

After housing costs:

	1979 £	*1981* £	*1987* £	*1988-89* £
Bottom 20 per cent.	81	78	80	81
Bottom 10 per cent.	70	67	67	66

(c) other incomes in kind included in the HBAI income measure are:
free meals and food provided by employers
free coal and coke
luncheon vouchers
free school milk
free welfare milk

These are included in the figures provided at (a) and (b) above.

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was for each type of household in the family expenditure survey, the average disposable income at 1989 prices, including the value of free and subsidised school meals, of the poorest 10 per cent. and poorest 20 per cent. of households, after taking account of housing costs, for each year 1979 to 1989, inclusive, for each of the principal regions of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Burt: The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The information that is available is in the table. HBAI: presents figures in a standard format: only for years 1979, 1981, 1987 and 1988-89—that is, 1988 combined with 1989—before and after housing costs; equivalised for household size and composition; using the median as the average measure for subdivisions of the income distribution; and at April 1992 prices. This is in line with the recommendations made in the stocktaking report produced last year after consultation with independent external analysts.

Due to the small sample sizes figures for the bottom 10 per cent., split by family type cannot be reliably estimated —HBAI presents detailed breakdowns only for the bottom 20 per cent. For similar reasons, regional breakdowns of HBAI are not produced.

Average equivalised income at April 1992 prices for the bottom 20 per cent. by household family type

Before housing costs:	*1979* £	*1981* £	*1987* £	*1988-89* £
Pensioner couple	87	91	99	98
Single pensioner	87	92	95	92
Couple with children	101	90	98	100
Couple without children	125	127	118	129
Single with children	85	89	93	93
Single without children	109	107	107	107

After housing costs:	*1979* £	*1981* £	*1987* £	*1988-89* £
Pensioner Couple	73	77	83	83
Single pensioner	78	82	83	81
Couple with children	84	73	76	78
Couple without children	107	105	94	105
Single with children	69	72	75	70

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the numbers of children of different

ages in the poorest 20 per cent. and richest 80 per cent. of households, ranked according to the net disposable income of the households in which they live, before and after equivalisation, for 1979 and for 1989, on the basis of households below average income data drawn from the family expenditure survey.

Mr. Burt: Information for the years 1979 and 1988-89 —that is, 1988 combined with 1989—before and after housing costs, and equivalised for household size and composition is in the table. It is not our practice to produce unequivalised information.

Numbers of children of different ages in the bottom 20 per cent. of the income distribution

(In millions)

Ages	Before housing costs		After housing costs	
	1979	1988-89	1979	1988-89
0-4	0·8	1·0	0·8	1·1
5-9	1·0	0·9	1·0	0·9
10-14	0·9	0·8	0·8	0·7
15-18	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·3
Total	2·9	3·0	2·9	3·0

Numbers of children of different ages in the top 80 per cent. of the income distribution

(In millions)

Ages	Before housing costs		After housing costs	
	1979	1988-89	1979	1988-89
0-4	3·0	3·0	3·0	2·9
5-9	3·2	2·6	3·3	2·6
10-14	3·2	2·7	3·3	2·7
15-18	1·4	1·3	1·4	1·3
Total	10·9	9·5	10·9	9·5

Correspondence

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the disability living allowance unit in Blackpool intends to reply to the letters of 15 March, 10 May and 21 June from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston regarding his constituent Mrs Mary Muir.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pension Age

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how his Department publicised the consultation period for the discussion paper "Options for Equality in State Pension Age";

(2) if he will list the organisation and individuals to whom his Department circulated the discussion paper "Options for Equality in State Pension Ages" and those who responded to the paper.

Miss Widdecombe: A period of public discussion was announced in the statement of my right hon. Friend on 26 June 1991 and press releases were issued in the usual way. When the discussion paper was published on 18 December 1991, publicity was by means of a written answer on 17 December to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) column *145*. Two press releases were also issued, the first on 18 December and the second on 17 June 1992. The latter was a reminder of the deadline for responses, 30 June. Both press releases inspired a large number of reports in the press, both national and local, and on radio and television.

The paper was circulated to pension industry organisations, the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Occupational Pensions Board and the Pension Ombudsman. Copies were also sent to the Social Security Select Committee and Members of Parliament. The publicity surrounding the publication of the paper resulted in inquiries from a number of interested organisations, to which copies were sent.

To date, more than 3,700 responses have been received from both organisations and individuals.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will delay any decision on the equalisation of the pension age to allow time for *(a)* a further period of consultation with organisations affecting women in the United Kingdom on the financial consequences for women which would result from raising the pension age to 63 or 65 years and *(b)* a wider consideration of other aspects of the pension systems which would discriminate against women or men.

Miss Widdecombe: The discussion period on state pension age ended on 30 June, and over 3,700 responses have been received. We now intend to examine those responses in detail and we will also be taking the opportunity of meeting the representatives of various organisations with an interest, including those concerned with the position of women. We will be announcing the Government's proposals on this complex and important issue in due course after consideration of the views expressed.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

Measures operated by the Department specifically to assist small business include increasing, from April 1992, the qualifying threshold for small employer's relief—SER —for statutory sick pay from £15,000 to £16,000.

Other measures aimed at business in general, which includes small business, include:

(i) Establishing a group of employers and employers' representatives specifically to consider the impact on employers of a combined Autumn and Budget statement in December. Small businesses are recognised as an important group to be consulted and are represented on the group.

(ii) Increasing the level below which deductions under pay-as-you-earn—PAYE—and national insurance contributions—NIC—can be paid to Inland Revenue quarterly rather than monthly to £450 for deductions made in periods

beginning after 5 April 1992. Twenty-five thousand businesses should benefit from this increase, bringing the total number of businesses who could be helped by this measure to 725,000 —more than half of all employers.

The Department has a system to monitor proposals which have an impact on business, to ensure that the needs of small businesses are taken into account, although there are no performance indicators specifically for monitoring achievements in this area. However, we attach particular importance to action taken to help small firms and will continue to explore further ways of doing so.

Pension Premiums

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review any provision for the extended refund of pension premiums.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department, within its responsibilities for the regulation of occupational pension schemes, has no provision for the extended refund of pension premiums and therefore we have no plans to review.

Disability Allowances

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether a person in receipt of either *(a)* severe disablement allowance, *(b)* invalidity benefit, *(c)* income support with the disability premium, *(d)* community charge benefit with the disability premium or *(e)* housing benefit with the disability premium, who subsequently receives disability working allowance and who is then off work sick for over 10 weeks at the time of renewal claim for disability working allowance, will lose the right to renew their claim.

Mr. Scott: People who qualify initially for disability working allowance—DWA—by virtue of one of these benefits can claim again using the same qualifying benefit during the six weeks before and the eight weeks after their award expires—14 weeks in all. They also have to satisfy the remunerative work test in order to qualify for DWA and cannot do so in any weeks when off work sick. To satisfy this test, they must work 16 hours or more either in the week they claim or in one of the two weeks before or they must be expected by the employer to work 16 hours or more in the week after the week in which they claim. The effect of this is that depending on when illness begins, they would have to be absent from work for the whole of a period of 17 weeks spanning the date their award falls to be renewed to lose the right of renewal using one of these benefits.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to amend the disability living allowance to ensure that the criteria for award of the higher mobility component do not exclude people with dementia and other progressive neurological conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: New help is available to people suffering from dementia through the new, lower rates of both components of disability living allowance. We have no plans to amend the criteria for awarding the higher rate of the mobility component of disability living allowance.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in Birmingham, Small Heath qualify for payments under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what dates cold weather payments were made in Birmingham, Small Heath in response to a forecast of a qualifying period; and if he will indicate the period taken for payments to be made once the system had been triggered.

Mr. Scott: Such information as is available is in the Library.

War Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 19 June, *Official Report*, column *704*, on payment of war pensions in cases of post-traumatic stress, what is the reason for the different treatment of payment of arrears of war pension in relation to schizophrenia as compared with other conditions.

Miss Widdecombe: Until relatively recently, most cases of schizophrenia were regarded as being causally unrelated to service. When medical opinion changed it became possible to make awards of war pension. The discretionary powers of the war pension scheme were used to award arrears of pension, in appropriate cases, from February 1980, the date chosen to reflect the change in medical opinion. This date is under review following a recent High Court judgment.

Authoritative medical opinion has always accepted that the clinical entity now known as post-traumatic stress disorder could arise as the result of service. An award of war pension would therefore normally have been made from the date of claim.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 19 June, *Offical Report*, column *703*, on statistics relating to war pensions, what estimate was made of the cost of answering the question tabled.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost was estimated as being as least £1 million.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom's presidency of the EC.

Mr. Scott: No such meetings have taken place. We have no plans to initiate special action in this area during the presidency. We will, however, continue to resist any EC initiatives affecting the Department which would impose undue burdens on business.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Scott: All parts of the Department, including its executive agencies and the divisions and branches of its central headquarters, share the purpose and aims set out in the department report "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1992-93 to 1994-95", Cm 1914.

The Department's purpose is to serve Ministers in the development and implementation of social security policy, pay social security benefits, arrange for the collection of national insurance contributions and carry out other services in accordance with the law.

The underlying aims are to:

provide a good service to customers, one which is professional, efficient, responsive and fair;

support ministers in the development and implementation of policy, and in the preparations and passage of legislation;

manage the Department and its agencies efficiently, providing good value for money and maintaining the highest standards of propriety in the conduct of public affairs;

provide relevant information about social security to individuals, groups and the community at large in a clear and comprehensible form;

ensure correct payments are made—that benefit recipients are paid their correct entitlement and the scope for fraud and abuse is minimised;

ensure compliance with the law relating to national insurance contributions by employers, employed earners and the self-employed;

meet the needs of all staff as regards training and career and personal development, recognising and properly rewarding them for their contribution, and encouraging them to play a full part in the Department's work.

In addition, the objectives of the individual executive agencies are laid out in their business plans for 1992-93, copies of which are in the Library.

Civil Servants (Shares)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last fives years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff in the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: All staff in DSS and its next steps agencies are made aware of the guidance given in the civil service pay and conditions of service code relating to civil servants' shareholdings. The provisions apply to all staff equally. Staff are required to report shareholdings which may present a potential conflict of interest but no records are kept centrally of such reports.

Children

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to equalise benefits for men and women with dependent children on the death of their spouse.

Miss Widdecombe: This is one of the issues which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be addressing in his consideration of the equalisation of state pension age.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of dependent children aged under 16 years who are living in families receiving regular weekly payment of income support in April 1991 and April 1992; and how many of these dependent children were living in *(a)* one-parent families and *(b)* unemployed families.

Mr. Burt: The latest available figures are for May 1991. There were 2·37 million dependent children under 16 in families receiving income support, 1·49 million were in lone parent families and 0·64 million were in the families of claimants who were receiving income support on the grounds that they were unemployed.

Source: income support statistics, annual inquiry 1991.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will make it his policy to ensure that the value of benefits for children of war widows, other widows and invalidity pensioners, is increased in real terms in the 1993 benefit uprating.

Miss Widdecombe: The policy of successive Governments has been to take account of child benefit when setting the rates of benefits for children. We have no plans to alter this long-standing principle.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish tables similar to those in his answer of 11 May, *Official Report*, columns *43-44*, showing the combined value of child benefit and child dependency increases, including figures for April 1992 and showing equivalent values at April 1992 instead of 1991 prices.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables.

National insurance widows and invalidity pensioners

A	*B*	*C*	*D*		*E*			
Uprating date	*Rate of child benefit plus child dependency increase*	*Equivalent value of column B amounts at April 1992 prices*	*Gross male weekly average earnings, with amounts in column B as percentage*		*Equivalent weekly earnings net of income tax and national insurance contributions, with amounts in column B as percentage*			
					Single person		*Married couple*	
	(£)	*(£)*	*(£)*	*(per cent.)*	*(£)*	*(per cent.)*	*(£)*	*(per cent.)*
November 1979	11·10	25·57	114·10	9·7	79·90	13·9	83·60	13·3
November 1980	12·25	24·47	135·10	9·1	93·40	13·1	97·80	12·5
November 1981	12·95	23·11	149·50	8·7	101·00	12·8	105·40	12·3
November 1982	13·80	23·17	160·60	8·6	107·40	12·8	112·59	12·3
November 1983	14·10	22·58	172·40	8·2	115·50	12·2	121·30	11·6
November 1984	14·50	22·13	187·40	7·7	125·90	11·5	132·50	10·9
November 1985	15·05	21·78	199·50	7·5	134·40	11·2	141·60	10·6

A Uprating date	B Rate of child benefit plus child dependency increase	C Equivalent value of column B amounts at April 1992 prices	D Gross male weekly average earnings, with amounts in column B as percentage		E Equivalent weekly earnings net of income tax and national insurance contributions, with amounts in column B as percentage			
					Single person		Married couple	
	(£)	(£)	(£)	(per cent.)	(£)	(per cent.)	(£)	(per cent.)
July 1986	15·15	21·56	210·90	7·2	143·80	10·5	151·20	10·0
April 1987	15·30	20·86	224·00	6·8	155·90	9·8	163·00	9·4
April 1988	15·65	20·53	245·80	6·4	174·80	9·0	182·00	8·6
April 1989	16·20	19·67	269·50	6·0	191·30	8·5	198·90	8·1
April 1990	16·90	18·75	295·60	5·7	212·80	7·9	221·10	7·6
April 1991	[1]18·95	19·76	318·90	5·9	230·00	8·2	238·30	8·0
April 1991	[2]17·95	18·72	318·90	5·6	230·00	7·8	238·30	7·5
October 1991	[1]19·95	20·50	330·00	6·0	237·20	8·4	245·50	8·1
October 1991	[2]18·20	18·70	330·00	5·5	237·20	7·7	245·50	7·4
April 1992	[1]20·50	20·50	337·50	6·1	235·30	8·7	301·30	6·8
April 1992	[2]18·65	18·65	337·50	5·5	235·30	7·9	301·30	6·2

[1] Rate for the eldest or only child.
[2] Rate for each other child.

War widows

A Uprating date	B Rate of child benefit plus war widow's child's allowance	C Equivalent value of column B amounts at April 1992 prices	D Gross male weekly average earnings, with amounts in column B as percentage		E Equivalent weekly earnings net of income tax and national insurance contributions, with amounts in column B as percentage			
					Single person		Married couple	
	(£)	(£)	(£)	(per cent.)	(£)	(per cent.)	(£)	(per cent.)
November 1979	14·00	32·25	114·10	12·3	79·90	17·5	83·60	16·7
November 1980	15·35	30·66	135·10	11·4	93·40	16·4	97·80	15·7
November 1981	16·10	28·73	149·50	10·8	101·00	15·9	105·40	15·3
November 1982	17·10	28·71	160·60	10·6	107·40	15·9	112·50	15·2
November 1983	17·45	27·95	172·40	10·1	115·50	15·1	121·30	14·4
November 1984	17·90	27·32	187·40	9·6	125·90	14·2	132·50	13·5
November 1985	18·55	26·84	199·50	9·3	134·40	13·8	141·60	13·1
July 1986	18·65	26·55	210·90	8·8	143·80	13·0	151·20	12·3
April 1987	18·85	25·70	224·00	8·4	155·90	12·1	163·00	11·6
April 1988	19·25	25·25	245·80	7·8	174·80	11·0	182·00	10·6
April 1989	19·85	24·10	269·50	7·4	191·30	10·4	198·90	10·0
April 1990	20·65	22·91	295·60	7·0	212·80	9·7	221·10	9·3
April 1991	[1]21·90	22·84	318·90	6·9	230·00	9·5	238·30	9·2
October 1991	[2]22·90	23·53	330·00	6·9	237·20	9·7	245·50	9·3
October 1991	[3]22·15	22·76	333·00	6·7	237·20	9·3	245·50	9·0
April 1992	[2]23·40	23·40	337·50	6·9	235·30	9·9	301·30	7·8
April 1992	[3]22·65	22·65	337·50	6·7	235·30	9·6	301·30	7·5

[1] Where the new higher rate of child benefit for the eldest qualifying child applied, the war widow's child's allowance was adjusted so that the total level of support remained the same for all children.
[2] Rate for the eldest or only child.
[3] Rate for each other child.

Young People (Hardship Payments)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many severe hardship claims were submitted by 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland, Wales and each region of England in the last full year for which figures are available; and what percentage were successful.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	Scotland	North East	North West	Midlands	Wales and South West	London North	London South	Success Rate Per cent
1991								
July	1,263	1,008	673	687	730	576	624	80
August	1,320	979	625	684	609	528	553	80
September	1,189	932	671	695	685	579	657	80
October	1,349	1,044	710	697	687	617	677	80
November	1,153	936	640	700	710	542	608	82
December	927	709	497	579	512	420	449	84
1992								
January	1,656	1,434	1,100	1,158	1,007	823	958	85
February	1,593	1,283	956	1,030	927	797	882	83
March	1,676	1,231	1,125	1,094	967	875	964	83
April	1,988	1,292	1,082	1,093	1,000	877	888	82

	Scotland	North East	North West	Midlands	Wales and South West	London North	London South	Success Rate Per cent
May	1,905	1,222	1,132	1,088	954	824	901	82
June	2,157	1,404	1,265	1,126	1,077	991	974	81

Source: Severe hardship claims unit statistics.

Occupational Pensions

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when provisions in the Social Security Act 1990 —section 11 and schedule 2—on inflation-proofing of occupational pensions will come into force; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The implementation of limited price indexation for occupational pensions was postponed because of the financial uncertainties for schemes caused by the Barber judgment. This has still to be clarified.

Social Fund

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of grants made and the number of loans provided, together with the number refused since the social fund was introduced.

Mr. Scott: The information was published on 8 July in the Secretary of State's annual report on the social fund —Cm 1992—which is available in the Library.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what increase in social fund allocations for 1992-1993 would be needed to enable monthly average expenditure to reach the levels of expenditure in March 1992.

Mr. Scott: Annual social fund allocations enable expenditure to be managed flexibly and effectively throughout the year. An increase of £37·6 million would be required if the initial annual allocation for 1992-93 had been based solely on expenditure levels for the single month of March 1992. For a variety of reasons, expenditure in March has traditionally been heavy. Over 10 per cent. of last year's annual expenditure was made in March 1992.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *224*, to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), when he received the university of York report on the social fund; when examination of the report by Ministers started and was completed; and for what reasons it was decided that such examination was necessary before publication.

Mr. Scott: Research reports commissioned by the Department are routinely submitted for ministerial clearance prior to publication, as required by the Department's standard research contract. We received the final draft of the report in April.

Income Support

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the scale rate for supplementary benefit and income support for a couple with two children aged under 11 years for each year from 1979 to 1992 at *(a)* constant prices and *(b)* as a proportion of the median disposable income of a couple with two children.

Mr. Burt: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what assumption he bases the viability of income support for a husband and wife with two children at primary school.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to paragraphs 2.1 to 2.5 of the memorandum on benefit levels and a minimum income, dated 18 October 1989, and submitted to the House of Commons Social Services Committee. A copy of the complete memorandum is in the Library. Income support has been uprated each year by the retail prices index less housing costs.

Resettlement Units

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give further details on the plans to transfer Camden and Newbury resettlement units.

Miss Widdecombe: The Resettlement Agency is taking forward the plans announced on 5 February 1992 at column *210* to transfer two resettlement units.

A number of well-established housing associations and voluntary bodies have expressed an interest and will be submitting detailed proposals to the Resettlement Agency.

These will be evaluated and a final decision will be made on 29 September 1992 and the successful organisations will be informed shortly thereafter. Negotiations with these organisations for the handover of operations on 31 March 1993 will commence immediately.

Research

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the research currently in progress which is being undertaken by, or has been commissioned by, his Department; if he will indicate in each case when he expects to receive the report and whether it is his intention to publish it; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: A list of all research currently in progress, with the expected timing of the first draft report, is in the table. Reports about pieces of research are normally published, either in the Department's own research series or by the contractor.

Project	Anticipated timing of first draft report
Study of invalidity benefit (IVB)	Early 1994
Study of statutory sick pay (SSP)	Summer 1993
Comparative study of financial provision for carers	End of 1992
Survey of the impact of family credit (FC)	Received

Project	Anticipated timing of first draft report
Family credit and the self employed	Spring 1993
The use of Department of Social Security (DSS) administrative records to produce panel data	End of 1992
Comparative study of child support in the European Community	Spring 1993
Further econometric analysis of data from the survey of incomes in and out of work	Summer 1992
Impact of family credit—lone parent extension project	Summer 1993
"Relate" information database	End of 1992
Study of persons abroad legislation	Early 1993
Econometric analysis of the OPCS retirement survey	Spring 1993
Pensioners' assets	Received
Personal pensions survey	Received
The effects of benefits on housing decisions	Early 1993
Study of direct payments	Early 1994
Staff attitudes survey (DSS and agencies)	Summer 1992
Staff exit survey (DSS and agencies)	Early 1993
Modelling the potential yield of national insurance contributions	Spring 1993
Research to test the language and design of forms and integrated leaflets	Autumn 1992
Hard to place residents of resettlement units (phase II)	Autumn 1992
Customer opinion of resettlement units	Received
Survey of admissions to resettlement units	Received
Access to service and information needs of people with disabilities	Autumn 1992
Access to service and information needs of minority ethnic groups	Summer 1992
Information needs of informal advisers	Received
Benefits Agency 1992 national customer survey	Early 1993
Preliminary research into the information and advice needs of local offices and advice agencies	Received
Information needs of lone parents (consultancy work)	Interim report received
Investigation of alternative campaign strategies (for Child Support Agency launch publicity)	Summer 1992

National Insurance

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the amount of national insurance contributions outstanding from self-employed individuals;

(2) what is the amount of national insurance contributions outstanding from companies with more than five employees;

(3) if he will list the staffing levels for the departments concerned with collecting outstanding national insurance contributions for each of the past five years.

Miss Widdecombe: The amount of unpaid national insurance contributions due for self-employed individuals is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the effect on employees' pension rights of non-payment of national insurance contributions by their employers.

Miss Widdecombe: Regulations provide that where a primary class 1 contribution payable by a secondary contributor on an employee's behalf is not paid, the contribution can nevertheless be treated as paid on the due date so as not to affect the employee's pension rights, providing certain conditions are met. It must be shown to the Secretary of State's satisfaction that the failure to pay the contribution has not been with the consent or connivance of the employee, nor attributable to any negligence on his part.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the expected saving at 1992 prices, in total and per 100,000 claimants, from the extension of the unemployment disqualification period to 13 weeks in 1986 and 26 weeks in 1988, respectively, and the cumulative saving from the two extensions; and what are his latest estimates of the actual savings.

Mr. Burt: I will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available as soon as possible.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will update the estimate of the cost of reducing the unemployment disqualification period to six weeks, given in his reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 21 January, *Official Report*, column *180;* whether that estimate took into account the resulting savings in income support and housing benefit; what would be the net cost, taking these savings into account; on what assumption about the proportion of disqualified unemployment benefit claimants receiving income support his estimates are based; and what would be the net cost if that proportion fell to its May 1986 and November 1987 levels, respectively.

Mr. Burt: The estimate given in my reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North on 21 January remains at £35 million per annum at 1992 prices. This takes account of the resulting savings in income support and housing benefit.

The estimate is based on the assumption that 75 per cent. of those disqualified due to their misconduct or voluntarily leaving their employment without just cause receive income support.

The net costs, assuming May 1986 and November 1987 levels of disqualification, would be £40 million and £35 million respectively.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from the Independent Tribunal Service regarding the payment of fees to members of social security appeal tribunals; and how he has responded to those representations.

Mr. Scott: The President of the Independent Tribunal Service, His Honour Judge Holden, has made representations to the department about payment of fees to members of social security appeal tribunals. Our policy on fees for tribunal members is to pay a fee where membership requires specialist skills or knowledge. This is not the case for SSAT members.

Maxwell Pensions

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to obtain donations to the trust headed by Sir John Cuckney to compensate Maxwell pensioners; and what success he has had.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Sir John Cuckney that he and his fellow trustees will sign the trust deed on 17 July and that they have formally launched their appeal for contributions to the Maxwell pensioners trust. Pending the formal establishment of the trust, £170,000 has been paid into the holding account opened by the Department. This will be transferred to the trust's account when it is open. Donations to the trust are, of course, completely separate to any funds or assets recovered.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total sum of money so far recovered by the trust fund set up within his Department, headed by Sir John Cuckney, to recover assets lost by the Maxwell pension funds; if he will give a breakdown of the various sums recovered by source and amount of income.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the replies to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 6 July at columns *88-89* and to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr Leighton) today.

Claimants (Relocation)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether he will review the rights of benefits claimants to relocate to areas of high unemployment without forgoing entitlements;

(2) if he will monitor the migration of benefits claimants to seaside resorts over the summer.

Mr. Burt: The Employment Service checks that unemployed people, including itinerants, are entitled to benefits in respect of unemployment, in accordance with social security legislation; in particular that they are available for work and actively seek it. Every effort is made to ensure that benefit is paid only where the conditions of entitlement are satisfied. The Government have no plans to restrict the movement of unemployed people: mobility of labour is essential for the efficient operation of the labour market and job creation.

Students

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will seek to amend legislation so as to enable students to claim benefits during the summer vacation if prevented by ill health from seeking work.

Mr. Burt: We have no such plans; the educational maintenance system is designed to provide for the needs of students. Vulnerable students, including those who are disabled or who are long-term sick, retain eligibility for housing benefit and income support throughout their course and may qualify for those benefits during the summer vacation if they are unable to work.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will review the obligation on local authorities to meet their share of the costs of housing benefits for unemployed persons moving in from other areas, where benefits are already being paid by relevant local authorities.

Mr. Burt: We have no plans to review the current arrangements which allow housing benefit to meet the commercial rent liability on a property occupied as the main home, providing the level of rent is reasonable. Local authorities are reimbursed for their benefit expenditure through subsidy arrangments.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Raoul Wallenberg

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to request the authorities of the former Soviet Union to publish their records relating to Raoul Wallenberg.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We understand that a Swedish-Russian commission has been set up to investigate the disappearance of Raoul Wallenberg: and that Russia has granted Sweden access to Soviet MFA and KGB files. We assume that the Swedish Government will publish any further details about Wallenberg's fate which are uncovered.

European Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that no notification shall be given that the United Kingdom assents to the amendment of any part of any protocol annexed to the treaty on European union unless a draft of the notification has first been approved by an Act of Parliament.

Mr. Garel-Jones: All the protocols associated with the treaty on European union will be annexed to the treaty of Rome and would form an integral part of that treaty. The protocols—and any later amendments—therefore require ratification by member states. In the United Kingdom

ratification does not require approval by an Act of Parliament but would only occur once any necessary domestic legislation was in place.

Maastricht

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the position of the United Kingdom as a signatory of the North Atlantic treaty will be affected by the implementation of a common foreign security and defence policy, pursuant to article B, title I of the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The position of the United Kingdom as a signatory of the North Atlantic treaty will not be affected by a common foreign and security policy.

The Maastricht treaty—article J. 4.4—makes it clear that the foreign and security policy

"shall respect the obligations of certain member States under the North Atlantic Treaty and be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework".

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will lay before Parliament a consolidated text of the treaties establishing the European Economic Community, the ECSC and Euratom, as amended by the treaty of Maastricht.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There will be no official Community publication of this nature until after the treaty on European union has been ratified by all 12 member states and has entered into force.

However, in view of the interest expressed in this House and elsewhere, the Government will be producing their own consolidated text of the treaty establishing the European Economic Community as amended by the treaty on European union. This text will be laid before the House in the normal way in good time for the consideration in Committee of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

The text will inevitably be informal at this stage and may differ in some minor respects from that produced by the European Community official publications office in due course.

Fissile Materials

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards a multilateral, verifiable fissile materials cut-off.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Her Majesty's Government welcome the US decision on 13 July to end production of weapons grade fissile materials. It is in response to a bilateral initiative from the Russians and does not depend on United Kingdom agreement. United Kingdom production will continue to be kept at the minimum level necessary to satisfy our deterrent and naval reactor requirements.

EC Decision-making

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to undertake a study into the decision-making structure of the European Community with reference to economic convergence and allocation of resources.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There are no plans to undertake any such study. Under the convergence decision of 1990, individual member states are putting forward convergence programmes for discussion within the Council of Ministers as part of the regular process of multilateral surveillance. The Maastricht treaty would carry forward that process of multilateral surveillance, but economic policy would remain, as now, a responsibility of member states.

European Community

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances Her Majesty's Government are prepared to apply to the European Court of Justice for a ruling on the validity of a Commission proposal before it has been referred for deliberation by the Council of Ministers or other Community institutions.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There is no legal basis to challenge a Commission proposal for Community legislation before the court until that proposal has been adopted as a formal act.

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent the proposed article 8c of the treaty of Rome will require a harmonisation of diplomatic practices among member states of the Community.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Consular protection services offered by the member states of the European Community to their respective nationals do not differ greatly. Some administrative changes will be necessary to give formal effect to article 8c of the treaty of Maastricht, and procedures need to be established. The details are being worked on at the regular meetings of the EC consular affairs working group.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the effect on the personnel, work load, organisation and financing of Her Majesty's foreign service in respect of obligations imposed by the proposed article 8c of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: An informal arrangement made in 1985 provides for the diplomatic missions of EC member states to give consular protection to the nationals of unrepresented EC states in non-Community countries. Article 8c of the Maastricht treaty is a move towards formalisation of this arrangement. We do not expect it to cause significant extra work for our posts.

Civil Servants

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The conduct of staff in the diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth office is governed by diplomatic service and home service regulations. The latter also apply to staff at Wilton park, the diplomatic wing's next steps agency. They require staff to disclose in writing to the Department's administration full details of any personal business interests which might conflict with the Department's interests or general principles of conduct. The diplomatic wing does not maintain a central record of staff who have reported shareholdings. The conduct of staff in the aid wing is governed by the code and guide. In addition staff rules are issued individually to all members of staff in the ODA headquarters and its next steps agency, the Natural Resources Institute. The rules require individual officers to consult the principal establishment officer about the desirability of acquiring and retaining any shareholding which might raise a question of possible conflict with the interests of the Department. No such conflicts of interest are recorded in the last five years.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Goodlad: All the individual departments of the diplomatic and aid wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth office, and all our posts abroad—more than 200—set objectives annually. These objectives are framed in the light of the overall objectives for both wings, which are set out in the annual departmental report on the Government's expenditure plans. The report also contains more detailed objectives on the various FCO functions. A copy of the report is available in the Library of the House.

European Union (Public Information)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state his policy in respect of the proposals in each substantive clause of the European Union (Public Information) Bill.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Government have made information on the Maastricht treaty readily available to the public. The treaty was published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office on 7 May. Before publication, copies were supplied to Parliament in large numbers, and to the public on demand from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Memoranda were produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Her Majesty's Treasury outlining the content of the treaty. These are also available from Her Majesty's Stationery office. The Government are considering whether to issue additional information about the treaty and its benefits.

Shipbuilding

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the Government's attitude to the Commission's proposal for a Council directive providing for changes to the seventh Council directive on aid to shipbuilding of 2 December 1990 SEC 92 (991)—final;

(2) if he has given consideration to designating as an agenda B point at the Council meeting scheduled for 20 July the Commission's proposal for a Council directive providing for changes to the seventh Council directive on aid to shipbuilding of 2 December 1990, SEC (92) 991—final;

(3) what evaluation his Department has made of the effect of the United Kingdom and EC shipbuilding industries of the Commission proposal for a Council directive providing for changes to the seventh Council directive on aid to shipbuilding of 2 December 1990, SEC (92) 991—final;

(4) what account he has taken of the European Parliament's view on current EC proposals to aid shipyards in east Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Government support the Commission proposal which will help alleviate the severe economic difficulties facing eastern Germany. The proposal contains safeguards which should ensure that the United Kingdom and other EC shipbuilding industries are not adversely affected. The European Parliament opinion on the Commission proposal will be discussed at a meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives today. The dossier would then normally go to a Council meeting for final adoption.

British Diplomatic Spouses Association

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the employment status of the chairman of the British Diplomatic Spouses Association; and if he will publish the job description as agreed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and specify the duties that are laid down towards the trustees of the association;

(2) what is his policy on charging organisations to which public employees are seconded, including ones which are wholly funded by Government, the full staff costs of the seconded employees; and what policy is followed in respect of the British Diplomatic Spouses Association;

(3) for what reasons his Department advertised the job of family welfare officer in its medical and welfare unit as carrying ex officio membership of the executive committee of the British Diplomatic Spouses Association;

(4) what is the value of support given by his Department to the British Diplomatic Spouses Association in *(a)* contributions to salaries, *(b)* staff secondments, *(c)* office and other facilities and *(d)* other support.

Mr. Goodlad: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Serbia

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to ensure that the sanctions on Serbia do not affect supplies of food and medicines.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: United Nations Security Council resolution 757 specifically exempts from the sanctions regime foodstuffs and supplies intended strictly for medical purposes. Exports of both categories have to be notified to the sanctions committee. To date approximately 70 per cent. of all applications received by the committee have been for foodstuffs and medicines and all have been passed without objection.

South African Security Personnel

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what protests Her Majesty's Government have made to the South African Government on the activities of South African security personnel Captain Pamela du Randt and Mr. Leon Flores.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what protests Her Majesty's Government have made to the South African Government about the activities of South African security personnel Captain Pamela du Randt and Mr Leon Flores.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The South African Government were informed of the suspected activities of these individuals in this country and we received the full co-operation of the SAG in our pursuit of this matter.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff his Department currently employs; what are the total personnel costs; and what were the staffing levels and personnel costs in 1970.

Mr. Goodlad *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office expects to employ an average of 10,085·5 staff in 1992-93 at an estimated total personnel cost of £369·877 million. In 1970-71, 12,421 staff were employed; a comparable figure for total personnel costs for that year is not available. Actual salary costs for 1970-71 were £52·52 million and £186·6 million in 1992-93.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC;

(2) what representations have been made by British embassies in the member states of the EC about the removal of unnecessary regulations affecting United Kingdom interests at a national and Community level in the last year;

(3) whether, during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC, he will arrange for a European Council of Ministers meeting to consider how the European Commission's deregulation efforts can be improved.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Lisbon European Council noted the importance of the principle of subsidiarity and invited the Commission and the Council to undertake urgent work on procedural and practical steps to implement the principle. It also called for a re-examination of existing legislation in order to adapt it where necessary to the principle of subsidiarity. We intend to take this work forward during the United Kingdom presidency. There will be an initial discussion in the Foreign Affairs Council on 20 July. The Government intend to ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is respected in all its aspects, including its presumption against over-regulation.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Kurdistan

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures have been taken to ensure the safety and security of non-governmental officers in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The safety of NGO officers is of great concern to us. They are working in Iraq under the inter-agency programme of the United Nations and we have raised with the UN the importance of arrangements for their safety. In addition, coalition forces are stationed in Turkey.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what attempts have been made to ensure that humanitarian aid administered in Iraqi Kurdistan is reaching the targeted groups; if he will give assurance that current levels of assistance will be maintained; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We monitor progress with the United Nations and British non-governmental organisations to ensure the inter-agency programme of humanitarian relief is properly targeted. We continue to respond to requests for support and are keeping the situation under close review.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds have been budgeted to directly support British based non-governmental organisations operating in Iraqi Kurdistan from 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993; and what funding has been set aside to support the activities of British based non-governmental organisations indirectly through support for the United Nations in the area in the same period.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We shall continue to consider on their merits requests from British non-governmental organisations to fund specific projects in northern Iraq, while taking account of other priority calls on available resources. We do not earmark for non-governmental organisations any specific part of our contribution to the United Nations programme.

International Decade of National Disaster Reduction

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the United Kingdom is making to the International Decade of National Disaster Reduction and the discussions he has held with colleagues in the United Nations on this.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the last financial year the Government spent nearly £600,000 for disaster preparedness projects under the International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction. Commitments since April this year total over £250,000 so far. This is in addition to our continuing support for the Royal Society/Royal Academy of Engineering IDNDR committee. We are working closely with that committee, with other interested groups in Britain and through our embassies and high commissions overseas to see what more we can do. We are also in close contact with the United Nations IDNDR Secretariat in Geneva and with the disaster mitigation branch of the United Nations department of humanitarian affairs.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the Royal Society as a result of his request to it to consider scientic options and proposals for the International Decade of National Disaster Reduction.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We continue to work very closely with the Royal Society on the British contribution to the International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction, primarily through the joint Royal Society/Royal Academy of Engineering IDNDR committee. With that committee, we mounted a one-day IDNDR forum at the Royal Society on 27 March this year, bringing together key players from Britain and the United Nations to discuss disaster reduction. A report of the workshop is being produced and should be available soon.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Civil Service Shareholdings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Home Office staff handbook includes specific advice on shareholdings by staff, covering the issues of potential conflict of interest and the provisions of the Companies Securities (Insider Dealing) Act 1985 and the Financial Securities Act 1986. Further advice on the general principles of conduct and the need to avoid any conflicts between official duty and private interests is also included in the handbook. The handbook is issued to all non-industrial staff, and its provisions apply equally to staff in Home Office agencies. No cases have been recorded in the past five years of staff reporting shareholdings to personnel management units in the Home Office.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Objectives are set for each division and branch of the Home Office, but because of the breadth and diversity of the Department's activities, listing them would involve disproportionate cost. The principle objections for Home Office divisions are contained within the "Home Office" Annual Report 1992—Cm 1909,—12 copies of which are in the Library.

Primates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will prohibit the use in British laboratories of primates that have been caught in the wild.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. Where the use of primates in research is justified under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, there may be no alternative to the use of wild-caught primates if purpose-bred animals are not available. Inspectors do, however, encourage the use of propose-bred primates where such animals are available.

Immigration Controls

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implications of article 8a of the Maastricht treaty for Britain's current immigration controls.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer my hon. Friend to the explanatory memorandum on the European Commission communication on abolition of border controls—6497/92—which was submitted to the EC scrutiny committees on 19 June and in which the Government's position on this matter is fully set out.

Camp Hill Prison

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether medication at Her Majesty's prison Camp Hill is being administered by the qualified hospital officers, and taken by prisoners in the sight of hospital officers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Health care staff supervise the taking of medication during the day. At night some prisoners are entrusted to take their medication unsupervised; in other cases supervision is undertaken by discipline staff. These arrangements are under review.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the monthly cost of medication at Her Majesty's prison Camp Hill.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The cost of drugs and dressings dispensed in the four weeks ended 26 June 1992 was £2,049·91.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were on medication at Her Majesty's prison Camp Hill for the last date for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 29 June 1992, 92 prisoners received some form of medication.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were in the hospital at Her Majesty's prison Camp Hill on the last day for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The health care centre at this establishment no longer provides facilities for in-patient care. Patients in need of such care are transferred to the prison hospital at HM prison Parkhurst.

Security Companies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take action to make it a criminal offence for convicted criminals *(a)* to own or be directors of, *(b)* to be employed by or *(c)* to seek employment by a security company.

Mr. Jack: No.

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implications of article 8a of the Maastricht treaty referring to freedom of residence.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Article 8 confers on nationals of European Community countries the new status of citizen of the union. Article 8a provides that such citizens shall have the right to move and reside freely in the Community. This right will, however, be subject to the limitations and conditions set out in existing EC directives and regulations, under which, for example, residence may be refused on grounds of public policy.

Electoral Law

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to bring forward proposals to amend the electoral law, consequent to the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Detailed arrangements for the provisions contained in the treaty to extend the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in European Parliamentary and local government elections to EC nationals in their country of residence have to be adopted unanimously by the Council of Ministers by 31 December 1993 and 31 December 1994 respectively. Until those arrangements have been agreed, we have no proposals for amending electoral law.

Police and Criminal Evidence

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an inquiry into the ways in which the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 is operated by the police services in England and Wales.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Royal Commission on criminal justice is already considering this issue.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an inquiry into the ways in which the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 is operated by the West Midlands police service.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No.

Gambian Nationals

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of The Gambia have been *(a)* admitted to the United Kingdom as visitors in each year from 1988 and *(b)* how many have been refused entrance at the point of entry.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not available; citizens of The Gambia are not separately identified in the immigration statistics.

Bailiffs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislative proposals to make it illegal to operate as *(a)* a security business and *(b)* a bailiff's business unless registered as a plc.

Mr. Jack: We have no plans to do so.

Cruel Tethering

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been under the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988.

Mr. Jack: Section 1 of the Protection against Cruel Tethering Act 1988 amended the Protection of Animals Act 1911. It is not possible from the information held centrally to identify separately such offences under the Protection of Animals Act 1911. However, our statistics show that in 1989 and 1990 there were 1,050 and 1,167 prosecutions, respectively, under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, as amended.

Immigration

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision is being made by the Government to bring into force EC Council directives 90/364/EEC, 90/365/EEC and 90/366/EEC which require member states to bring into force laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with the directives not later than 30 June; and whether, under those directives, the third country national family members in the ascending or descending line seeking to enter or remain in the United Kingdom with the EC national family member will be permitted to take employment.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The directives are being implemented administratively. It is planned to lay an order under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 before Parliament later this year to incorporate into United Kingdom law all the EC regulations and directives dealing with rights of free movement and residence, including the three referred to in the question. Directive 90/366, on the right of residence of vocational students, entitles the EC national to be joined by his or her spouse and children under 21. The other two directives, on the right of residence of retired persons and of persons not covered by other EC measures, make provision for spouses, children under 21 and other dependent relatives in the ascending and descending line. Under the directives the spouse and dependent children of the main beneficiary are, irrespective of nationality, entitled to take employment or self-employment. Non-EC national dependent relatives in the ascending line who wish to take employment or self-employment have to meet the relevant requirements of the immigration rules.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provisions are made for the grant of indefinite leave to remain to the third country national spouses of EC nationals exercising treaty rights in the United Kingdom in the event that the EC national does not apply for indefinite leave to remain or there is marriage breakdown.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Indefinite leave is normally granted to a non-EC spouse only if the EC national has acquired it or if the spouse qualifies for it in his or her own right under the immigration rules. A non-EC national cannot qualify for indefinite leave under the immigration rules on the basis of a marriage which has been dissolved. However, where such a person has been living in the United Kingdom for a substantial period as the spouse of

an EC national, any application to remain following a divorce would be considered in the light of any compassionate circumstances.

Electoral Procedures

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to amend relevant legislation so as to bring the availability of marked registers after parliamentary elections into line with local and European elections.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The marked copies of the electoral register used at parliamentary elections are retained by the Clerk of the Crown and are available for inspection for one year after the election. The marked registers used at European parliamentary elections are retained by the returning officer for the constituency and are also available for inspection for one year. For local government elections, the marked registers are held by the proper officer of the relevant council, and can be inspected for a period of six months following the election. In all cases copies of the marked registers may also be purchased. In consultation with the political parties and the local authority associations we are conducting a review of electoral law in the light of experience at the recent general election, and this will be one of the issues considered.

Disabled People's Parking Spaces

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions were undertaken in 1991 against able-bodied motorists misusing spaces reserved for disabled people.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not available.

Crime (Unidentified Vehicle Keepers)

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the use in the furtherance of crime of vehicles used by a group of individuals in circumstances where the identity of the individual keeper is concealed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We have found no record of recent representations on this subject. The targeting of offences involving the use of such vehicles is an operational matter and is therefore the responsibility of chief officers of police.

Wolds Prison

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contingency plans have been made to deal with circumstances resulting in the loss of control by Group 4 of the Wolds prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: For security reasons it is not our practice to publish contingency plans for any prison.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether circular instructions and standing orders issued by the Prison Department are applied to the Wolds prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. Group 4 Remand Services Limited is required to deliver standards of performance which are specified in the contract for the management of Wolds prison. Within that framework the company has freedom to decide on the best procedures for achieving the desired results.

Prison Mothers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances mothers in prison are separated from their babies six hours after birth.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The circumstances in which a mother in prison would be separated from her baby within hours of the birth are the same as in the community. Immediate separation would take place where the local social service department had obtained a care order because the child was considered to be at risk.

EC Visas

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on the mutual recognition of visas within the EC.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Mutual recognition of short-stay visas is provided for in the draft external frontiers convention, signature of which remains stalled because of an objection by the Spanish Government to the convention's application to Gibraltar.

Prisoners, Northern Ireland

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the transfer of Northern Irish prisoners in English prisons to complete their sentence in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As I stated in my reply to a question by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) on 12 June 1992, *Official Report*, columns 330-31, my right hon. and learned Friend is considering a report of the interdepartmental review on the transfer of sentenced prisoners with colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Prisoners (Remission)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons why persons imprisoned for non-payment of community charge are not entitled to remission.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: To qualify for remission a person has to be serving a term of imprisonment which under section 104(1) of the Criminal Justice act 1967 does not include "a committal in default to payment of any sum of money". Nor is the royal prerogative of mercy used to grant special remission in respect of civil cases.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds criminals in prison are given remission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Remission of sentence is governed by the prison rules 1964. In general terms remission is granted on the grounds of a prisoner's industry and good conduct. The royal prerogative of mercy may also be used to grant special remission on exceptional grounds, including the recognition of assistance given to the authorities or for urgent compassionate reasons.

Speeding

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police authority forces now possess the technology to identify speeding motorists using photographic techniques.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that a recent survey by the Association of Chief Police Officers traffic committee indicated that 18 forces in England and Wales were actively considering acquiring speed cameras or traffic light cameras or both and that a further three police forces expected to be equipped with speed cameras from 1 July. Nineteen forces already operate in-car video systems which can be used to identify speeding offences.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost of the equipment necessary to gather evidence of speeding using speed camera technology.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to his question on 14 July, *Official Report*, column *531*.

Polling Stations (Access)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will review the criteria for grants in respect of access to polling stations by disabled people;

(2) what steps he proposes to take to promote improved access to polling stations for disabled people.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Councils have a statutory obligation to place polling stations only in buildings which are accessible to disabled people, wherever this is practicable. We have provided guidance for acting returning officers to remind them of their obligations, and shall continue to do so. Where it is not possible to use a building affording easy access, we will provide grants towards half the cost of a temporary ramp, provided the local authority will meet the other half. We consider it reasonable to expect the local authority to contribute to the cost since the ramps may also be used at local elections and for other local activities. We will consider as part of our post-election review of electoral practice whether more needs to be done to help disabled people to exercise their right to vote.

Fire Services

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what correspondence his Department has had with the Northumberland fire authority about the level of provision within the county's fire service; and what indication has been given in the correspondence as to whether *(a)* day manning, *(b)* other systems involving full-time personnel or *(c)* wholly retained status would be regarded as acceptable for the stations concerned.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My officials have received correspondence from the chief fire officer of the Northumberland fire and rescue service drawing attention to financial issues affecting the service's budget and to plans for addressing identified over-provision in the service. My right hon. and learned Friend has recently approved the fire authority's proposal to replace the whole time crew at Alnwick fire station by a retained crew with the result that both firefighting appliances based at Alnwick are now crewed by retained firefighters. The chief fire officer has made clear the fire authority's intention to seek the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend, under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947, to the removal from the services establishment of the whole-time crews at Berwick and Hexham fire stations, subject to their replacement by retained crews. My right hon. and learned Friend would not approve such an application unless he was satisfied that the authority would be able to maintain the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fire service personnel of sub-officer grade and below have been *(a)* made redundant or *(b)* given early retirement other than on health grounds in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available figures, from annual establishment returns submitted to the Home Office by fire authorities each year, relate to discharges for other than medical reasons and dismissals after disciplinary proceedings. The establishment returns for fire authorities in England and Wales for the year to 31 December 1991 show that 36 whole-time fire fighters of the rank of sub-officer and below, and 118 retained or volunteer fire fighters, were discharged for other than medical reasons, and that seven whole-time fire fighters of the rank of sub-officer and below, and three retained or volunteer fire fighters, were dismissed following disciplinary proceedings.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, following Northumberland county council's refusal to accept that he is entitled to withhold permission for the closure of the Holy Island fire brigade, and following the Local Government Commissioner's finding that this constituted maladministration, he will arrange for a special inspection of the brigade's arrangements for fire cover on Holy Island.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Northumberland fire and rescue service was inspected by Her Majesty's inspector of fire services between 17 and 21 February 1992. In the course of the inspection, Her Majesty's inspector examined the fire cover arrangements on Holy Island. My right hon. and learned Friend does not propose to commission any further inspection of the fire cover arrangements on Holy Island. He hopes to reach a decision shortly on the Northumberland fire authorities application for approval to the removal from its establishment scheme of the volunteer fire-fighting crew on Holy Island.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what provisions exist in national conditions of service governing the terms of redundancy for firemen; what requests for advice he has received from fire authorities about redundancy terms; and what advice he has given;

(2) what provisions exist in national conditions of service relating to the pension entitlements of firemen who accept early retirement on other than health grounds, or are made redundant.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: National conditions of service for fire-fighters are a matter for the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades and not for the Home Office. I understand that the council's scheme of conditions of service contains no provisions governing the

terms of redundancy for fire-fighters. My officials have received a request from the chief fire officer of the Northumberland fire and rescue service for advice on the pensions implications of any redundancies, and are to discuss this with the chief fire officer at a meeting on 5 August. The pension entitlements of whole-time fire-fighters are governed by the Firemen's Pension Scheme Order 1992. Rule A14 of the scheme provides for the early retirement on efficiency grounds of a fire-fighter aged 50 or over who has completed 25 years' pensionable service.

Telephone Tapping

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *199*, if he will list the organisations which carry out telephone interceptions which have been authorised by warrant.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have nothing to add to my reply of 8 July.

Urban Areas (Crime)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who draws up the list of urban areas and housing estates regarded as at risk of serious disorder;

(2) if he will provide additional resources to find measures to tackle youth crime in the 16 urban areas or estates regarded as likely to be at risk of serious disorder.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There is no central list of areas regarded as at risk of serious disorder though local police forces naturally monitor areas of particular tension. The Government already provides funding for many initiatives aimed at tackling youth crime. In particular, the safer cities programme tackles crime in the inner cities through projects in 20 areas with high crime rates and other social problems.

British Diplomatic Spouses Association

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the British Diplomatic Spouses Association is a registered charity.

Mr. Jack: The British Diplomatic Spouses Association is registered with the Charity Commission as a charity.

Commercial Premises

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to amend legislation so as to make occupation of commercial premises without the owner's permission a criminal offence.

Mr. Jack: The Government are committed to strengthening the law against squatting and we issued a consultation paper examining possible options. The responses have raised a number of issues which are receiving careful consideration. Our aim is to ensure that any new measures are fair, easy to administer and effective.

Police Evidence

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive reports from the relevant police forces into the safety of the evidence used to convict Sam Kulasingham and Prem Sivalingham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The inquiry by the Essex police into this case is still continuing, but at this stage it is not possible to give any indication as to when it will be completed and a report submitted.

European Year of Civil Protection

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has held with his EC colleagues on the United Kingdom's and the Community's plans for the European Year of Civil Protection beginning on 1 July 1993.

Mr. Jack: At a meeting of the Council of Ministers held in November 1990 to discuss civil protection, my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Ferrers and his ministerial colleagues endorsed a resolution, agreeing in principle that July 1993 to July 1994 should be designated the European Year of Civil Protection. Officials from member states are now working to produce a revised draft resolution.

New Age Travellers

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many hours of police overtime were worked by Avon and Somerset constabulary and Devon and Cornwall constabulary between 20 June and 11 July, as a result of the movements of new age travellers and rave parties;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, columns *739-40*, what further estimates he has of the costs of extra policing required by the movements of new age travellers and various rave parties between 20 June and 11 July in the counties of Avon, Somerset, Devon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire; and whether he will specify these by police authority.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Police and Fire Services

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will specify the change in the cost of providing police and fire services within the metropolitan county areas as compared with non-metropolitan areas during the financial years preceding, including and succeeding the abolition of the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Durham Prison

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average number of hours per day inmates of Durham prison spend outside cells.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The estimated number of hours per day inmates of Durham prison spend outsde cells is 7·5 hours for convicted male inmates, 3·25 hours for male remand inmates and 9·5 hours for convicted female inmates.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of hours spent on education for each year since 1981 in Durham prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The total student hours spent on education for each year since 1985 in Durham prison are shown in the table. No figures are available for the years 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Year	Total student hours
1985-86	35,796
1986-87	48,284
1987-88	62,902
1988-89	70,245
1989-90	58,893
1990-91	57,818
1991-92	70,251

European Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the current requirements for the acquisition of a visa for entry into the United Kingdom will be affected by the proposed article 100c (1) of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Article 100c (1) will transfer into the competence of the European Community the determination of the third countries whose nationals are to be subject to a visa requirement for the crossing of external frontiers of member states. Decisions under the article, which will be taken by unanimity until the end of 1995 and by qualified majority voting thereafter, will depend on the outcome of discussions within the Community and cannot be predicted at this stage. The United Kingdom, like all member states, will be under an obligation to align its national visa requirements with such decisions.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what alterations he proposes to *(a)* asylum policy and *(b)* immigration policy in the light of article K1 of the treaty on European union.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The chapter of the treaty dealing with co-operation in the fields of justice and home affairs, of which Article K1 forms part, will provide a new framework for intergovernmental discussions on these subjects but leave them within national competence. Of itself, therefore, the article does not entail alterations to the United Kingdom's policies on immigration and asylum.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what forms of co-operation he will propose in the area of combating international fraud under article K1 (5) of the treaty on European union.

Mr. Jack: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Wrongful Convictions

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many allegations of wrongful conviction upon indictment have been received during the last six months by C3 division of the Home Office with a view to a possible reference to the Court of Appeal under section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968; and how many allegations have been dealt with.

Mr. Jack: During the six months ending 31 March 1992, the most recent period for which figures are readily available, 301 allegations of wrongful conviction on indictment were received and reviews of 283 cases were completed.

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of implementing title VI of the Maastricht treaty in so far as it relates to justice and home affairs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Title VI brings together into a more coherent framework existing intergovernmental work in justice and home affairs matters. Additional support services may be needed, which will be negotiated in the usual way through the Community budget procedures. Otherwise, costs will arise only on a case-by-case basis from actions agreed between the member states and will be borne by the member states themselves.

Bail Statistics

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of *(a)* all defendants and *(b)* defendants charged with violent offences, sexual offences, drug offences, robbery, burglary, theft, fraud and criminal damage respectively were granted bail in England and Wales in the years 1980, 1985 and 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The percentages of all defendants granted bail in England and Wales in the years 1980, 1985 and 1990 are given in the following table:

All offences	*1980*	*1985*	*1990*
Summonsed	73	70	61
Arrested and bailed	23	25	34
Arrested and held in custody	4	5	6

These figures are published in chapter 8 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". Reliable information on the breakdown of remands into bail and custody according to offence groups is not available centrally.

Police (Contracting Out)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to contract out police functions relating to the issuing of firearms licences and the escorting of heavy loads.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering the responses to the recently concluded public consultation on Home Office proposals to establish a new civilian firearms licensing body. No decisions have yet been taken.

As to police escorts for heavy loads, my Department is considering the issues with the police service and local authority associations. No firm decisions have yet been taken.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to regulate unauthorised clamping of motor cars on private land and the charging of large sums for their release.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In the light of recent public concern about the activities of firms and individuals offering wheel clamping services on private property, the Government are considering whether any action on their part would be appropriate.

Mr. T. S. Gill

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce his decision in respect to inquiries being made about Mr. T. S. Gill, No. C42698, of Featherstone prison, since March 1991.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend has decided to refer Mr. Gill's case to the Court of Appeal under section 17(1)*(a)* of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968. I will write to the hon. Member.

European Parliamentarians

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes the Government plans in the way Members of the European Parliament are elected in Great Britain or in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have at present no plans to change the way in which Members of the European Parliament are elected in Great Britain or in Northern Ireland.

Refugees

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Bosnian and Croatian refugees have been accepted in the United Kingdom to date.

Mr. Charles Wardle: About 1,100 citizens of the former state of Yugoslavia have sought asylum in the United Kingdom between December 1991 and the end of June this year on the basis of claims associated with the various conflicts in that area. The large majority of these applications are still under consideration. Separate figures for the numbers from Bosnia or Croatia are not readily available.

Race Relations

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with the Commission for Racial Equality's investigation into treatment of psychiatric patients of different racial groups; what measures her Department has taken to support the CRE in its investigation; and whether she has been asked to authorise a notice under section 50 of the Race Relations Act 1976.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The CRE will be running a pilot study this month in a London psychiatric hospital to test the questionnaire and methodology for the former investigation.

In September, 10 psychiatric hospitals nationwide will form the basis of the CRE's general formal investigation into the treatment of ethnic minority psychiatric patients.

I have agreed to the appointment of an additional commissioner, Dr. Suman Fernando, a practising consultant psychiatrist, to assist in this general formal investigation.

I have not been asked to authorise a notice under section 50 of the Race Relations Act 1976 in connection with this investigation.

Dangerous Driving

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to increase the maximum penalty for causing death by dangerous driving and by careless driving while under the influence of drink and drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Those whose dangerous or drunk driving has resulted in the tragic waste of another human life deserve to be punished accordingly. We are aware of public concern about the gravity of driving in a manner which causes fatal accidents and believe that the current maximum penalty of five years for these offences does not allow the courts adequately to reflect the seriousness of the worst cases. We intend, when parliamentary time permits, to increase the maximum penalty to 10 years.

Prisoners (Early Release)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what directions he has given to the Parole Board as to the matters it should take into account when discharging its functions regarding the early release and recall of determinate sentenced prisoners under the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have written to the chairman of the Parole Board to give him directions which the board should apply when considering the release and recall of prisoners. The directions are based on the need to protect the public from serious harm from offenders, the desirability of preventing further offending and of securing the offenders' rehabilitation. They will be applied to all parole-elegible prisoners from 1 October this year when part II of the Criminal Justice Act comes into effect.

Copies of the letter and the directions will be made available in the Libraries of both the Houses.

Feltham Remand Centre

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take to improve the regime in Feltham remand centre following the recent report from the Chief Inspector of Prisons on Feltham.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In addition to the work already under way to tackle the issues raised by the chief inspector in his report on Feltham, I have decided to set up a working group with the following terms of reference:

"To support and facilitate the enhancement of the regime at Feltham Remand Centre; to consider and plan for its long term future; and to make recommendations".

The group will act to help the governor put into effect as quickly as possible his plans to enhance the regime at the remand centre. It will also look at wider issues such as experience and good practice elsewhere in relation to young remands; the remanding practices of courts in the Feltham catchment area; and the long-term future of the remand centre.

Detainees

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were detained under Immigration Act powers *(a)* overnight, *(b)* between one night and one month and *(c)* for a period of more than one month in (i) Harmondsworth detention centre, (ii) the Queen's building Heathrow, (iii) terminal 4 Heathrow, (iv) The Beehive, Gatwick, (v) HM prison, Haslar and (vi) and other establishments, by name, during (1) 1991 and (2) 1992 to the latest convenient date; and of these people, how many in each category were (A) women, (B) children under 18 years of age and (C) men.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 3 July 1992]:* The information readily available relates to the total number of

persons whose detention spanned at least one night, and is given in the table. Information on the length of the period of detention, the numbers of persons detained at locations other than those listed, and the numbers of women, children and men detained, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Persons detained overnight or longer at certain locations[1]

Location	*1991 (year)*	*1992 (January to May)*
Harmondsworth[2]	1,119	192
Queen's Building, Heathrow	2,253	928
Terminal 4, Heathrow	2,058	653
The Beehive, Gatwick	2,897	1,557
Hasiar	519	143

[1] Unless otherwise stated, the data include persons initially detained elsewhere prior to being detained at the location given.
[2] Data mainly exclude persons initially detained elsewhere, and exclude illegal entrants and deportees detained.

Asylum

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will provide a breakdown by nationality of the number of passengers seeking political asylum who were detained under Immigration Act powers in 1991 in *(a)* prison department establishments and *(b)* immigration detention accommodation.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 7 July, *Official Report*, columns *133-34*.

Water Pistols

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to ban the import and sale of high-powered water pistols; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

There is no reason to believe that the high-powered water pistols currently on sale pose any undue safety hazards when used as intended. I do not propose to introduce a ban on their import or sale.

Bailiffs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take the necessary action to make it a criminal offence for convicted criminals *(a)* to own, *(b)* to be directors of, *(c)* to be employed by or *(d)* to seek employment by a business operating as bailiffs.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The Government has no plans to introduce a series of such offences. The Lord Chancellor's Department requires high standards of those who are recruited as county court bailiffs. Applicants are required to give information about previous convictions. The Department's policy is not to recruit or retain as a baliff any person with a criminal conviction which could conflict with his or her role as officer of the court. Applicants for certification under the distress for rent rules are required to disclose any convictions. The circuit judge dealing with the application would take this into account when considering whether to grant a certificate.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of The Board of Trade if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: The current objectives of the various parts of the Department are set out in the HMSO publications "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1992-93 to 1994-95" for Trade and Industry—Cm 1904—and for Energy—Cm 1905. I announced on 3 July my plans for reorganising the combined Department. These plans include the introduction of the management information system for Ministers—MINIS—system of objective-setting and resource allocation. The first MINIS round will be completed by next spring, and the results—which will show the objectives of each division—will be placed in the Library.

Whales

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he proposes to introduce a labelling scheme identifying products which contain material derived from whales.

Mr. Leigh: No.

Pyramid Selling

Mr. Cryer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many breaches of pyramid selling regulations were prosecuted during 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* None.

Post Office

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what performance standards his Department has set for the Post Office in the past 12 months.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* The Post Office at present sets its own performance standards having consulted the Post Office Users National Council. For 1991-92, for example, Royal Mail successfully delivered 89·8 per cent. of first-class letters the next day, against a target of 87·2 per cent. For 1992-93, the target is 90·5 per cent. The Government proposed, however, in the citizens charter White Paper that performance standards should in future be set by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who will be advised by the proposed new, independent, advisory regulator. The regulator will also monitor Post Office performance against these targets. These changes will require legislation.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what new information has been provided about compensation and redress when Post Office service falls below standard; and how this information has been made available to the public;

(2) when he last reviewed the Post Office compensation arrangements; and how frequently he intends to review them in the future.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* In line with the citizens charter, the Post Office was asked to carry out

an urgent review of its redress schemes in consultation with the Post Office Users National Council. The Post Office, together with POUNC, reported in February this year. They agreed to a number of improvements which are now being implemented. The then Secretary of State, in a reply to a question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield, (Mr. Burden) welcomed the reports—20 February 1992, *Official Report*, columns *262-63*. In future, the Government also intend to introduce legislation to take powers for the Secretary of State to approve the Post Office's arrangements for compensation and redress, on advice on the proposed new independent advisory regulator. In the meantime, the Government will continue to review the Post Office's redress schemes from time to time as necessary.

Information on compensation and redress is provided to the public in a number of different ways. The Post Office's commitment to consumer care and details of contact points etcetra were set out in its leaflet "Putting the Customer First", of which 750,000 leaflets were distributed, mainly through post offices, in spring this year. Information on compensation and redress is also set out in the new "Post Guide", which is now being distributed to every household in the country on a rolling basis during the course of this year. The detailed rules are set out in codes of practice for the three Post Office businesses—Royal Mail, Counters and Parcelforce. The codes are all available at post offices.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to introduce a new independent regulator to advise him on issues affecting the interests of Post Office customers.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 15 July 1992]*: Legislation to give effect to the Government's proposed reforms of the structure of postal services, including the appointment of an independent advisory regulator, will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

British Goods and Services

Mr. Amess: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his Department's objectives in promoting the sale of British goods and services.

Mr. Leigh: At home, my Department's objective is to help British businesses to produce competitive goods and services. Overseas, my Department's export promotion activities are aimed at increasing the United Kingdom's earnings, thus strengthening the United Kingdom's economic base.

Mr. Amess: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has to extend the buy British goods campaign.

Mr. Leigh: My Department has no buy British goods campaign. Such a campaign would be in conflict with the Government's free market policies. However, Ministers often point out the advantages of buying British goods and services where they are competitive in design, quality and price.

Animal Testing

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will seek to persuade his EC partners to agree to phase out testing of cosmetics on animals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The United Kingdom has called upon the European Community to set 1998 as a target date for the replacement of all skin and eye irritancy tests subject to there being validated non-animal alternatives. The Government is sympathetic to phasing out all animal testing for cosmetics where suitable validated alternatives are available.

Export Controls

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals the Trade Council expects to receive from the Commission on the harmonisation of extra-European Community export controls during the United Kingdom presidency.

Mr. Needham: I expect to receive proposals shortly from the European Commission on the harmonisation of export controls on dual-use goods.

Compliance Costs

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the subjects of compliance cost assessments carried out since the publication of the White Paper, "Building Businesses Not Barriers".

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Compliance cost assessments—CCAs—are prepared for all policy proposals likely to affect business. A central list of CCAs going back to 1986 does not exist, and would require disproportionate time and effort to produce. Since 1989, details of new CCAs prepared by Departments have been published every six months. Currently the list appears in "Business Briefing", the weekly magazine of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. CCAs are currently being produced by the Government at a rate of over 50 per annum. The deregulation unit is planning to set up a computerised database of CCAs.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will institute a review of the effectiveness of the compliance cost assessment system operated by his deregulation unit.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The effectiveness of the compliance cost assessment system is kept under continuous review by the unit.

Civil Servants (Shares)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My Department provides standing guidance supplemented from time to time by internal notices to all staff. The latest notice on shareholdings was issued in February 1991. Staff, including those in the Department's agencies, are required to report any possible conflict of interest to their senior line managers. Separate

arrangements exist for the full disclosure of the financial interests of the most senior grades. In addition, all heads of management units are required to consider the potential for conflicts of interest within their area of responsibility, to provide, if necessary, specific guidance, with detailed reporting requirements and to take action in response to any disclosure of shareholdings by staff, to ensure that conflicts of interest do not occur.

Trade Marks

Dame Angela Rumbold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect on British industry of the application of the registration of trade marks in Germany.

Mr. Leigh: My Department is not aware of any general problem for British industry in respect of the registration of trade marks in Germany.

Dame Angela Rumbold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to ensure harmonisation across the Community countries for registration of trade marks during the United Kingdom presidency.

Mr. Leigh: An EC directive to harmonise substantive provisions of trade marks laws was adopted in 1988. It requires member states to bring their laws into line with its provisions by the end of 1992. In the United Kingdom, we have prepared the necessary legislation, but the Bill is still awaiting a place in the parliamentary timetable. Implementation by other member states is a matter for them, and not the presidency; we understand that, by the end of last year, three of them—Denmark, France and Spain—had passed new legislation in order to implement the directive.

Dame Angela Rumbold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Community Trade Marks Office will be established.

Mr. Leigh: Progress on the regulation to establish the Community Trade Marks Office—CTMO—has been held up for some years, primarily because of the difficulty of securing agreement on the location of the office. This question has become linked with that of the seats of other EC bodies, and any decision will almost certainly be on a package of such seats. We will, however, be pushing hard during the United Kingdom presidency to try to reach agreement on all the other outstanding issues on the regulation, so that the regulation can come into force as soon as a decision is reached on location. The Commission has said that it expects the CTMO to come into operation around two years after the regulation comes into force.

European Space Agency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the British contribution to the European Space Agency, the Hermes spaceplane and the Columbus project, in each of the last five financial years, together with the projection for the current year; if he will express these figures as a percentage of the total expenditure and of the German contribution; and if he will also express the annual British contribution in standard prices.

Mr. Leigh: United Kingdom contributions in each of the last five financial years and projected contribution in 1992-93 are:

	ESA		*£ millions*	
	Historic prices	*1992-93 prices*	*Hermes*	*Columbus*
1987-88	81	112	0	5
1988-89	90	116	0	8
1989-90	88	106	0	6
1990-91	94	105	0	7
1991-92	100	105	0	11
1992-93	100	100	0	13

ESA accounts on a calendar year basis. The following percentages are therefore on that basis:

	United Kingdom contribution as a percentage of:	
	ESA total expenditure	*German contribution*
1987	12	49
1988	8	37
1989	7	31
1990	6	23
1991	6	27

Net Book Agreement

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the European Court's decision on the net book agreement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Until I have seen the text of the court's ruling, I cannot comment on it.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will now refer the net book agreement to the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The net book agreement falls within the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976 and as such is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading to consider.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his plans during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC for promoting deregulation both at a Community level and in member states' implementation of EC directives.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: During the United Kingdom presidency of the Community, the Government plan to introduce a resolution at the Industrial Affairs Council aimed at strengthening the Commission's fiche d'impact system of assessing the costs to business of Community legislation and encouraging the Commission to consult business more fully before proposing legislation. We will continue to attach importance to prompt implementation of Community directives by member states. In the United Kingdom, we will continue to press the Departments responsible to implement Community directives on time and with the minimum possible burden to business.

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how he proposes to ensure that the work of the deregulation liaison Minister in each Department is monitored and that an overall view of the Government's achievements in the field of deregulation is brought together; and if he will publish an annual report of those achievements.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Progress under the deregulation initiative in all regulatory departments is co-ordinated and monitored by the deregulation unit in the Department of Trade and Industry. As the Minister with particular responsibility for the initiative, I take an active lead in liaising with deregulation Ministers in other Departments. Reports of progress and announcements are made regularly; the most recent such announcement was on 18 February, *Official Report*, columns *122-25*. As stated by the Prime Minister on 19 May, *Official Report*, column *113*, there is a ministerial committee on industrial, commercial and consumer affairs whose terms of reference are

"to consider industrial, commercial and consumer issues, including questions of competition and deregulation".

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom's presidency of the EC.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I and my ministerial colleagues have met our EC counterparts and European Commissioners on a number of occasions since 18 April. The importance of minimising the burdens on business of community legislation was emphasised in relevant meetings. During the United Kingdom presidency, I and my colleagues will attach great importance to making progress on minimising burdens on business.

European Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to bring forward proposals during the United Kingdom presidency of the European Council to reduce the secrecy stipulations in article 194 of the treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Eggar: The Commission has the exclusive right to bring forward proposals in the fields covered by the treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community. We are not aware that the Commission has any plans to make proposals in respect of article 194.

Hospital Radio

Mr. Amess: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what conclusions his Department has drawn from recent tests concerning hospital radio receiving its own frequency;

(2) what progress has been made in securing an individual frequency for hospital radio.

Mr. Leigh: My Department—the Radiocommunications Agency—and the Radio Authority have recently completed the pilot experiment at East Surrey hospital, Redhill. The Radiocommunications Agency and the Radio Authority are meeting shortly to reach conclusions on the results of the experiment and discuss future plans for hospital radio.

Property Misdescriptions Act 1991

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress which has been made in drafting the orders which arise under the terms of the Property Misdescriptions Act 1991; if he will indicate when he expects the drafts of the proposed orders to be published; and when he intends to lay the proposed orders before the House.

Mr. Leigh: My Department circulated a draft Property Misdescriptions (Specified Matters) Order for public consultation last December. The proposed order is being redrafted in the light of responses to the consultation, and my hon. and noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms intends to lay it before Parliament as soon as possible.

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for his Department to celebrate the European Year of the Elderly in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 13 July, *Official Report*, columns *430-31*.

Shipbuilding

Ms. Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with representatives of the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry on the current EC proposals to aid shipyards in east Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I discussed the EC proposals to aid the east German shipbuilding industry during a meeting with a delegation from the Shipbuilders and Shiprepairers Association on 24 June.

RECHAR

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what payment has been received this year under the RECHAR programme; and when arrangements will be completed to allow RECHAR grants to be paid.

Mr. Sainsbury: For the RECHAR programmes, the United Kingdom has so far this year received payments of £33,793,000 from the European regional development fund.

The approval of projects is the responsibility of the programme monitoring committees, which are now meeting. Arrangements are in place for RECHAR grants to be paid in respect of approved projects once the normal conditions for payment have been met.

Bicycles

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on circumvention of the generalised system of preferences tariff by Asian bicycle companies.

Mr. Needham: Although this is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General, I have agreed to reply.

A number of investigations have been carried out by Customs and Excise to verify that bicycles coming from Asian countries have been manufactured in accordance with the rules of origin of the generalised system of preferences. No evidence has been found of circumvention. Customs continues to monitor imports to ensure that correct rates of duty are imposed.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has any plans to review the European Community policy whereby Chinese bicycles enjoyed generalised system of preferences duty free status; if he has any plans to impose anti-dumping duties on Chinese and Taiwanese bicycles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The operation of the European Community's generalised system of preferences scheme is due for review this year. The concerns of the bicycle manufacturers, along with those of other sectors of industry, will be considered during discussions in the Community. I have no plans to impose anti-dumping duties on Chinese and Taiwanese bicycles, since such action is a matter of Community competence. The European Commission is currently carrying out an anti-dumping investigation into imports of these bicycles.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many bicycles were imported from *(a)* China and *(b)* Taiwan in (i) 1990 and (ii) 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The number of bicycles imported into the United Kingdom from China and Taiwan in 1990 and 1991 were as follows:

	1990	*1991*
China	100,983	141,874
Taiwan	694,032	657,738

I have nothing to add to my earlier replies on this subject.

European Funds

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the United Kingdom's contribution to *(a)* the EC European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, guidance section, *(b)* the European social fund and *(c)* the European regional development fund; and what was the United Kingdom receipt, by region, of these funds for the current year.

Mr. Sainsbury: Member states contribute to the EC budget as a whole rather than individual parts of it. The United Kingdom's share of contributions in 1992 is forecast to be around 17 per cent. before abatement. Forecast structural funds receipts in 1992 for the EC as a whole and for the United Kingdom are shown in the table. Figures showing receipts by regions of the United Kingdom are not readily available.

Forecast Structural Funds Receipts for 1992

£ million

	Total EC	*United Kingdom*
(A) European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund Guidance Section	1,874	80
(B) European Social Fund	3,370	411
(C) European Regional Development Fund	5,302	458
Total Structural Funds	10,546	949

Agencies

Mr. Milligan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the National Engineering Laboratory agency for 1992-93.

Mr. Heseltine: When the National Engineering Laboratory was launched as an executive agency in October 1990, it was set the longer-term target of recovering its full economic costs through arm's length contracts from customers by 1994-95. I congratulate the chief executive and his staff on the excellent progress they have made towards meeting this target.

In addition to building on the position reached in respect of the above target, the agency has been set the following targets for 1992-93:

Non-Department of Trade and Industry income as a proportion of full economic costs to grow by 10 per cent. compared with the results for 1991-92—as published in the agency's annual report 1991.

Fee earning hours on "arm's length" contracts, as a proportion of all hours, to increase by 10 per cent. compared with the published results for 1991-92.

Fee earning hours on "arm's length" contracts, as a proportion of available engineer hours to increase by 7 per cent. compared with the published results for 1991-92.

Per capita office space to reduce by 10 per cent. compared with 1991-92.

By 1 October 1992 to introduce a concise contract-completion questionnaire, to provide systematic feedback from all clients of all technical centres as part of NEL's commitment to deliver to its clients the standard of service they require.

To train at least 60 per cent. of staff in six of the basic competences they will require for operating in a commercial environment.

Mr. Milligan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the National Weights and Measures Laboratory agency for 1992-93.

Mr. Leigh: The agency has been set the following key targets for 1992-93:

to operate within its current expenditure budget;

to achieve the specific objectives set out in its 1992-93 to 1995-96 corporate plan, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House in April this year;

to reduce the unit cost of a programme-hour by 1·5 per cent. in real terms.

The agency is also required to meet a number of other targets, including quality of service targets. Its achievements against these last year will appear in its annual report 1991-92, which is due to be published shortly.

These targets will be subject to annual review.

Mr. Milligan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the Insolvency Service executive agency for 1992-93.

Mr. Nell Hamilton: The Insolvency Service expects to deal with about 36,000 new insolvencies in 1992-93 and against this background I look to it to preserve the very considerably efficiency gains it has already achieved. The service will continue to bring proceedings for the disqualification of directors of failed companies where these are in the public interest, and to submit prosecution reports where there is evidence of criminal behaviour.

The quality of service targets for 1992-93 are:

to report to creditors on assets and liabilities within nine weeks in at least 75 per cent. of all cases.

to hold the initial meeting of creditors within 12 weeks in at least 80 per cent. of all cases.

to check and action at least 95 per cent. of payment requisitions within 10 days or by the due date.

to submit reports within 10 months in at least 80 per cent. of cases where there is evidence of criminality.

to submit disqualification reports within 15 months in at least 80 per cent. of cases where there is evidence of unfit conduct by directors.

I have set it a target of completing the administration of at least 24,000 cases in 1992-93.

I would like to congratulate the chief executive and his staff on their success last year in handling a considerably increased workload whilst managing to achieve most of their targets. For 1992-93, I have asked the chief executive to ensure a consolidation of the productivity gains already made. At the same time I have raised the target for a reduction in real terms of the average unit cost of the initial stage for bankruptcies and liquidations to 45 per cent. over the period 1990-91 to 1992-93.

Mr. Milligan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets have been set for the Companies House executive agency for 1992-93.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The chief executive of Companies House has been set the following quality of service and financial performance targets:

to make all documents available for public inspection within a maximum of five working days of receipt in Companies House;

to provide a two-hour search service for all customers, and to provide a one hour search service to all customers by April 1994;

to achieve a compliance rate for companies filing accounts and annual returns of 86 per cent. by June 1993 and 90 per cent. by June 1994;

to reduce real unit costs by 2 per cent. in 1992-93;

to achieve a 6 per cent. average annual return in the form of an operating surplus expressed as a percentage of average net assets employed at current values.

Executive agency status has led to significant improvements in efficiency and in the standard of service provided to Companies House's customers. The adoption of trading fund status last October has further increased the quality and flexibility of the agency's financial management, placing its finances on a more commercial footing.

The targets which I have set are designed to ensure that Companies House builds on these improvements in its performance, by requiring further increases in efficiency and improvements in the rate of compliance.

Urban Regeneration Agency

Mr. Milligan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what will be the relationship between English Estates and the proposed new Urban Regeneration Agency.

Mr. Heseltine: I greatly value the work English Estates does in the assisted areas and elsewhere to ensure the provision of premises and sites for new and growing businesses. I see great advantage in bringing this role within the remit of the new Urban Regeneration Agency. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I have, therefore, agreed that the activities of English Estates should be subsumed within the new agency when it is set up.

Counterfeit Goods

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made in dealing with the problems of counterfeit consumer goods; and if he will give the latest estimate of the cost to the manufacturing industry of this illicit trade.

Mr. Leigh: The Government's role in combating counterfeiting is limited to providing the necessary legislative framework. Around three years ago, provisions came into force making the counterfeiting of a trade mark a criminal offence carrying heavy penalties. The enforcement of the law is the responsibility of local trading standard officers, who may act either on their own initiative or on intelligence from industry. There is also the possibility for industry to take civil action against counterfeiting. The Government have no figures of their own as to the extent of the trade in counterfeit consumer goods.

Electricity

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people were employed in the electricity division of the Department of Energy on 1 July 1990.

Mr. Eggar: One hundred and thirteen people were employed in the Department's electricity divisions as at 1 July 1990.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will seek to amend legislation so as to allow electricity companies to establish that premises are lawfully occupied before being compelled to connect supply.

Mr. Eggar: The obligation to supply electricity derives from section 16 of the Electricity Act 1989. Any dispute arising under that section may be referred to the Director General of Electricity Supply. The Government have no plans to amend this legislation.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has had with the Director General of Electricity Supply concerning his decision of 7 July on the target real rate of return on assets and annual maximum price change formula on domestic electricity prices via the cost passed through mechanism.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* I have consultations with the Director General of Electricity Supply from time to time on a range of issues. Licence conditions, including the price controls, are a matter for the director general.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact of the coal privatisation programme on the competitive position of Sizewell B with regard to the merit order; what further consultations he has had with the EC competition directorate general concerning the applicability of *(a)* the existing nuclear operating agreement and *(b)* the nuclear levy payments to Sizewell B in the period 1994 to 1998, *(c)* extension of life of the Magnox stations and *(d)* extension of life of the nuclear levy beyond 1998; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The capacity and output from Sizewell B is included in Nuclear Electric's contract with the regional electricity companies, which expires on 31 March 1998. The treatment of Sizewell B by the appropriate regulatory authorities will be no different from that of Nuclear Electric's existing stations. The commercial arrangements relating to Nuclear Electric's operations up to 1998, including Sizewell B, were notified to the European Commission in March 1990 under state aid notification procedures.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on

eastern bloc and European nuclear safety of the $100 million fund set up at the Group of Seven to cover retrofitting Soviet-designed nuclear power stations;

(2) if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the G7 summit meeting on Soviet-designed eastern bloc nuclear reactor safety problems and Group of 24 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development retrofit safety programmes and the British nuclear industry contribution to those programmes.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* I welcome these important conclusions, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred to in his statement to the House on 13 July 1992. As he explained, the G7 countries have given support to a multilateral programme of action to improve the safety of Soviet-designed nuclear power plants in the former Soviet Union and central and eastern Europe. The programme aims to achieve significant improvements in the short-term in operational safety and in strengthening regulatory regimes in those countries. A supplementary multilateral mechanism, details of which have still to be settled, will be set up to fund necessary short-term safety improvements which are not adequately covered by bilateral programmes of assistance.

At the same time, the programme lays the foundation for longer-term safety improvements by setting in train energy studies covering replacement sources of energy and the scope for, and cost implications of, upgrading nuclear plants of more recent design.

The G7 countries have urged other interested states to contribute to the programme. The group of 24 OECD countries—G24—will co-ordinate this assistance through existing but strengthened procedures. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development will assist in the administration of the multilateral fund in close liaison with the G24 and will report on the potential financial requirements for future energy supplies.

The British nuclear industry is already playing an active part in bilateral and international assistance programmes and I expect it to make an enhanced contribution within the framework of the multilateral programme which has now been agreed.

EC Structural Funds

Ms. Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 6 July, *Official Report*, column 27, about the future of the EC structural funds, how he defines "appropriate" priority.

Mr. Sainsbury: The first priority for the European regional development fund is clearly objective 1. The Government consider that objective 2 comes next and should be given clear priority over other operations by this fund.

Multi-level Marketing

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will bring forward proposals to require all multi-level marketing associations to belong to an organisation enforcing the standards of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Mr. Leigh: No. I have not seen any evidence of the need for such a requirement.

Offshore Licensing

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will make it his policy to withdraw from the 14 round of offshore licences those blocks of the Pembrokeshire coast that are likely to impact on the Skomer marine nature reserve;

(2) if he will make it his policy to withdraw from the 14 round of offshore licences those blocks in Cardigan bay which are likely to have impact on those areas which qualify for designation as special protection areas under the EC directive on the conservation of wild birds.

Mr. Eggar: Blocks to be offered in the second stage of the 14th round at the end of July are still under consideration. Potential impact on the environment will be taken into account before any blocks are released for licensing.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what environmental conditions are to be attached to exploration licences issued under the 14 offshore licensing round;

(2) what consideration will be given to the likely effect on the marine environment in assessing licence applications during the 14 offshore licensing round;

(3) whether he will withdraw from the 14 offshore licensing round those blocks which include marine sites of international nature conservation importance.

Mr. Eggar: My officials are currently finalising consultations with other Departments and interested parties to see which blocks can be offered for licence in the second stage of the round at the end of July. The Department of the Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department, fishing organisations, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds are among those consulted. Where blocks covering areas of environmental importance are offered, the offers will be subject to conditions. These conditions, as in 12th round awards, will reflect the nature and degree of concerns at issue on each block. In the 14th round companies will be asked to provide an environmental statement covering the proposed operators' policy towards environmental protection and this will form part of the criteria by which applications are judged.

Economic Advice

Mr. Milligan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what arrangements he is making for economic advice in his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: Dr. Walter Eltis, director general of the National Economic Development Office will be assisting me as my chief economic adviser on a part-time basis until his appointment as director general comes to an end on 31 December 1992 and thereafter on a full-time basis.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Milligan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will respond to the fourth report from the Energy Select Committee of Session 1991-92, on renewable energy.

Mr. Eggar: I have today placed a copy of the Government's response to the Energy Select Committee report on renewable energy in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 14 May, *Official Report*, column *169*, if he will break down the figures provided by *(a)* private sector, *(b)* generating boards and *(c)* the European Commission.

Mr. Eggar: The answer can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Fine Animal Hair Goods

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what specific steps he proposes to take to ensure that all member states honour the terms of the China/EC bilateral treaty, as it relates to the shipment of fine animal hair goods against agreed quotas; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy that any proven over-shipment of fine animal hair goods from China in the last five years will be compensated for in the round of negotiations leading to a new bilateral EC/China treaty to take effect in January 1993;

(3) if he will create a separate sub-limit exclusive to cashmere fibre within the next agreement with China on fine animal hair goods;

(4) what steps he is taking to address difficulties relating to trade in fine animal hair goods from the Republic of Mongolia.

Mr. Needham: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Libya (Sanctions)

Mr. Jessel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether, in relation to the application by Leppid Ace International Ltd., of King street, Twickenham, to export 5,000 handcuffs, and 1,000 wooden truncheons, helmets, anti-riot shields and field suits to Libya for use by the Libyan police, such exports are consistent with the United Nations resolutions on sanctions; what advice has been given by the United Nations as to whether the Libyan police are paramilitary in this context; whether the United Nations resolution is mandatory or discretionary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what measures the Government are taking to change the small firms loan guarantee scheme to meet their needs in 1992;

(2) what discussions he has had with external organisations regarding the future of the small firms loan guarantee scheme since 9 April;

(3) for each year of the operation of the small firms loan guarantee scheme what is *(a)* the number of companies assisted in that year which had by April gone into receivership and *(b)* the sum paid out to the lending banks under that scheme;

(4) how many firms have received money through the small firms loan guarantee scheme each financial year since its inception in 1981;

(5) what was the total sum guaranteed through the small firms loan guarantee scheme in each financial year from its inception in 1981.

Mr. Leigh: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Export Licence Fraud

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) of 6 July, *Official Report*, column *28*, what plans he has to pursue further the issue of fraudulent export control licence documentation with Mr. Tim Kelsey.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* As I informed the House on 8 July, I had already asked Mr. Kelsey, through his editor, to supply any evidence he had about the fraudulent use of end-user certificates so that my Department might follow up his allegations. He has not done so.

Thermal Measurement Ltd.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he received the letter from the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth dated 27 April about Thermal Measurement Ltd.; when it was transferred to the Department of the Environment; when he notified the hon. Member of the transfer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* My hon. Friend wrote to me on 27 April. The letter was received on 29 April. Following advice from officials, the case was transferred to the Department of the Environment since it fell within their areas of responsibility. My hon. Friend was informed of this in a letter of 7 July. I understand that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State replied to my hon. Friend on 14 July. I regret the delay in dealing with this case.

Orimulsion

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much orimulsion was imported in each year since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* Imports of orimulsion in each year were:

	thousand tonnes
1989	47
1990	156
1991	465

Relocation

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the number of civil servants in his Department who could be relocated to provincial centres as part of the policy of devolving and decentralising Government Departments.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* I am currently reviewing the location of London-based DTI staff, but I expect there to be only limited potential for further relocation. Over 50 per cent. of DTI staff are already located outside London.

Cashmere

Sir David Steel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will urge all member states to *(a)* honour the China-EC bilateral treaty negotiated in their name as members of the European Community, *(b)* provide compensation by reduction of units equivalent to the ownership of cashmere from the next round of negotiations with China due to commence in September this year for the implementation in January 1993, *(c)* create a separate sub-limit exclusive to cashmere within the agreement, and *(d)* recognise that the same problems apply to future negotiations with Mongolia.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* I will write to the right hon. Gentleman.

Environment Awards

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the countries and projects, respectively, that won the European better environment awards for industry this year.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

First prizes this year went to:

Good environmental management category—Techagri M, Srl, of Italy, for an integrated scheme, involving farmers and other sections of food production, that makes use of recycled by-products, to reduce greatly any need for chemical fertilisers.

Clean technology category—Shell International Chemie Maatschappij BV, the Netherlands, for a catalytic system to clean up poisonous gaseous oxides of nitrogen (NO_x) from industrial exhausts.

Eco product category—Papeteries Matussière et Forest, of Lyon, for a technological breakthrough in recycled paper.

Recovery of waste category—Hovione Socieda Quimica, of Portugal, for a treatment plant at an antibiotics factory to recover solvent waste chemicals.

Highly recommended award winners were:

Good environmental management—BP Exploration, UK, for the good management of its on-shore Southern England oil-field—Wytch Farm, Dorset.

Clean technology category—A combined British entry from the University of York and Contract Chemicals Ltd. for a new form of catalyst based on clay that has large potential to improve, environmentally, a range of chemical processes.

Eco product category—BP Chemicals, UK, for a new airfield runway de-icer that does no harm to fish or other life when it runs off into water-courses.

Recovery of waste category—a process for recycling scrap motor car tyres into useful material, from the Dutch firm, Vredestein Icopro BV.

Technology transfer category, for technologies that can be transferred to third world countries—the French operation, GPS Salt Producers and Organisation/Univers-Sel, that enables villagers in west Africa to recover salt without the need to burn timber.

Human Rights Ethics

Ms. Abbott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy for the human rights ethics of a country to be taken into consideration prior to permitting trade between that country and Britain.

Mr. Needham: I will write to the hon. Lady.

Disclosure of Information

Mr. Duncan-Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to end unnecessary secrecy and to promote openness in his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: My officials are taking part in an interdepartmental review of restrictions on disclosure of information and will consider the scope for any relaxation in the present arrangements.

WALES

European Year of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993, the European Year of the Elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office will, of course, participate in events being organised at the UK level and we will also consider proposals for events in Wales as appropriate.

Ozone-Depleting Chemicals

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times the Government have utilised the powers to prevent emissions of ozone-depleting substances from industrial processes since the passing into law of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Environment on 15 July.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to introduce a mandatory recovery scheme for the recycling of CFCs.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside.

Local Government

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received which advocate the maintenance of each district council in Mid-Glamorgan in their present form; and if he will break the figures down according to current district council areas.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has received no representations advocating the maintenance of each district council in Mid-Glamorgan in their present form. There is widespread support, in Mid-Glamorgan as elsewhere, for replacement of the present district councils and county councils by unitary authorities.

Dentistry

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will extend the role of community dentists to include patients who are currently denied access to general dental practitioners who refuse to treat national health service patients.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The community dental service is obliged to provide facilities for a full range of treatment to patients who have experienced difficulty in obtaining treatment in the general dental service.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of those family health services

authorities in Wales that have contacted his Department to express concern as to their inability to provide national health service dental services due to the shortage of dentists willing to be employed on family health services authority pay scales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No family health services authority in Wales has, to date, expressed concern to the Department that it would be unable to recruit salaried dentists.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the effect of the current dispute on the time taken for people to obtain dental treatment.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The time taken for people to obtain dental treatment will vary from area to area according to local circumstances. If patients are unable to obtain treatment within a reasonable period they should approach their family health services authority for assistance.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library the criteria each family health services authority in Wales uses to measure cross-infection rates in dental surgeries.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The measuring of cross-infection rates is a matter for each family health services authority. Information on techniques used by individual authorities is not held centrally. However, guidance on cross-infection control is issued by the Department from time to time and I refer to the answer which was given to the hon. Gentleman on 10 July 1991, *Official Report*, column *388*.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of dentists in Wales in the national health service and that number as a percentage of dentists in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Provisional figures as at 30 September 1991 show that there were 832 dentists in the general dental service in Wales. This represented 4·5 per cent. of the United Kingdom figure of 18,621.

As at 30 September 1990, the latest information available, there were 292—207·9 whole-time equivalent—dentists in the hospital and community dental services. This represented 6·2 per cent. of the United Kingdom figure of 4,676, or 6·5 per cent. of the whole-time equivalent of 3,182·2.

Housing Associations

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps towards the withdrawal of the consultation document, "Improving the Effectiveness of Housing Association Development and Management".

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will continue to encourage housing associations to discuss with potential tenants their housing designs before commencing new build;

(2) if he intends to permit housing associations to continue to place contracts with builders for *(a)* 10 units, *(b)* 10 to 20 units, *(c)* 20 to 30 units, *(d)* 30 to 40 units and *(e)* 40 to 50 units;

(3) if he has any plans to reduce the provision of housing association new build in rural areas by introducing a minimum threshold number of new units to be contracted for in a limited geographical area;

(4) if he has any plans to introduce changes in the operation of housing associations that would reduce the percentage of new build provided by small builders.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: These are matters for Housing for Wales to consider in the first instance. The board has just issued a relevant consultation document entitled, "Improving the Effectiveness of Housing Association Development and Management".

Oystermouth Bus Station

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reason he decided to call in the planning application for the Oystermouth bus station, Swansea.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The application raises matters of more than local significance.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has visited the site of the proposed development at the Oystermouth bus station, Swansea.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the way in which his Department has dealt with the two planning applications for the development of land at the Oystermouth bus station, Swansea.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Both applications have been dealt with in accordance with the statutory procedures.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has agreed to an extension of time for the applicant to negotiate with Swansea city council on the proposed development at Oystermouth bus station, Swansea, after he had first called in the application.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Twice.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will announce a date by which he will decide whether to order a public inquiry into the current planning application to develop the Oystermouth bus station, Swansea.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A decision on whether to hold a public inquiry will be made in the near future.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate in relation to the current application before Swansea city council for planning consent at the Oystermouth bus station *(a)* the dates of any meetings he has had with any objectors, *(b)* those present at the meetings, *(c)* the dates of any meetings his officials have had with any objectors, *(d)* those present at the meetings with officials and *(e)* the number of representations he has had for the application to be called in; if he will place copies of the representations in *(e)* the Library; and when he made the decision to call in the application.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Several representations have been made including 15 in writing. It is not normal practice to

place copies of representations on call-in references in the Library of the House. A decision to call in the application was made on 9 July 1992.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions his officials have had on the current planning application regarding the Oystermouth bus station, Swansea with officials of Swansea city council.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None apart from a response to a request from officers of Swansea city council on 10 July 1992 about any additional information required as a result of the call-in direction.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many industrial process operators have yet to apply for Environmental Protection Act 1990 authorisation in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The responsibility for implementing the provisions of part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in Wales is split between Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and district councils. HMIP is responsible for dealing with applications for integrated pollution control from those industrial processes with generally a greater potential for pollution while district councils administer air pollution control over the less polluting processes.

These new controls are being phased in over a period of time—applications may be made up to September 1992 for local authority processes and to January 1996 for HMIP processes—and it would not be possible to estimate at this stage how many outstanding applications have yet to be made.

Any process operator who does not apply for authorisation within the allocated time is liable to prosecution.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what visits he has made to his EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department is committed to easing, wherever appropriate, the regulatory burdens on small businesses, especially through the deregulation initiative co-ordinated by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. I have made no visits to discuss deregulation with EC counterparts since 18 April.

Unwanted Medicine

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is planning to allow pharmacists to continue to make arrangements for the collection and disposal of unwanted medicines without having to complete consignment notes giving a description of the waste, its chemical constituents and their concentrations and total quantity and source.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Pharmacists receiving unwanted medicines are subject to a wide range of waste management controls including a requirement to complete consignment notes. Representations from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain on the controls that apply to the disposal of unwanted medicines are being considered in the context of the review of the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980.

Housing for Wales

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a list of any new appointments he has made during the last 12 months to the board of Housing for Wales, together with the name of the persons or bodies that made the nomination, a summary of the experience of the nominees in housing matters and the date of appointment.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I will write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Planning Applications

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each of the last three years in relation to every planning application he has called in for his own determination *(a)* the date he called them in, *(b)* the Ordnance Survey grid reference squares of the sites, *(c)* the precise reasons underlying his decisions to call them in and *(d)* the subsequent result of the decision.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is as follows. Decisions relating to applications for listed building consent are not included. All the applications were called in because it was considered that they raised matters of more than local significance.

Applications called-in 1989-90 (1 April 1989–March 1990)

Proposed Development	*Call-in Date*	*Subsequent Result*
Proposed Porthcawl Marina Grid Reference—SS 8200 7680	24 April 1989	Not yet determined
Proposed Deeside Waterfront —SJ 2865 7112 to SJ 3092 7220	17 April 1989	Application withdrawn 15 June 1989
Proposed Dwellings, Land Adjacent to Eshowe, Wiston, Dyfed —SN 0217 1807	28 April 1989	Permission refused 20 January 1989
Proposed Tourism and Leisure Development, Glyn Rhonwy, Llanberis, Gwynedd —SH 5685 6080	28 July 1989	Application not received
Proposed Flint By-Pass —SJ 2700 - 716	16 August 1989	Permission refused 17 September 1990

Proposed Development	*Call-in Date*	*Subsequent Result*
Proposed Residential Development and Golf Course, Tymawr and Bailea Farms, Gilwern, Gwent —SO 2550 - 1570	23 February 1990	Application not received
Proposed conversion of Redundant Farm Buildings, into a residence, Runston Farm, Shirenewton, Gwent —ST 4943 9180	4 December 1989	Permission granted 20 December 1990

Departure Applications	*Called-In*	*Present Position*
1989-90		
Land adjoining Gilwern Park Roads and other side works for Industrial and commercial development —ST 2580 1500	26 May 1989	Not yet determined
Residential Development at Loo Choo Farm, Haverfordwest —SM 9415 1645	27 July 1989	Permission refused 1 August 1990

Applications called-in 1990-91 (1 April 1990–31 March 1991)

Proposed Development	*Call-in Date*	*Subsequent Result*
Proposed Opencast Mining, Pwll Du, Blaenavon, Gwent	7 June 1990	Not yet determined
Proposed Retail Park, Rhuddlan Road, Rhyl, Clwyd —SJ 0227 7952	25 April 1990	Permission granted 10 June 1991
Proposed River Protection Work, Morfordian, Llanidloes, Powys —SN 9647 8557	4 October 1990	Not yet determined
Proposed Wind Farm, Mynydd Cemaes, Cemaes, Powys SH 8700 0800	22 November 1990	Permission granted 19 September 1991
Proposed Landfill Site, Pen-y-Bont, Chirk, Wrexham, Clwyd —SJ 2925 4165	1 March 1991	Application withdrawn 15 March 1991
Proposed Diversion and Upgrading in parts of B4248 between Brynmawr and Blaenavon, Gwent	6 December 1990	Not yet determined
Proposed Riverside Development, Caerleon, Newport, Gwent —ST 3450 9075	6 February 1991	Application withdrawn 15 May 1992
Proposed Mixed Development, Oystermouth Bus Station, Mumbles, Swansea —SS 6160 8825	25 March 1991	Application withdrawn 12 March 1992

Applications called-in 1991-92 (1 April 1991–31 March 1992)

Proposed Development	*Call-in Date*	*Subsequent Result*
Proposed Coal Storage and Screening Plant, Land West of Griffin Valley, Pwll Du, Gwent —SO 2325 1150	23 April 1991	Not yet determined
Proposed Refuse Disposal Site, Blaen Pig Void, Pwll Du Gwent —SO 2400 1150	23 April 1991	Not yet determined
Proposed Extension, Masonic Hall, Tower Hill, Denbigh, Clwyd —SJ 6514 6602	11 July 1991	Application withdrawn 28 October 1991
Proposed Extraction and Processing of Limestone, Cilyrychen, Quarry and Glangwenlais Quarry, Llandybie, Ammanford, Dyfed —SN 6100 1650	23 October 1991	Application withdrawn 10 June 1992
Proposed Oil and Gas Terminal, Point of Ayr, Talacre, Clwyd —SJ 1235 8390	16 December 1991	Not yet determined
Proposed Workshop Unit and Car Track, Land South of Newton Road, Wentloog, Cardiff —ST 2365 7833	2 January 1992	Application withdrawn 21 January 1992
Proposed Conversion of former Coach House into 6 Self Contained Dwellings, Garthmyl Hall, Garthmyl, Welshpool. Powys —SO 1895 9890	20 December 1991	Not yet determined

Departure Applications	*Called-In*	*Present Position*
Croes Bleddyn Farm Itton Chepstow Golf Course and associated access road and Car Parking —ST 4915 9625	7 February 1992	Application withdrawn 31 March 1992
P33/1482 Porthcasseg Farm St. Arvans, Chepstow 18 hole golf course —ST 5250 9770	7 February 1992	Application withdrawn 21 May 1992

Clinical Waste

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the landfill waste disposal sites in Wales licensed to accept clinical waste.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the district councils, which are responsible for licensing such sites.

Environmental Protection Act

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many additional posts have been created by local authorities in Wales to undertake work under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of full-time equivalent manual and non-manual staff employed on environmental health by Welsh councils was 1,460 on March 1992, an increase of some 8 per cent. on the March 1991 figures.

The Department does not have details of how this increase was distributed between the various environmental health functions.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office's broad objectives are set out in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1992-93 to 1994-96: Departmental Report by the Welsh Office", Cm. 1916.

Civil Servants (Shareholdings)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Guidance based on the civil service pay and conditions of service code covering the personal interests and conduct of civil servants, including the use of official knowledge for private gain, is contained in the Welsh Office handbook which is available to all staff. This instructs staff on the procedures to be followed when a potential conflict of interest arises. Staff are reminded of the guidance from time to time.

Any self-reported or otherwise reported private interest, including shareholding, of a member of staff is considered and recorded in order to highlight a potential conflict of interest. If there is potential conflict, appropriate action is taken to avoid it. No record is kept of the number of such reports.

The same arrangements apply to Cadw, the only next steps agency within the Welsh Office.

Skin Cancer

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of deaths in each year from 1988 to 1991 attributable to skin cancer in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of registered deaths to residents of Wales in each year from 1988 to 1991 where the underlying cause of death was skin cancer are shown in the following table:

	Malignant melanoma of skin (ICD 172)	*Other malignant neoplasm of skin (ICD 173)*
1988	47	36
1989	65	29
1990	75	30
1991	75	29

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Farming Accidents

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of deaths in farm accidents in Wales in 1991; what was the number as a percentage of farming fatalities overall in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: There were five fatal injuries in the agricultural sector in Wales reported to Health and Safety Commission enforcing authorities in 1990-91, representing 7 per cent. of the United Kingdom figure of 71 fatal injuries for the same year. Provisional estimates for Wales and Great Britain for 1991-92 are 10 and 57 respectively. Comparable figures for the European Community are not available.

Teachers

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* advisers and *(b)* advisory teachers have been employed in each local education authority area in Wales in each year since 1987.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on *(a)* the number of advisers in each local education authority in Wales is not collected on a formal basis.

Information on *(b)* the number of advisory teachers has only been collected as a separate category since 1990 and this is shown in the following table:

(b) Advisory Teachers[1]

Authority	*1991*	*1990*
Clwyd	0	0
Dyfed	10	10
Gwent	22	17
Gwynedd	12	10
Mid Glamorgan	66	44
Powys	23	16
South Glamorgan	27	26
West Glamorgan	76	83
WALES	236	206

[1] The source of this information is the Department of Education Form 618G which states:
"Advisory teachers are defined as qualified teachers paid under the terms of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document but employed for purposes other than teaching. Does not include advisers or inspectors paid on other scales".

Schools Inspection

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people from Wales qualified to inspect schools in Wales;

(2) when he expects to appoint the Chief Education Inspector for Wales;

(3) how many inspectorate teams will be required *(a)* to inspect 25 per cent. of secondary schools in 1993-94, *(b)* to inspect 50 per cent. of secondary schools in 1994-95, *(c)*

to inspect 25 per cent. of primary schools in 1994-95 and *(d)* to complete a full inspection of all secondary and primary schools by 1997.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) on 15 July, in which I announced the appointment of the chief inspector for Wales from September 1992. Inspections by teams headed by a registered inspector will be carried out every five years and will start for secondary schools from September 1993 and for primary and special schools from September 1994. It will be for the chief inspector to decide which inspectors should be registered in the light of their qualifications, experience and following training by Her Majesty's inspector.

When the new system is fully in force in 1995-96, there will be inspections of some 45 secondary schools and some 360 primary, special and nursery schools a year.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in his explorations with Welsh TV concerning how the energy efficiency message can be promoted through popular television programmes in relation to the 1990-91 annual report of the ministerial group on energy efficiency.

Mr. David Hunt: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has responsibility for energy efficiency in my Department a task, which he has inherited from his predecessor. He will continue to explore with Welsh TV ways in which the benefits of energy efficiency can be promoted in their popular programme.

A494

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes a public inquiry on the A494 road widening project at Queensferry in Ewloe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: It is too early to comment on whether I will hold a public inquiry in respect of the proposed improvement of the A494 between River Dee and Ewloe. Once the public consultation exercise is completed I shall consider the comments received and decide whether to protect a route for planning purposes. Should I do so, draft statutory orders, as required by the Highways Act 1980, will be published in due course. Anyone wishing to comment or object to the orders will have the opportunity to do so at that time and depending on the objections received a decision will be made on whether to hold a public inquiry.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has so far received from residents concerning the A494 road widening scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department is currently undertaking a public consultation exercise in respect of proposals to improve a section of the A494 between the River Dee and Ewloe; 463 representations have been received to date.

National Curriculum Tests

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he intends to make for the national curriculum tests in Wales in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The arrangements for the assessment of seven and 14-year-olds in schools in Wales will parallel those for schools in England as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education. Additionally for schools teaching the subject of Welsh pupils will be assessed in their language skills in this subject where it is taught either as a first or as a second language.

The assessment of seven-year-olds will, in 1993, be extended to include the subjects of history and geography. Additionally provison is being made to extend the period in which teachers will be required to administer the tests until four weeks before the end of the summer term.

Next year's assessment of 14-year-olds will be the first under the statutory arrangements. They will cover the core subjects of English, Welsh, mathematics and science together with technology and Welsh second language. The key features will include:

assessment by means of a combination of teachers' own assessment and short, unseen written examinations. Pupils' oral skills in Welsh and their designing and making skills in technology will be tested by longer standardised tasks.

all results, which will be reported to parents, will be subject to a rigorous audit by independent examining bodies.

test results will be preferred to teacher assessments in determining overall subject scores but both are available in relation to the same attainment target with teacher assessments used in relation to those attainment targets which are not tested.

the tests will be conducted over a two-week period beginning 7 and 14 June so as to provide organisational flexibility for schools and to minimise the clash with the GCSE timetable in Wales.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Borrowings

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will give a breakdown of how much has been borrowed by the Commissioners for each year since 1989; and if he will set out the name of the lender and the rates of interest charged for each loan.

Mr. Michael Alison: As shown in their annual reports and accounts the additional net amount borrowed by the Church Commissioners in 1989 amounted to £133 million and in 1990 to £70 million. The total outstanding at the end of 1990 amounted to £518 million which was reduced to £383 million in the course of 1991 by net repayments of £135 million.

I will write to the hon. Member with further information.

SCOTLAND

European Year for Older People

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for his Department to celebrate in 1993, the European Year for Older People; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 13 July, which covered the United Kingdom position.

Scotland is represented at the United Kingdom advisory group and Scottish Office officials are working closely with those of the Department of Health in the preparations for the year. All the task groups include members from Scotland who are actively involved in the development of a United Kingdom programme which will include a range of Scottish events.

The Government have acknowledged the importance of the concerns of older people by including in the programme for the United Kingdom presidency of the EC a major international conference "The Social Integration of the Older Person", which will take place in St. Andrews on 30 September to 2 October 1992 and which will serve as a prelude to the European Year for Older People.

Assisted Places

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was *(a)* the expenditure on regional assistance, *(b)* the number of offers and *(c)* the associated numbers of (i) new jobs and (ii) safeguarded jobs for each assisted area in Scotland for the most recent available year;

(2) if he will give the expenditure on regional development grants in each of the assisted travel-to-work areas in Scotland for the latest available year;

(3) if he will give *(a)* the expenditure on regional enterprise grants and *(b)* the number of offers in each assisted travel-to-work area in Scotland for the latest available year.

Mr. Stewart: The information is given in the table.

Regional assistance in Scotland
1991-92

	Regional selective assistance				*Regional development grants*[1]	*Regional enterprise grants*	
Travel-to-work-area	*Gross expenditure*[2] *£ Thousands*	*Number of offers accepted*	*Forecast new jobs*[3]	*Forecast safeguarded jobs*[3]	*Gross expenditure*[2] *£ Thousands*	*Gross expenditure*[2] *£ Thousands*	*Number of offers accepted*
Alloa	641·0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Arbroath	1,126·0	3	70	80	29·2	18·6	—
Ayr	3,005·0	1	30	0	154·8	—	—
Badenoch	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bathgate	11,929·5	13	950	250	3,746·0	265·6	23
Campbeltown	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumnock and Sanquhar	246·0	7	260	0	3·0	29·1	5
Dumbarton	716·0	2	30	0	9·0	56·6	4
Dundee	2,866·6	11	340	120	944·7	192·6	17
Dunfermline	719·0	3	70	0	—	41·9	12
Dunoon and Bute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Forres	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Falkirk	2,334·0	3	20	70	—	—	—
Girvan	19·0	1	10	0	—	—	—
Glasgow	21,319·7	62	2,460	720	2,912·6	1,262·2	155
Greenock	4,717·5	3	220	0	1,119·7	19·5	2
Invergordon and Dingwall	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Irvine	3,978·7	7	470	30	2,095·2	130·5	18
Kilmarnock	454·0	5	110	30	49·6	84·2	10
Kirkcaldy	2,294·0	8	640	130	—	25·0	17
Lanarkshire	6,065·9	30	810	420	1,128·3	545·6	69
Lochaber	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newton Stewart	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Skye and Wester Ross	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Andrews	224·0	1	30	30	—	—	—
Stewartry	400·0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stirling	170·0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stranraer	430·0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sutherland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wick	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Includes expenditure on original and revised Regional Development Grant schemes. The Regional Development Grant scheme was closed to new applications on 31 March 1988.
[2] Includes payments on offers accepted in previous years.
[3] Forecast at time of offer.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each recipient company and the level of grant provided through regional assistance since 1984-85 in each of the assisted travel-to-work areas.

Mr. Stewart: Information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In the period 1 April 1984 to 30 June 1992, over 11,000 projects in Scotland have benefited from regional assistance grant offers. Details, including the level of grant, the company name and the location of the project, of projects assisted

by regional development grant or regional selective assistance, where the grant exceeds certain values, are published quarterly in "Department of Employment Gazette"—tables 9.6 and 9.8. Similar details were published in "British Business" until this publication ceased in September 1989. Copies of both publications are in the Library. Details of projects receiving regional enterprise grants are not published.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many fishing vessels from Scotland have been registered in the United Kingdom fishing vessel register for each year for the last 20 years.

Sir Hector Monro: The fishing vessel register held by the Department of Transport does not identify where the United Kingdom vessels are based. However, table 1 in the publication "The Scottish Fishing Fleet at 31 December 1990"—ISBN No. 0748 006060—shows the number of fishing vessels based in Scotland each year from 1965 onwards and is available from the House of Commons Library. A similar publication for 1991 is due out shortly.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the fishing industry in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Given the poor state of a number of our main fish stocks, improved conservation has been a major priority of the Government over recent years. The need to reduce fishing effort is now paramount and our recent package, which includes a substantial financial commitment from the Government for vessel decommissioning is intended to achieve that. I am determined to do all I can to secure a good long-term future for the industry.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a table showing the amount of very sheltered housing for the elderly provided by *(a)* district councils, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* other public agencies, for each district council area in Scotland as at 31 March 1991 or the latest date available.

Mr. Lang: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Parliamentary Constituencies

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the possible implications of future changes in the structure of local government on the shape of parliamentary boundaries.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations. The Boundary Commissions Bill, which is now before Parliament, requires that the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland, in carrying out its current review of parliamentary boundaries, has regard to local government areas which are in operation at whichever is the earlier of the date of its report or 1 June 1994.

Speeding

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many police forces in Scotland are fully equipped with remote red light cameras and speed camera technology to meet the requirements, introduced on 1 July, of the Road Traffic Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Peebles High School

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he intends to respond to Peebles high school board's response to consultation paper by Scottish Office Education Department "School Management: The Way Ahead"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I am at present giving careful consideration to the response from the Peebles high school board and to the other responses to the consultation paper on school management issued by the Scottish Office Education Department earlier this year. I intend shortly to bring forward firm proposals.

Road Safety

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve road safety education in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Housing Organisations

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives he intends to take in support of the work of housing associations and co-operatives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I shall write to the right hon. Member as soon as possible.

Scottish Homes

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will review the time scale which projects such as Maryhill housing association's Barnes road renewal are required to accept due to Scottish Homes's uncertainty over its own funding from year to year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The allocation of funds to individual housing association projects is entirely a matter for Scottish Homes and, as such, the hon. Member may wish to pursue her particular constituency interest direct with the chief executive of Scottish Homes. Scottish Homes is allowed to pre-commit up to 80 per cent. of any year's expenditure programme into the next year; this should minimise uncertainty for individual projects.

Electoral Registration

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to encourage and improve electoral registration in Scotland; what additional resources he intends to provide for this purpose; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Road Junctions

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the average cost to his Department of a trunk road junction alteration feasibility study; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The cost of a trunk road scheme feasibility study may vary considerably depending on factors such as the scale and complexity of the proposals and topographical constraints. To calculate an "average cost" for junction alterations would serve little practical purpose and could not be taken as an indicative figure.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland is he will state the total cost involved in preparing, printing and delivering his Department's publication, "A9 Trunk Road: North Kessock Junction"; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Potato Storage

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to reveal the successful applicants for the grant aid provided under the EC processing and marketing scheme towards the provision of potato storage facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: It is for the European Commission to decide which projects should receive grant aid. Final decisions on the current round were taken earlier this month and I expect to be able to announce the outcome shortly. The next round should be decided by the end of December.

Housing Associations

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will give consideration to the difficulties caused to housing associations when they are expected to start work on projects based on agreement in principle, but with no guarantee of funding until completion.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am not aware of any such difficulties. The grant procedures operated by Scottish Homes do not allow housing associations to start site works until the scheme has been approved, and a formal commitment to funding has been given. Grant is paid out, thereafter, in tranches, as the works proceed.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Stewart: The Government continue to place a high priority on helping small businesses, through improvements to the business climate, through deregulation and through specific programmes of support and assistance.

Small businesses are of crucial importance to the Scottish economy and are continuing to benefit from the comprehensive schemes of support which the Government have introduced. My Department has overall responsibility for assisting small firms in Scotland while specific schemes are delivered mainly through Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the network of 22 local enterprise companies. In addition to providing services specific to Scotland, these bodies also have responsibility for the delivery and monitoring in Scotland of United Kingdom services on behalf of other Departments including the Department of Trade and Industry. Measures operated directly by my Department to assist small business includes the regional enterprise grant for investment, regional enterprise grant for innovation and regional selective assistance. For the period 1991-92 my Department made 106 offers of regional selective assistance to the value of over £14·5 million to small companies—those employing fewer than 200. This contributed to the creation of 2,120 planned new jobs and the safeguarding of 310 existing jobs. Under both the investment and innovation elements of the regional enterprise grants scheme, 360 offers to the value of £3·9 million were made in Scotland in 1991-92 to companies employing fewer than 25 people, contributing to the creation of 1,450 planned new jobs and the safeguarding of 1,210 existing jobs.

The success of these and other Government policies is demonstrated by statistics for VAT registration. A total of 9,800 additional companies registered for VAT in 1980. In 1990 the comparable figure was 14,900, an increase of 52 per cent. At the end of 1990 the total number of VAT-registered businesses in Scotland was 115,100, an increase of 21,700 or 23 per cent. on the comparable figure for 1979.

Electoral Registration

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the fee paid to each of the returning officers in Scotland for general election duties in March and April in the current year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Anglers

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he intends to respond to the representations made by the Scottish Anglers National Association; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Officials from my Department will be meeting the Scottish Anglers National Association to discuss their representations shortly.

ReChem

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to the amount and type of toxic materials deposited by ReChem in the City of Glasgow; if he will list all such sites; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: This information is not available centrally. The City of Glasgow district council is responsible for monitoring records of wastes consigned

under the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980 for disposal in the city of Glasgow. I understand that the council has no record of such wastes being deposited by ReChem.

Civil Servants (Shareholdings)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I shall reply to the hon. Member in writing as soon as the information is available.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Lang: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Women's Refuges

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce legislation making it a statutory requirement on local authorities to provide refuges for women.

Mr. Lang: I shall write to the right hon. Member as soon as possible.

Housing Capital Receipts

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the results of his review of housing capital receipts will be made known to the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I shall write to the right hon. Member as soon as possible.

Homelessness

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* registered homeless and *(b)* unregistered homeless, in Scotland in each year since 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I shall write to the right hon. Member as soon as possible.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision is made in central Scotland for sites of special scientific interest of value to the migratory bean goose.

Sir Hector Monro: No sites of special scientific interest have been notified in central Scotland in respect of bean geese. Scottish Natural Heritage is investigating how the habitat used by the small number of bean geese which winter in the area might most effectively be protected.

Rescue Archaeology

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Government's policy with regard to rescue archaeology in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Our policy is to ensure that rescue excavations are carried out whenever possible, to record archaeological sites which would otherwise be lost. Where the threat is from development we look to the developer to meet the costs of the excavation.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance his Department has issued to planning authorities in respect of rescue archaeological excavations where the urgency has been caused by *(a)* natural causes and *(b)* a development project.

Sir Hector Monro: In the case of *(a)*, none; in the case of *(b)* archaeological desk assessment guidelines.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been spent on or allocated to the work of the central excavation unit in 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 in *(a)* Orkney, *(b)* Shetland and *(c)* Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: The central excavation unit has not existed for a number of years. The amount of money spent by Historic Scotland and its predecessor body on rescue excavations in the years in question, with an estimate for 1992-93, was a follows:

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*[1]1992-93*
Orkney	0·098	0·108	0·151	0·102
Shetland	0·041	0·005	0·028	0·105
Scotland	0·996	1·373	1·605	1·016

[1] Estimated.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the annual budget of the central excavation unit was allocated in each of the last five years to rescue excavation in *(a)* Orkney, *(b)* Shetland and *(c)* Scotland; and what sum has been earmarked for each of these areas in the 1992-93 budget for rescue digs.

Sir Hector Monro: The central excavation unit has not existed for a number of years. The percentage of the annual budget for rescue archaeology in Scotland spent by Historic Scotland and its predecessor body in each of the last five years in Orkney and Shetland was a follows:

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Orkney	16	13	10	8	9
Shetland	5	7	4	4	2

The percentage of the total archaeological budget for Scotland spent by Historic Scotland and its predecessor body on rescue archaeology was as follows:

1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
94	86	81	85	87

Resources are not earmarked for particular areas but for projects. The amounts allocated for rescue projects in these areas in 1992-93 are as follows:

	£ million
Orkney	0·102
Shetland	0·105
Scotland	1·016

Conservation

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will request advice from Scottish Natural Heritage on the likely environmental effects of the ending of the conservation management agreements made under the Scottish island agricultural development programme, in March 1993.

Sir Hector Monro: There have been mutual benefits for farmers and crofters and the environment from the measures introduced on the Scottish islands under the agricultural development programme, and I have no reason to believe that these will not continue once the programme is completed next year. If necessary I will of course look to Scottish Natural Heritage for advice on this matter, but do not propose to do so at this time.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to provide continuing support for farmers and crofters in receipt of conservation management agreements under the Scottish islands agricultural development programme beyond March 1993.

Sir Hector Monro: Support for farmers and crofters to continue or to commence environmentally friendly farming practices is available to those who operate in environmentally sensitive areas. In the Scottish islands, part of the Western Isles is presently so designated, and the Shetland islands and the Argyll islands will be given this status on 1 April next year. Other sources of assistance are available to farmers who carry out works which bring environmental benefits, for example, through the farm and conservation grant scheme. More generally, support for conservation management is now inherent under the agreement to revise the common agricultural policy. It is now incumbent on all member states to bring forward further programmes to encourage environmentally sensitive farming.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the actual or planned expenditure, as part of the Scottish islands agricultural development programme, on conservation management agreements for *(a)* Shetland, *(b)* Orkney and *(c)* the inner Hebrides, for each of the five years of the programme.

Sir Hector Monro: Expenditure on environmental management measures in each of the five years of the agricultural development programme is as follows:

	Orkney £	*Shetland* £	*Other ADP islands* £
1988-89	22,082	4,147	[1]17,874
1989-90	139,433	22,193	[1]126,717
1990-91	259,117	44,673	[1]297,408
1991-92	133,336	65,250	[1]241,838
1992-93	185,000	55,650	[2]260,000
TOTAL	738,968	191,913	943,837

[1] Actual.
[2] Committed.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what basis the then Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland made its selection of areas appropriate for designation as environmentally sensitive areas.

Sir Hector Monro: The then Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland put forward its list of priority areas for designation in a third round of environmentally sensitive areas in response to a request from the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department in terms of section 18(1) and (2) of the Agriculture Act 1986. The selection of areas for inclusion in the list was a matter for the council in the light of the guidance issued by the Department.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria his Department has set for the former Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland for application when it is considering areas in Scotland appropriate for designation as environmentally sensitive areas; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: When the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department asked the former Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland to consider areas in Scotland appropriate for designation in a third round of environmentally sensitive areas, it suggested that the areas should be of high conservation interest; that the conservation interest of the areas should, to a considerable extent, depend on maintaining or adopting particular farming practices; and that the areas should be relatively homogeneous in agricultural terms. In addition, the Department asked the council and commission to consider areas suitable for designation in order to protect or enhance heather or other upland vegetation.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what areas were recommended to him for designation as environmentally sensitive areas by the former Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland prior to the announcement in March 1992 of a further five areas in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: The Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland's list of priority areas for designation in a third round of environmentally sensitive areas contained the following areas:

The Inner Hebrides (Islay, Jura, Colonsay, the west coast of Mull, Coll, the Firth of Lorn, Skye, Lochalsh and the Small Isles), the Cairngorms, Shetland, Orkney, South Lochaber, Deeside, and the Outer Hebrides.

The council also recommended the southern uplands as an area suitable for designation in order to enhance and restore upland plant communities. In putting forward these recommendations the council indicated that in its view a larger part of Scotland would also benefit from environmentally sensitive area designation.

West Lothian College

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the latest position on funding the development of West Lothian college.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

New Towns

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number and details of European regional development fund assisted projects within each of the Scottish new towns; and which will be subject to disposal on the dissolution of each of the development corporations.

Mr. Stewart: The European regional development fund —ERDF—has assisted or is assisting a range of projects in the Scottish new towns as follows:

	Number of projects	*Eligible expenditure £ million*	*ERDF Grant £ million*
Cumbernauld Development Corporation	15	12·7	5·8
East Kilbride Development Corporation	8	17·0	7·5
Glenrothes Development Corporation	15	2·6	0·9
Irvine Development Corporation	15	12·5	3·3
Livingston Development Corporation	51	26·4	9·9

Plans for the transfer and disposal of new town assets are currently being formulated in consultation with the development corporations and will take account of the conditions attached to ERDF grants.

Historic Monuments

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when staff at Historic Scotland commenced work for the paper on alternatives to scheduling to provide protection of monuments in Scotland; when it will be completed; and what its findings were.

Sir Hector Monro: Officials in Historic Scotland began an investigation of possible alternatives to scheduling last year. Their findings will be presented to the next meeting of the Ancient Monuments Board, in October.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when the consultants Peat Marwick McLintock commenced their review into the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Scotland); how long the review took; when it was completed; how much it cost; and what its findings were;

(2) if he will instruct the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Scotland) to inform Historic Scotland of all cases on damage to scheduled monuments caused by trees and vegetation; and if he will review the liaison mechanisms between the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Scotland) and Historic Scotland to secure greater efficiency in the preservation of historic monuments.

Sir Hector Monro: I shall write to the hon. Member about these matters.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has made additional resources available for 1992-93 to Historic Scotland in line with the recommendations of the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Resources have been redeployed within Historic Scotland to enable additional staff time to be devoted to scheduling in the current financial year, consistent with recommendation two in the Ancient Monuments Board's report for 1991.

Meeting, St. Andrews House

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he hopes to make a statement on the outcome of the meeting on 13 July at St. Andrews house, Edinburgh between the Minister and the hon. Members for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and for Linlithgow.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Balmoral Estate

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what grants have been given from *(a)* Scottish Natural Heritage or its predecessor bodies and *(b)* the Forestry Commission to the owners of the Balmoral estate, in each of the past 20 years.

Sir Hector Monro: Grants have been paid to the present owners and their predecessors, in respect of what now forms the Balmoral estate, under the following provisions:

Countryside Commission for Scotland:

The Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967.

Forestry Commission:

Dedication Schemes Basis II and III (planting, restocking and management grants).

Woodland Grant Scheme (planting grant).

Water

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* consultations and *(b)* meetings have taken place between representatives of (i) OFWAT, (ii) the National Rivers Authority and (iii) other bodies relevant to water and his Department in 1992; and if he will list the dates and locations of the discussions.

Sir Hector Monro: No departmental meetings have taken place with representatives of OFWAT during 1992. Many circulars and reports prepared by OFWAT are sent for information to the Scottish Office and contact with officials is sometimes necessary to seek clarification or further information on these. Consultations and meetings with NRA officials and the many other bodies concerned with water take place frequently in the course of normal business. It is not practicable to list dates and locations of all such contacts.

Mental Health

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the allocations made to local authorities as mental health specific grant in each year since 1985 in cash and constant terms and *(b)* the proportion of these allocations to projects helping people with dementia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The information required is not currently available, but I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce policies which will impact upon the provision of respite care in hospitals for

people with dementia; what operational aspects of this provision are and will be subjected to compulsory competitive tendering; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve information collection systems in health services and local authorities so that accurate statistics can be collected on the numbers of people with dementia who receive services.

Mr. Stewart: Accurate statistics on those people with dementia receiving hospital treatment are already available.

A multi-disciplinary standing group on community care information requirements is currently being established by social work services group to ensure that local social work, health and housing information systems yield a common minimum set of data for use at local and national level. The group will consist of representatives of policy and statistical interests from social work, health and housing branches in the Scottish Office, and representatives from local authority social work, local authority housing and Scottish Homes and health boards.

At local level these matters are being addressed through joint planning mechanisms.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement on the results of arrangements to monitor the priority that dementia services are given in health board expenditure; how these compare with the recommendations contained in the SHARPEN report of 1988; and what plans he has to change these arrangements;

(2) if he will list those health boards and local authorities which have treated dementia as a separate special needs category in their community care plans; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what duties and responsibilities Scottish health boards have in relation to the development of preventative services in the community for people with dementia; how these are co-ordinated with other agencies; what plans he has to improve joint planning arrangements with agencies including local government; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what plans he has to increase the level of privatisation of long-term care for people with dementia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Housing

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make the sale of Scottish Homes stock in Glasgow open to competitive tender;

(2) if he will make it his policy to suspend the Scottish Homes transfer process in Glasgow while the National Audit Office is investigating the financial position of the Borders region transfer to Waverley Housing;

(3) what is Government policy towards the provision of additional inducements to non-profit-making businesses bidding for Scottish Homes stock;

(4) if he will separate the independent advice role in public sector stock transfer from the disposal agency, Scottish Homes;

(5) whether he is prepared to make finance available for independent advice for tenants targeted for change of landlords by Scottish Homes and various housing associations in Glasgow;

(6) if he will make it his policy to offer choices in stock transfer to tenants of Scottish Homes in Scotland in line with those available to new town tenants;

(7) what is the district valuers assessment of the current tenanted market value of Scottish Homes stock in north west Glasgow within the area being considered for sale to Cube housing association.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Law Commission

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to reply to the question from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central of 18 June, relating to the Scottish Law Commission.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and will arrange for a copy of my letter to be placed in the Library.

Young People (Hardship Payments)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he intends to take to reduce the number of 16 and 17-year-olds applying for severe hardship payments due to their inability to secure a place on a youth training scheme.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am assured by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise that there are sufficient youth training places available throughout Scotland for those young people who want one.

Liaison arrangements exist between the Benefits Agency's severe hardship claims unit based in Glasgow and these organisations and their networks of local enterprise companies, to provide additional help where required to young people claiming a severe hardship allowance while seeking a youth training place. I understand that these arrangements are working satisfactorily.

Elderly People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of national health service beds for the long-term care of elderly people provided through contract arrangements with the private sector for each Scottish health board in each year since 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dangerous Driving

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to increase the maximum penalty for causing death by dangerous driving or by careless driving while under the influence of drink and drugs.

Mr. Lang: The Government recognise understandable public concern about deaths caused by dangerous or careless driving. We propose to increase from five to 10

years the current maximum penalty for such offences at the earliest legislative opportunity. This will allow the courts to deal adequately with the worst offenders.

Parliament House Extension

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the extension to Parliament House to be completed; and what other plans he has for the provision of accommodation for the Supreme court in Edinburgh.

Mr. Lang: The extension to Parliament House will be completed and ready for use by September 1992. Following the completion of the new Edinburgh sheriff court house in 1994 it is proposed that the Lawnmarket building in Edinburgh, suitably refurbished, will be made available for use by the High Court of Justiciary and a phased programme of major repair and refurbishment work undertaken in the accommodation used by the supreme courts in Parliament House. I am inviting interested parties to comment on these proposals which are directed to ensure that the supreme courts in Edinburgh will have fully adequate accommodation well into the next century.

Fisheries Protection Agency

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the annual report and accounts of the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency for 1991-92.

Mr. Lang: I have today published the report, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Historic Scotland

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the annual report and accounts of Historic Scotland for 1991-92.

Mr. Lang: I have today laid in the Libraries of both Houses copies of Historic Scotland's annual report and accounts for 1991-92.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he last met representatives of Scottish chambers of commerce; and what matters were discussed;

(2) when he last met representatives of the Confederation of British Industry (Scotland); and what matters were discussed;

(3) when he last met representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 9 June 1992]:* My colleagues and I frequently meet representatives of these bodies, both formally and informally. Recent subjects discussed include the Scottish economy; the implications of European Community policies; business rates; local government reform; and other matters of interest to business and industry in Scotland. We place a high value on these contacts and look forward to a continuing exchange of views.

Islands Agricultural Development Programme

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the actual or planned expenditure on the Scottish islands agricultural development programme for *(a)* Shetland, *(b)* Orkney and *(c)* the inner Hebrides, for each of the five years of the programme.

Sir Hector Monro: Expenditure under the agricultural development programme for each of the five years is as follows:

	Orkney	*Shetland*	*Other ADP Islands*
	£	£	£
1988-89	1,129,404	419,402	[1]1,351,562
1989-90	2,322,411	816,581	[1]2,619,463
1990-91	3,000,206	1,009,961	[1]3,002,429
1991-92	2,713,556	981,007	[1]2,865,758
1992-93	2,083,209	1,537,811	[2]2,279,363
Total	11,248,786	4,764,762	12,118,575

[1] Actual.
[2] Committed.

Public Appointments

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to ensure that all lists of candidates for public appointments in Scotland contain equal numbers of men and women.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 9 June 1992]:* All public appointments must be made on the basis of aptitude and merit. It is, however, Government policy to ensure that the names of women are included on the shortlist of candidates for public appointments prepared for Ministers' consideration. Good reasons must be given for the absence of women's names.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Lang: Information on public appointments which is held centrally by my Department is not sufficiently comprehensive to enable me to provide the information requested. However, my Department takes all relevant factors into account when considering public appointments.

Spastics Centre, Elderslie

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he plans to visit the Scottish Council for Spastics' Wallace Court residential centre in Elderslie; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 June 1992]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans at present to visit the Scottish Council for Spastics' Wallace Court residential centre in Elderslie.

I fully recognise the valuable services which the council provides. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State maintains regular contact with the council through my Department's representatives on the council's professional advisory committee.

Renfrew District

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has recently given to giving enterprise zone status to any part of Renfrew district; and what criteria he applied in reaching his conclusions.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 11 June 1992]:* Approval has recently been secured for an enterprise zone in Lanarkshire because of the sudden and severe worsening of the economic situation there. This reflects Government policy for enterprise zones which is that no new zones will be created except in very exceptional circumstances. Such circumstances do not bear upon Renfrew district which has the benefit of development area status and the full range of development incentives available from my Department and from Renfrewshire Enterprise.

Publicity

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the total spent on publicity, public relations, publications and press by the Scottish Office in each year since 1982 and the planned expenditure for the financial years 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 11 June 1992]*: The figures are:

	£
1982-83	541,000
1983-84	506,000
1984-85	746,000
1985-86	895,000
1986-87	1,101,000
1987-88	1,704,000
1988-89	1,927,000
1989-90	3,082,000
1990-91	2,640,000
1991-92	2,349,000

Estimated expenditure for 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95 is £3·6 million, £2·9 million and £3 million respectively.

Elderly Forum

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the development of the Elderly Forum movement in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 June 1992]*: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Sports Facilities

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of the Scottish Sports Council to discuss the development of community sports facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 11 June 1992]*: I met the chairman and chief executive of the Scottish Sports Council on Wednesday 3 June. We discussed a number of initiatives which the council is currently promoting, including those which are related to the development of community sports facilities. The council will be keeping me closely in touch with the range of sports matters within its interest. I look forward to further meetings with council representatives from time to time.

Environment Protection Agency

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the CBI in Scotland regarding the proposed Scottish environment protection agency; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: *[holding answer 4th June 1992]:* The Confederation of British Industry submitted on 8 April 1992 its response to the consultation paper on the proposals to create a Scottish environment protection agency. The confederation generally welcomed the proposals and offered helpful and constructive comments in a number of areas. A copy of its response has been placed today in the House Library.

More than 160 responses were received as a result of the consultation exercise and they are currently being considered. An announcement about the final shape of my right hon. Friend's proposals will be made later in the summer.

Official Functions

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each official function *(a)* he has hosted in his position as Secretary of State or *(b)* hosted by the other Scottish Office Ministers or civil servants, since he was appointed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 11 June 1992]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) Functions hosted by the Secretary of State

23 November 1990	Dinner for representatives of Scandinavian Companies in Scotland.
27 November 1990	Buffet lunch to mark the visit to London of the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.
3 December 1991	Reception for Members of the Board of the Scottish Development Agency.
15 January 1991	Reception for the Parliamentary Lobby and Gallery Correspondents.
8 April 1991	Reception to mark the launch of Historic Scotland as an Executive Agency.
8 April 1991	Reception to mark the Japan Festival.
28 April 1991	Reception to mark the Diamond Jubilee of the National Trust for Scotland.
24 May 1991	Reception to mark the visit to Scotland of the Rev. Billy Graham.
12 June 1991	Reception for Scottish Parliamentarians.
21 September 1991	Dinner in honour of His Excellency Crown Prince Naruhito of Japan.
24 September 1991	Buffet lunch to mark the launch of NHS in Scotland "Charter for Health".
7 October 1991	Reception to honour citizens who have assisted the Police.
26 November 1991	Buffet lunch to mark the visit to London of the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.
7 December 1991	Dinner in honour of His Excellency President Masire of Botswana.
7 January 1992	Reception for delegates attending the conference of the University Association for Contemporary European Studies.
20 January 1992	Reception for a delegation of Russian Business and Political Leaders.
22 January 1992	Reception for the Parliamentary Lobby and Gallery Correspondents.
19 February 1992	Dinner in honour of the President of Bavaria.

9 March 1992	Reception to mark the launch of the Community Investment Charter.
9 June 1992	Reception for Scottish Parliamentarians.

(b)(i) Official functions hosted by Mr. Michael Forsyth MP

17 December 1990	Christmas Party for disabled and disadvantaged children.
8 February 1991	Reception for participants in the World Schools Debating Championship.
28 February 1991	Reception to mark the introduction of management reforms in Scottish Further Education Colleges.
11 March 1991	Reception to mark the launch of Scottish Further Education Week.
25 March 1991	Reception to mark the Centenary of the Scottish Football league.
23 April 1991	Reception for delegates to the EC Seed Congress.
8 July 1991	Dinner to mark the visit to Scotland by an Australian Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation.
2 September 1991	Lunch in honour of the New Zealand Education Minister, Dr. Lockwood-Smith.
3 September 1991	Reception for delegates to a conference of the International Federation of Social Workers.
20 September 1991	Reception to mark the 20th Anniversary of the Children's Hearing System.
25 September 1991	Reception for NHS staff in the Greater Glasgow Health Board area.
30 September 1991	Reception for the Japanese Rugby World Cup Team.
1 October 1991	Reception for members of the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum.
8 November 1991	Lunch in honour of the Danish Minister for Education.
2 December 1991	Reception to mark 1991: Year of Sport.
6 December 1991	Reception for drugs and AIDS workers.
9 December 1991	Christmas Party for disabled and disadvantaged children.

(b)(ii) Official functions hosted by Lord James Douglas-Hamilton MP

14 December 1990	Reception to recognise the work of the Voluntary Housing Movement.
15 February 1991	Reception to launch the publication "Civilising the City".
10 May 1991	Reception for the Scout Movement in Scotland.
12 July 1991	Reception for the members of the Butler Trust.
11 November 1991	Buffet lunch to launch the "Scottish Housing Opportunities" booklet.
17 January 1992	Reception for the Business Sponsors of the Arts Incentive Scheme.

(b)(iii) Official functions hosted by Mr. Allan Stewart MP

14 January 1992	Reception for Japanese Inward Investment companies.
22 February 1991	Reception for Enterprise and Education advisers.
14 March 1991	Dinner to promote the Industrial De-regulation Initiative.
28 June 1991	Reception to mark the Silver Jubilee of the General Teaching Council.
25 November 1991	Dinner on the occasion of the visit to Scotland of a European "Quartiers en Crise" delegation.
13 December 1991	Reception to recognise Enterprising Scottish companies.
31 January 1992	Reception for Japanese Inward Investment companies.

(b)(iv) Official functions hosted by Lord Strathclyde

20 March 1991	Reception for the Scottish Travel Trade.
17 May 1991	Dinner on the occasion of the visit to Edinburgh of the European Monetary Committee.
21 June 1991	Reception for agricultural interests, Royal Highland Show.
19 August 1991	Reception for Highlands and Islands interests.

(b)(v) Official functions hosted by Lord Fraser

28 May 1992	Reception to mark the meeting of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and the American College of Surgeons.

(b)(vi) Official functions hosted by Sir Hector Monro, MP

8 May 1992	Reception for the Scottish Tour of Agricultural Attaches.
1 June 1992	Reception to mark the launch of Scottish Natural Heritage.

(b)(vii) Official functions hosted by Scottish Office officials

15 February 1991	Reception to mark the "Carrying Stream" exhibition prepared by the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University—hosted by the Permanent Secretary.
17 May 1991	Lunch on the occasion of the visit to Edinburgh by His Excellency the Russian Ambassador—hosted by the Permanent Secretary.
18 September 1991	Reception for members of the Alcohol Education Research Council—hosted by the Secretary of The Scottish Office Home and Health Department.
17 October 1991	Reception to mark the 150th Anniversary of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain—hosted by the Secretary of The Scottish Office Home and Health Department.

In addition, hospitality was provided on a number of less formal occasions, including working lunches and dinners.

Sunday Trading

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the arrangements in Scotland for the retail trade to open for business on a Sunday; and what representations he has received in favour of bringing the law in Scotland in line with that of England and Wales as set out in the Shops Act 1950.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 22 June 1992]:* The restrictions on Sunday trading contained in the Shops Act 1950 do not apply in Scotland, other than to hairdressers and barbers. Since the start of this year, my right hon. Friend has received two representations advocating the imposition of restrictions on Sunday trading in Scotland.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the increase in average male manual earnings in real and constant price terms in Scotland since 1979.

Mr. Stewart: The average earnings of full-time male manual employees on adult rates in Scotland increased by two and a half times between 1979 and 1991, which is equivalent to an increase of about one tenth in constant price terms.

Employment Training

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many places were available in Scotland on employment training in April in each of the years since it started.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 16 June 1992]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, the numbers of employment training places filled in April of each year since the programme started are set out in the table.

Employment Training filled places in Scotland

	Numbers
1989	22,200
1990	[1]26,380
1991	20,693
1992	[2]16,840

[1] March 1990 figure—April 1990 figure not available.
[2] Estimated by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (returns from local enterprise companies not yet complete).

School Playing Fields

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will earmark cash in the Sports Council grant aid to enable the Sports Council to list the current stock of school playing fields land.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 18 June 1992]:* School playing fields in the public sector are the responsibility of education authorities and the Scottish Sports Council has no role in their provision, maintenance, or use. I am aware that the Sports Council of Great Britain has been commissioned to compile a register of recreational land, including school playing fields, for England. I am keeping the need for such a register in Scotland under review.

Water Privatisation

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions his Department has had about the privatisation of the Scottish water industry; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 25 June 1992]:* In the course of normal business over the last few months, officials in the Scottish Office Environment Department has been contacted by a small number of organisations to express their views about Scottish water services and investment needs.

Electronics Industry

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the total number of jobs in the electronics industry in each of the years 1979 to 1991.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 22 June 1992]:* The estimated numbers of employees in employment in electronics, which have been derived from the Scottish register of employment, in each of the years 1979 to 1991 are as follows:—

Electronics employment in Scotland—1979-1990

Year	Gross employment
1979	42,500
1980	42,100
1981	39,100
1982	38,700
1983	41,500
1984	43,500
1985	42,800
1986	42,200
1987	43,600
1988	44,800
1989	46,600
1990	[1]46,500
1991	[1]45,500

[1] Provisional.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of part-time and full-time employees in employment for each of the years December 1979 to December 1991, inclusive.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 22 June 1992]:* Information at the level of detail required is only available from the censuses of employment conducted by the Employment Department. Within the period of time for which data are requested, information is available for the following years: 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1989. The table shows the figures requested.

Employees in employment

September	Full-time	Part-time
1981	1,593,000	397,000
1984	1,497,000	407,000
1987	1,448,000	433,000
1989	1,502,000	465,000

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the total number, *(b)* the number of males, and *(c)* the number of females, of employees in employment and self-employed for each year since December 1979.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 22 June 1992]:* The information requested is shown in the table. It has been derived by the Employment Department and is from a series of quarterly estimates of the civilian work force in employment.

	Employees in employment			Self-employed		
December	(a) Total	(b) Male	(c) Female	(a) Total	(b) Male	(c) Female
1979	2,094	1,197	897	157	127	30
1980	2,037	1,158	879	152	124	28
1981	1,958	1,095	864	157	126	31
1982	1,903	1,067	836	172	133	39
1983	1,891	1,045	846	182	141	41
1984	1,901	1,045	856	193	148	45
1985	1,891	1,031	860	203	158	45
1986	1,863	1,005	858	200	159	41
1987	1,896	1,014	883	204	160	44
1988	1,943	1,016	927	226	173	53
1989	1,971	1,033	938	235	182	53
1990	1,992	1,043	949	244	190	54
1991	1,985	1,031	954	264	207	56

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the total number of employees in employment in services industries and manufacturing for each of the years December 1979 to December 1991, inclusive.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 22 June 1992]:* The figures showing the total number of employees in employment in

service and manufacturing industries are taken from the civilian work force in employment estimates compiled by the Employment Department. The figures are shown in the table.

Total employees in employment — *Thousands*

December	*Services industries*	*Manufacturing industries*
1979	1,221	596
1980	1,237	532
1981	1,217	497
1982	1,199	460
1983	1,215	437
1984	1,231	434
1985	1,242	427
1986	1,243	412
1987	1,280	407
1988	1,319	415
1989	1,350	402
1990	1,376	403
1991	1,407	383

Forestry Commission Land

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the different methods and categories for the disposal of Forestry Commission land and give a definition for each type of disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 29 June 1992]:* This information is given in paragraph 18 of appendix IX to the Forestry Commission's 1989-90 annual report and accounts, a copy of which is in the Library.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the Forestry Commission land which has been disposed of since July 1981 on an offer-back basis, giving the county or region, name of estate, area in hectares, name of purchaser, book value, sale price, and year sold.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Disability

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action is being taken to ensure that rural areas are not discriminated against in the proposed changes in funding for employment rehabilitation for visually impaired people in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 30 June 1992]:* The provision of all employment rehabilitation services will be subject to competitive tender with effect from 1 April 1993. Guidelines for tendering are still under consideration, but it is likely that tenders will be assessed and contracts awarded against criteria of need, provision of a high-quality service, accessibility and value for money. This process should ensure that all areas of Scotland are covered by provision appropriate to their circumstances.

Forests

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount of forest as a proportion of total land mass in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each of the other EC nations in (i) 1980 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 8 July 1992]:* The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation—FAO—publishes a production yearbook which includes this information. The latest edition is the 1990 yearbook, which includes information for 1989 and 1979, but not 1980. This is given in the table.

The FAO states that great care should be taken in making comparisons between countries or over time. This is because the definition of forest land may vary between countries, which may also use different definitions in different years.

Percentage of Land Area Covered by Forest

Country	*1979*	*1989*
Belgium/Luxembourg	21	21
Denmark	12	12
France	26	27
Germany	29	30
Greece	20	20
Ireland	5	5
Italy	22	23
Netherlands	9	9
Portugal	32	32
Spain	31	31
United Kingdom	9	10

Councillors' Allowances

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total cost of all councillors' allowances claimed in return for council duties for the last year for which figures are available shown as a percentage of total local government expenditure in Scotland for the same year; and what are the corresponding percentages for 10 and 15 years earlier.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* Councillors' allowances were reviewed following the Widdecombe committee of inquiry and the new scheme was introduced in 1991. Current expenditure figures for those allowances which were subsequently replaced by the new scheme were collected for 1987-88. The total expenditure for that year was £4·5 million—0·13 per cent. of total local government expenditure for that year; this expenditure did not include allowances outwith the scope of the new scheme.

Corresponding figures are not available for earlier years as such information is not routinely collected.

Quarrying

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the applications for quarrying operations in Scotland since January 1991, including *(a)* the exact location, *(b)* the estimated number of jobs created if each application is successful and *(c)* the type of stone to be quarried; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 6 July 1992]:* The information requested is not held centrally. Such applications are considered by planning authorities in the first instance. Only those that raise defined issues of national importance require to be notified to my right hon. Friend, and only where the authority is minded to approve them. Since January 1991 only one quarrying application has been so notified. This relates to a hard rock quarry at Hill of Gibblestone, Shetland which may generate about six jobs. No decision has yet been reached on this application. In addition, a direction has been issued requiring Western Isles islands council to notify my right

hon. Friend if it is minded to approve an application for a hard rock superquarry at Rodel, South Harris. It is estimated that the Rodel application could create 20 to 80 jobs if it is successful.

Since January 1991 a number of appeals relating to quarrying applications have come before my right hon. Friend. The table summarises the information. Details of the potential number of jobs involved are not held centrally.

Quarrying application appeals received since January 1991

Location	*Mineral*
Collace Quarry, Kinross, Fife	Limestone
Land of Bellmuir Methlick, Grampian	Sand and Gravel
Rothens, Monymusk, Grampian	Sand and Gravel
Crutherland, Farm, East Kilbride, Strathclyde	Brick, Clay, Coal
Watson Farm, Stonehouse, Hamilton, Strathclyde	Coal
Cocklicks Farm/Summerfield Farm, Cummertrees, Annan, Dumfries and Galloway	Sand and Gravel
Eastcraigs by Blackridge, West Lothian	Quartz/Dolomite
Craigie Hill Quarry, Kyle and Carrick, Strathclyde	Whinstone
Townhead Farm, Rigside, Clydesdale, Strathclyde	Brick/Clay

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his Department received a copy of the Environment Statement in support of the low-level solid waste pit extension proposal put forward by AEA Technology for the Dounreay nuclear facility; and what public outlets exist in Scotland for interested parties to examine the report, reference JM/MRC/PF06788.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* Highland regional council submitted a copy of this environmental statement to my right hon. Friend on 29 May. Comments on its content, in particular issues relating to the disposal of low level radioactive waste and the radiological impact, were passed to the council by Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate on 26 June. I understand that the statement was sent to a number of public bodies and was advertised, along with AEA Technology's application for planning permission for the proposed extension, in the local press and in the *Edinburgh Gazette*. Objections to the proposal could be lodged during the period 29 May to 26 June.

The environmental statement, and accompanying planning application, were made available for public scrutiny at the council's offices, in Wick, Thurso and Inverness. I understand that the statement may still be inspected by the public at these offices and that copies can be purchased from AEA Technology.

Travellers

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what planning policy guidance he gives to local authorities over the provision of sites for travelling people.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* Guidance notes on site provision were issued in February 1990 by the Secretary of State's advisory committee on Scotland's travelling people. The notes offer advice to local authorities on such aspects as planning, site selection, the grant scheme and design including construction and layout.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by his Department; which of these are audited by the National Audit Office; which firms of private accountants audits each of the others; by what method of tendering contracts to such firms are awarded; and for what duration.

Mr. Lang: *[holding answer 10 July 1992]:* Those non-departmental public bodies which are sponsored by the Scottish Office are listed in "Public Bodies 1991", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. That publication also shows which bodies are subject to audit by the National Audit Office. As there are a number of bodies whose accounts are audited by private companies, and the tendering methods vary, I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with this information and will arrange for a copy of the letter to be deposited in the House Library.

Child Care, Fife

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he received the report of the inquiry into child care in Fife; if he will publish it; what was the total cost of the inquiry; and whether Fife regional council will be asked to make a contribution to the costs.

Mr. Stewart *[pursuant to his reply, 26 June 1992, c. 363-64]:* My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland, has now decided that the report of Sheriff Kearney's inquiry into children's services in Fife should be published as a return to an order to the House when the House reassembles. This will provide the necessary time for proof reading and printing the report, which is lengthy.

Doctors

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the non-doctored islands in Scotland and the number of patients in each.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 July 1992]:* I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Football Matches (Arrests)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the numbers of those arrested and ejected at football matches in Scotland as a percentage of attendance in the last five years for which information is available.

Sir Hector Monro: This information cannot be assembled in the time available. I will write to the hon. and learned Member as soon as possible.

Speech Therapy

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the estimated cost of speech therapy provision for children with records of needs in each of the regional council areas; and how many such children there are in each;

(2) how much of the speech therapy provision announced on 24 February is to be distributed to *(a)* under-fives, *(b)* children in mainstream education and *(c)* children with mental handicaps.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As soon as the information is available I will reply to the hon. Member in writing.

ENVIRONMENT

Cremer and Warner Ltd.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list any contracts Cremer and Warner Ltd. has been awarded by his Department within the past three years, stating whether the contracts were let by single or competitive tender action; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The contracts are as follows. All were let by competitive tender.

Pollution control of hospital incinerators;
Pollution control for processes involving the manufacture or use of phosphorous;
Pollution control for inorganic halogen processes;
Pollution control for metal carbonyl processes and the manufacture of compounds of chromium, magnesium etc.

Rents Guidance

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish the paper inviting submissions on the review of the guidance given to rent officers and rent assessment committees when determining the rents of statutory tenants in London.

Sir George Young: A paper seeking views on the issue of the increase in fair rents assessed by rent officers and rent assessment committees is being published today. A copy of the paper is being placed in the House of Commons Library.

Water Supply (Mecoprop)

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the current levels of the weed killer Mecoprop in Anglian Water's boreholes; and what evidence the National Rivers Authority has of Mecoprop in Cheshire's groundwater supply.

Mr. Maclean: Groundwater used for public supplies is regularly monitored by Anglian Water for Mecoprop. Concentrations greater than 0·1 µg/l have been detected at only two borehole sites. At one of these sites an alternative borehole source is available which contains less than 0·1 µg/l; nevertheless, granular activated carbon treatment has been installed to reduce contamination. At the other site Anglian Water installed granular activated carbon treatment which has ensured that the water entering supply now meets the standard of 0·1 µg/l set in the water quality regulations.

Similarly, North West Water monitors boreholes in Cheshire, where there is no evidence of contamination.

Birds (Control)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce proposals to amend the law relating to the control of pest birds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have announced today proposals to amend the law relating to the killing or taking of "pest" species of birds such as crows, starlings and pigeons, and to introduce a licensing system for pest control.

At present, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 enables farmers, landowners and local authorities and other authorised persons to carry out year-round control of 13 species of bird which cause agricultural damage or which endanger public health or air safety. But the European Commission does not consider that the 1981 Act fully complies with the EC birds directive which requires member states to protect all wild birds.

A consultation paper issued today by the Department of the Environment contains proposals to remove all 13 species from the list in part II of schedule 2 and to move to a system of annual general licences to permit their control. These proposals would meet the requirement of the directive while enabling pest control to continue unchanged.

Farmers and landowners must be able to continue unhindered with their existing programmes of pest control which have served the country well for a long time. We believe we have found a non-bureaucratic solution that would not create the burdensome problems that caused us to withdraw proposals for a licensing scheme in 1990, and puts it beyond doubt that the Government are meeting their obligations under the directive.

Only a handful of annual licences would be needed, covering broad geographical areas, one or more species and specifying in general terms the nature of the damage caused. No one would have to apply for a licence, justify control or account for numbers of birds killed or taken. Everyone involved in the year-round control of pest birds would be able to carry on with his or her traditional practices exactly as he or she does now.

Licences would be considered for renewal each year following advice from the Government's statutory scientific advisers, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which would monitor the status of the species and alert the Department if populations of any fell to levels where care was needed to maintain a satisfactory conservation status. At the moment, populations of the species are stable or increasing and we do not think that pest control would have any detrimental effect on population levels in the foreseeable future.

Energy Proposals, London

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications for power generation proposals in the east London corridor upon domestic water usage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The implications of any power generation proposals for water resources will depend on the particular form of the proposals, and will have to be taken into account in any necessary abstraction or discharge authorisations. Abstractions from tidal waters are, however, very unlikely to have significant implication for domestic water usage.

Planning Applications

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his planning appeal inspectorate's policy towards a planning application refused by local planning authorities because of the cumulative effect of the relevant proposal when considered with other similar proposals not the subject of the isolated application; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: In dealing with any appeal, a planning inspector examines the merits of the case, having regard to all material considerations including those raised by the appellant, the planning authority and other parties.

In an area where there have been significant developments of a particular type, the question of whether the locality is suitable for further development of that nature may be material. In such circumstances, an assessment of the proposal would need to take into account the likely additional impact the individual proposal would have on the locality as well as the cumulative effect of those similar proposals taken together.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Stoke-on-Trent city council and local authority associations concerning the draft notices implying that an individual notice for all major planning applications should be inserted in the local press; what is his estimate of the cost of such individual notices; what provision he has made to ensure local authorities can meet these additional cost implications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: A number of representations have been received from local authorities and their associations about the costs of compulsory publicity for planning applications. My Department has recently commissioned research into local authority development control costs which will, among other things, investigate the costs of implementing the new publicity arrangements. The Government are committed to taking these extra costs into account when planning application fees are next reviewed.

Hide Processors

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that British hide and skin processors are not more adversely affected than their Community competitors under the implementation of EC directive 76/464/EC.

Mr. Maclean: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward proposals to treat chlorofluorocarbons as noxious and offensive gases under the terms of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, and to instruct Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to proceed to require the installation of emission statement equipment under the terms of the Act for companies that continue to release CFCs in the production of their products.

Mr. Maclean: The production of chlorofluorocarbons is regulated under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. There is a duty on the operator to use best practicable means to prevent the emission of noxious or offensive emissions to air. This control regime is being superseded by the new integrated pollution controls established under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Operators will be required to apply for authorisation on the timetable laid down in the Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations 1991.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ban the use of hydrochlorofluorocarbon 1342 as a substitute for chlorofluorocarbons.

Mr. Maclean: We are not aware of the existence of this chemical and, therefore, have no plans to ban it.

Municipal Incinerators

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those municipal incinerators which do not meet European standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

Integrated Pollution Control

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present status of the programme of implementation of integrated pollution control under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The programme of implementation of integrated pollution control is proceeding as set out in paragraph 4 of schedule 3 to the Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations 1991.

Recycling

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those posts within his Department designated to deal with local authority recycling plans.

Mr. Howard: Two officials in the Department of the Environment's headquarters and one in each of the Department's 10 regional offices have been given responsibility for dealing with local authority recycling plans.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the achievements of his Department and his policies in helping small businesses over the last 12 months relative to the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors those achievements and the statistical results of such monitoring.

Mr. Howard: My Department places a high priority on removing unnecessary burdens from small businesses, particularly in inner cities, where a key aim is to encourage new employment. We have already tackled bureaucracy in our main inner city programmes. For city challenge, we have abolished 80 pages of forms, in streamlining the provision of Government grant and increased the Government contribution on revenue projects from 75 to 90 per cent. I have today announced the 20 city challenge areas which will each receive £37·5 million over five years to support integrated programmes of urban renewal. These will include projects which directly help small business, such as the provision of premises and infrastructure.

In April 1992, the Planning Inspectorate executive agency instituted performance targets for prompt handling of planning appeals, including those from small

businesses. This autumn the existing procedures for simplified planning zones are to be streamlined when the relevant provisions in the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 come into force.

In partnership with the Department of Industry, my Department is exploring how local authorities can assist industry to comply with regulation, by improving consistency in enforcement. On 30 June, the Government launched a pilot project to establish partnerships between local authorities and local businesses in nine areas across the country, improving communications and clarifying the role of the regulatory authority.

Eutrophication

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the most recent evidence he has on the extent of eutrophication and algal blooms in the estuarial and coastal waters of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: Observational evidence suggests that there is no increase in the frequency of, and no areas with significant problems from, algal blooms caused by eutrophication in the estuarial and coastal waters of the United Kingdom. However, to obtain more systematic evidence, the National Rivers Authority is gathering data on a regular basis. This will be reviewed in conjunction with my Department at the end of the year, together with the other research which my Department is sponsoring on the subject of algal blooms and nutrients in the North sea.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the objectives of each division and branch of his Department.

Mr. Howard: The aims, objectives and targets of my Department are set out each year in the management information system for Ministers documents which are published. I have placed in the Library of the House copies of the MINIS 13 returns, which provide this information for 1992-93.

Civil Servants (Shares)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance, other than the civil service pay and conditions of service code and the establishment officers' guide, his Department provides relating to civil servants' shareholdings; if he will list the number of occasions within the last five years on which civil servants have reported shareholdings to establishment officers in his Department; what regulations apply to the staff of the next steps agencies within his Department; what mechanisms are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Guidance is given in the Department's staff handbook, which also applies to staff in its next steps agencies. Notices giving specific guidance have also been issued in relation to the sale of the water services industry and the proposed sale of businesses within PSA Services. This guidance instructs staff on how to avoid actual or potential conflicts of interest. Two members of staff have sought advice on their shareholdings since 1987.

Deregulation

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what visits he has made to her EC counterparts in each member state to discuss deregulation matters since 18 April; what agreements came out of such meetings; and what plans he has for making further progress in deregulation matters during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC.

Mr. Howard: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Community Charge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has of the number of local authorities affected by the error in the COMCIS computer programme for community charge collection; what is his assessment of the implications of this; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: I am not aware of the problem to which the hon. Member refers.

Business Rate

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what indication he has of local authorities including uniform business rate arrears in the figure they give as the additional amounts charged for sums not collected; whether all local authorities are acting consistently on this matter; whether he has issued any guidance to local authorities on this point; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: The amounts taken into account as "other adjustments" for the purposes of setting community charges is a matter for each individual charging authority.

Under the statutory arrangements for the national non-domestic rate it is not necessary for authorities when setting their community charges to make provision in their "other adjustments" for non collection of rates due from non-domestic ratepayers.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to amend legislation so as to reduce the business rate liability of empty shop premises using a charitable or non-commercial information display in their windows as a device to improve security and the environment.

Mr. Robin Squire: No.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to reduce the number of staff of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: None. We await proposals from English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales, in consultation with the JNCC, for a formal staff complement for the committee.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of funding and manpower of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Mr. Maclean: No. The future level of funding for the committee will be determined in the normal way as part of the current public expenditure round. We await proposals from the county councils, in consultation with the JNCC, for a formal staff complement for the committee.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all applications to demolish listed buildings in each of the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not readily available.

Private applications for listed building consent are made to local planning authorities, which refer them to the Secretary of State only if they are minded to grant consent. All applications for listed building consent by local planning authorities are submitted to the Secretary of State for his determination.

In the financial year 1990-91, 79 private applications for consent totally to demolish listed buildings were referred to the Secretary of State and 33 such local planning authority applications were determined by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State left local authorities to decide 72 of the private applications and called in the remaining seven for his own decision. Of the called-in applications, consent was refused in three cases and granted in four cases. Of the local authority applications, the Secretary of State refused consent in six cases and granted consent in 27 cases.

Housing Associations

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the housing authorities that have transferred most or all of their housing stock to housing associations stating in each case the year of the transfer and the number of dwellings transferred.

Sir George Young: The information is as follows:

Local authority	*Year of transfer*	*Number of dwellings*
Chiltern	1988	4,650
Sevenoaks	1989	6,526
Newbury	1989	7,053
Swale	1990	7,352
Broadland	1990	3,721
North Bedfordshire	1990	7,472
Medina	1990	2,825
Rochester	1990	8,029
South Wight	1990	2,119
Mid Sussex	1990	4,426
East Dorset	1990	2,245
Tonbridge and Malling	1991	6,382
Ryedale	1991	3,353
South Bucks	1991	3,319
Christchurch	1991	1,542
Suffolk Coastal	1991	5,272
Tunbridge Wells	1992	5,519
Bromley	1992	12,393

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what *(a)* evidence and *(b)* reports he has received from the Housing Corporation on the affordability of new homes provided by housing associations in England.

Mr. Baldry: The Housing Corporation has made available to the Department the work it has done so far in monitoring the rents set for new housing association homes.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what *(a)* evidence and *(b)* reports he has received from the Housing Corporation on the affordability of new homes provided by housing associations in England.

Mr. Baldry: The Housing Corporation has made available to the Department the work it has been done so far in monitoring the rents set for new housing association homes.

Rural Development

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, with the figures shown as a per capita figure, for each local authority which contains a rural development area the level of *(a)* rural development programme, *(b)* rural housing programme and *(c)* rural transport development fund for each year from 1987-88 at current prices and at 1987-88 prices.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him yesterday.

Land Compensation Act 1973

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why he decided to seek to remove the words "passed the resolution" from section 29(1) of the Land Compensation Act 1973 by schedule 15, part II of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

Mr. Baldry: The words referred to had been redundant since enactment of the Land Compensation (Scotland) Act 1973, under which Scottish provisions on land compensation were separated from those applying to England and Wales. Removal of the words thus involved no substantive change in the law.

Zoos

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to treat the proposed EC directive laying down minimum standards for keeping animals in zoos as a priority during the United Kingdom presidency of the European Community.

Mr. Maclean: After taking informal soundings within the Community, we announced our support in principle for the proposed zoos directive earlier this year. More recently however, it has become clear that a number of other member states would not support the current proposals, not least because of concerns about subsidiarity. In view of this, and the pressures on our programme for the United Kingdom presidency, we have concluded that the directive should not be one of our priorities.

Rents-to-Mortgages

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the tenants of housing authorities whose homes have been transferred to housing associations will be able to participate in the rents-to-mortgages scheme.

Sir George Young: We will be consulting shortly on the proposition that entitlement to a statutory rents-to-mortgages scheme should extend to former secure tenants whose homes have been transferred to private landlords.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his plans for the urban development corporations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: The urban development corporations will continue their task of securing the regeneration of their areas until the end of their lifetimes.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of budgets of each urban development corporation is allocated to community development work or similar grant aid to local community projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 15 July 1992]:* The percentage of each urban development corporation's 1991-92 budget which was specifically allocated to community development is shown. Further expenditure related to community development may be charged to individual UDC projects.

Percentage of total budget specifically allocated to community development.

	per cent.
Black Country	1·27
Bristol	1·44
Central Manchester	2·31
Leeds	1·69
London Docklands	4·50
Merseyside	1·66
Sheffield	2·00
Teesside	0·71
Trafford Park	3·06
Tyne and Wear	1·98

Urban Development Areas

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to his answer of 9 July, *Official Report*, columns *307-10*, if he will display the figures shown as a per capita figure.

Mr. Robin Squire: The per capita figure can be arrived at by dividing the figures in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 9 July *Official Report*, columns *307-10*, by the population estimates given below.

Population estimates

(000s)

Authority	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Sandwell	298·4	296·3	295·5	295·0
Walsall	281·8	262·3	263·6	263·9
Wolverhampton	250·5	249·4	249·9	249·4
Bristol	384·4	377·7	372·6	374·3
Manchester	450·1	445·9	443·6	446·7
Newham	206·5	207·0	207·0	208·6
Southwark	216·8	217·0	219·8	225·5
Tower Hamlets	159·0	161·8	163·9	166·9
Leeds	709·0	709·6	711·7	712·2
Liverpool	476·0	469·6	465·9	462·9
Sefton	297·3	297·6	299·6	299·6
Wirral	334·8	334·8	336·2	335·3
Sheffield	532·3	528·3	526·6	525·8
Hartlepool	89·8	88·4	88·7	89·9
Langbaurgh	145·6	144·8	144·5	144·0
Stockton	175·9	176·8	176·9	176·6
Middlesbrough	143·3	143·2	142·7	141·6
Trafford	216·1	215·8	215·3	214·8
Salford	237·7	235·6	234·6	234·1
Newcastle	282·7	279·6	277·6	277·8
North Tyneside	192·9	192·9	192·7	191·7
South Tyneside	156·3	155·7	155·8	156·0
Sunderland	297·1	296·1	296·2	296·1

Note: Figures are not yet available for 1991.
Source: OPCS Mid-Year Population Estimates.

Council Tenants

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to ensure that council tenants are given the same protection and rights under the Housing Act 1985 and the Land Compensation Act 1973 as private sector tenants; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Land Compensation Act 1973, together with other relevant legislation, lays down the basis on which compensation is available to those who are adversely affected by action taken under statutory powers. There is in general no difference in the position of public and private tenants under the compensation code.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish an update of the league tables on departmental performance of Whitehall-type buildings, and departmental expenditure on energy and energy efficiency measures.

Mr. Maclean: Data on the progress of the energy efficiency campaign on the Government estate will be included in the second-year report on the environment to be published in the autumn.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will initiate a study into the impact of the client contribution in the home energy efficiency scheme on the level of take-up.

Mr. Maclean: The home energy efficiency scheme is cash limited, and there has been no difficulty in meeting its targets. Abolishing the client contribution, far from increasing the numbers who could benefit, would reduce the number of jobs which could be done by increasing the cost of grant for each job.

Mr. Alan W. Williams To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the establishment of an independent working party to monitor the progress of Departments of state in implementing the energy efficiency improvements following the annual report, 1990-91, of the ministerial group on energy efficiency.

Mr. Maclean: A working party was set up in 1991 comprising of officials, with outside consultancy support, to monitor and advise on the progress of Departments towards achieving the 15 per cent. energy savings target; it has met three times since December 1991.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much revenue savings from local authority energy efficiency investments have been recycled into energy efficiency capital programmes and into designated energy funds since April 1990.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally; it is for local authorities to decide their own expenditure priorities.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the 1991-92 annual report of the ministerial group on energy efficiency.

Mr. Maclean: I have decided that the responsibilities of the ministerial group on energy efficiency should be taken over by the green Ministers, who co-ordinate environmental initiatives across Government. The second-year report on the environment will include an update on developments in the energy efficiency field and data on the campaign to improve energy efficiency on the Government estate.

House Renovation Grants

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the outcome of his Department's review of the house renovation grant system.

Sir George Young: Last July, I announced our intention to review the new renovation grant system to establish how well it is working, and to consider what changes might be needed further to improve its operation. More than 200 responses from local authorities and others were received.

The review has shown widespread support for the main principles of the new system, particularly the improved targeting of resources on the worst housing and of those least able to pay for repairs. Concerns included the harshness of the means test for grant applicants on lower incomes, the scope for the system still to pay out large grants to those on relatively high incomes, and the resources available to meet demand for grants.

The question of resources is a matter for the public expenditure survey. In response to the other concerns, I propose making the following adjustments to the system:

- to introduce a limit of £50,000 on mandatory grants to owner-occupiers, tenants and landlords;
- to adjust the grant premium and taper in the means test for owner-occupiers and tenants to give more help to those just above income support level and less to the better off;
- to uprate the allowances and premiums in the means test to reflect new housing benefit and community charge benefit rates;
- to remove the capital value element of the landlords' test of resources which has proved difficult to work effectively;
- to increase the limit on minor works assistance to £1,080 per year and to £3,240 over three years;
- to remove some of the obstacles to group repair schemes by adjusting the qualifying criteria both inside and outside renewal areas and by increasing average cost limits per dwelling to £16,000 in London and £13,000 elsewhere.

I also plan to make a number of minor adjustments to improve the working of the system. Full details of all proposed changes are contained in the Library.

These changes will help make the system more effective, by improving targeting of resources on those least able to afford essential repairs. I have decided that it would further complicate an already necessarily complex system to seek to make specific allowance for mortgage costs in the means test, as some authorities have suggested. However, the changes I propose will go a considerable way towards recognising the housing and other costs of lower-income households. All these changes can be introduced under existing legislation or by adjustments to secondary legislation, on which we will consult in the usual way. We aim to implement changes early next year.

We plan to consult further on two longer-term changes: the introduction of possible target times for local authorities handling inquiries on grants prior to formal application, and extending minor works assistance to mobile home owners for small repairs. These changes could require primary legislation. We shall continue to keep the grant system under review and will consider any further long-term changes that appear desirable.

Mortgage Arrears

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes are expected to become vacant in 1992 as a consequence of abandonment by their former occupiers, generally as a consequence of mortgage arrears.

Mr. Baldry: Statistics of mortgage arrears and possessions are collected by the Council of Mortgage Lenders. The figures for the first half of 1992, to be published shortly, will incorporate details of "voluntary possessions", which include those arising as a consequence of abandonment by their former occupiers.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers he has to ensure localities neighbouring shire counties are included in the review by the Local Government Commission for consideration of the granting of unitary authority status.

Mr. Robin Squire: Under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1992, the Secretary of State may direct the commission to conduct reviews of specified areas, and he may vary his direction to the commission to include areas adjacent to those so specified.

Greater London Council

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the resources released through disposal of surplus assets consequent upon the abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Robin Squire: Since its inception in 1986 the London residuary body has distributed £522·16 million in capital receipts to the London boroughs.

Atmosphere

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the relative proportions of *(a)* water vapour, *(b)* methane and *(c)* sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere.

Mr. Maclean: The concentrations in the lower atmosphere of water vapour and methane relative to

sulphur dioxide are on average approximately 10 million and 1,000 respectively. Both water vapour and sulphur dioxide concentrations vary considerably with geographical location, altitude and meteorological conditions.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the change in cost for the provision of local government services in the former metropolitan county areas as compared with non-metropolitan areas in the financial years preceding, including and succeeding the abolition of the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is as follows:

Local authority revenue expenditure 1984-85 to 1986-87

	Total Expenditure				
	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*Change 1984-85 to 1985-86*	*Change 1985-86 to 1986-87*
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
Metropolitan Areas	10,332	10,218	11,297	−1·1	10·6
Non-metropolitan areas	10,979	11,443	12,463	4·2	8·9
All England	21,312	21,661	23,760	1·6	9·7

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which benefit from the area cost adjustment, and by how much, in the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his Department's assessment of the effect of the Jubilee line extension on economic regeneration in the east Thames corridor.

Mr. Baldry: The proposed Jubilee line extension is one factor being taken into account in the study of development capacity and potential offered by the east Thames corridor, which is being undertaken for this Department by consultants.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when, and in what manner, he proposes to utilise information for the 1991 census in calculating the standard spending assessment of local authorities.

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to the hon. Member.

Sheffield Development Corporation

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many jobs, excluding those at Meadowhall, the Sheffield development corporation has created to date;

(2) how much land Sheffield development corporation has made ready for development to date, excluding Meadowhall;

(3) how much money the Sheffield development corporation has spent to date;

(4) what plans he has to extend the life span of Sheffield development corporation;

(5) what plans he has to extend the boundaries of Sheffield development corporation;

(6) when he expects the Sheffield development corporation to be wound up.

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to the hon. Member.

Environment Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to meet the director of environmental affairs at the Confederation of British Industry before 19 October, to discuss the implementation of the United Kingdom priorities for the presidency of the European Environment Council.

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

Environmental Organisations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress made with *(a)* the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment, *(b)* the Central and Local Government Environment Forum and *(c)* the Voluntary Sector Environmental Forum since each was established last year.

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

Cryptosporidosis Outbreak, Hull

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, following the outbreak of cryptosporidosis in Hull, he has decided to prosecute Yorkshire Water Services Ltd. for supplying water unfit for human consumption.

Mr. Howard: I have now received the recommendation of the chief drinking water inspector following his investigation of the outbreak of cryptosporidosis in the Hull area in December 1989 and January 1990.

Section 54 of the Water Act 1989—now replaced by section 70 of the Water Industry Act 1991—made it a criminal offence for a water undertaker to supply water unfit for human consumption. It is, however, a defence under the Act for the undertaker to show that all reasonable steps were taken and all due diligence exercised to secure that the water was fit for human consumption.

The inspectorate's investigation was based on the report of the outbreak control group—made up of representatives of the health authorities, the local

authorities, the water company and the Public Health Laboratory Service—which was completed and made available to the public in March 1991. The inspectorate then sought advice from the Government's Chief Medical Officer, from independent experts on epidemiology and water treatment, and from leading counsel.

The inspectorate's investigation of the Hull case has been extensive and thorough, and carried out in a professional manner. I have accepted the chief inspector's recommendation that, in the light of best expert advice available, the evidence is not sufficient to form the basis for a successful prosecution. I have asked the inspectorate to prepare a report on any lessons to be learned from the incident and for the report to be made public.

There are a number of gaps to be filled in scientific knowledge about cryptosporidium and, in accordance with the recommendations of the expert group chaired by Sir John Badenoch, a collaborative research programme co-ordinated by the inspectorate is seeking to do that.

The inspectorate is continuing its investigations of certain other incidents, and in some of these cases is considering the possibility of prosecution.

City Challenge

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, which local authorities have been successful in the city challenge round two competition.

Mr. Howard: My ministerial colleagues and I have carefully considered the 54 bids submitted by local authorities and their partners for the round two city challenge competition. We came to the conclusion that the following local authorities should, with their partners, be invited to prepare five-year action plans to start in April 1993:

Barnsley, Birmingham, Blackburn, Bolton, Brent, Derby, Hackney, Hartlepool, Kensington and Chelsea, Kirklees, Lambeth, Leicester, Newham, North Tyneside, Sandwell, Sefton, Stockton, Sunderland, Walsall and Wigan.

It is intended that these 20 inner-city areas will, subject to agreement of their individual action plans and satisfactory performance, share £750 million in Government city challenge funding over five years to support major regeneration programmes.

Since city challenge was launched by the then Secretary of State for the Environment in May 1991, it has created an unprecedented partnership between local authorities, businesses and local people. At the same time, it has brought together Government Departments and all the other agencies involved to identify needs and promote opportunity. City challenge confirms the value of competition, already demonstrated in other initiatives such as housing investment programmes and training credits.

Last year, 11 areas were successful in the first—'pacemaker'—round of city challenge. The 20 new winners will be able to draw on this experience and example of the pacemakers whose programmes started last April.

Unsuccessful authorities will naturally be disappointed. But the proposals they have drawn up will provide a focus for future development of their area, and may be used as a basis to make progress through private and public funding of some initiatives.

In the meantime, Government Departments will continue to co-operate with all inner-city local authorities and other interested parties to assist urban renewal efforts. These areas will continue to be eligible for support from the range of targeted programmes including city grant, derelict land grant and estate action. Outside London, most inner-city areas are also eligible for regional enterprise grants for innovation.

Alongside city challenge this year, we also invited local authorities to make a case for an inner-city task force. We received 15 bids. Most of the bids identified areas of high deprivation which task forces are intended to address.

I am announcing today the opening of new task forces in Birmingham, Haringey, Plymouth and Stockton. Two of these, Birmingham and Stockton, will link with new city challenge areas to reinforce those initiatives directed at disadvantaged local residents. But two of the strongest cases came from areas which were not successful in city challenge round two. I believe that task forces in Haringey and Plymouth will of themselves be able to achieve significant benefits for local people.

The task force initiative is a rolling programme and we will in the course of the coming months be closing the task forces in Bristol, Coventry, Middlesbrough and west London whose work is nearing completion.

Urban Regulation Agency

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has developed his proposals for an urban regulation agency.

Mr. Redwood: I shall shortly issue a consultation paper which will set out my proposals for the agency.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the implications for future imports of toxic waste into the United Kingdom of the European Court of Justice ruling on 9 July on the case of the appeal against the government of Wallonia in Belgium over its banning the import of toxic and hazardous wastes.

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

Domestic Fuels (Sulphur Content)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to regulate the sulphur content of domestic solid fuels.

Mr. Maclean: My Department has today issued a consultation document proposing a prohibition on the supply for domestic use of solid fuel with a sulphur content greater than 2 per cent. by weight. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. The Government are firmly committed to controlling emissions of sulphur dioxide—SO_2—a national and local level in order to protect human health and the environment. The proposed measure will help to contain SO_2 emissions, particularly in areas where extensive use is made of solid fuel. It will reinforce our work on improving air quality through the clean air Acts and contribute to our compliance with the mandatory European air quality standards.

The proposal has been endorsed by the statutory committee on hazardous substances as required under section 140 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Consultees have until 18 September to submit comments.

United Nations Environment Fund

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of the Government's contribution to the United Nations Environment Fund in 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom gave £4·5 million —US$7·7 million—to the United Nations Environment Fund this year, £0·5 million more than our contribution in 1991. This is the second successive annual increase in the United Kingdom's contribution and makes the United Kingdom the largest single contributor to the environment fund. I would urge other countries to make similarly generous contributions to this important work.

Public Appointments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list any public appointments by his Department since 1987 which have involved people from organisations criticised in published reports by DTI inspectors.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* Such information is not available centrally, but in making appointments full account is taken of all relevant factors.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list any advisers retained by his Department since 1987 who have been criticised in published reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 14 July 1992]:* I am aware of none.

Noise

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will include rights, within the citizen's charter, for those living alongside, or underneath, the creators of environmentally damaging noise.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 July 1992]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on 7 July, *Official Report*, column *154*, on the proposed charter for local authority environmental services. We would expect such a charter to include rights for people who are disturbed by certain noisy activities.

Cities

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria are used in determining city status for local authorities.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the title of city is an honour conferred by the Sovereign, by letters patent; it is not a right, which can be claimed by the fulfilment of specific conditions.

Southport

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received the report of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on a review under schedule 9 to the Local Government Act 1972 initial review of counties in relation to Southport.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

I will write to the hon. Member.

Secret Intelligence Service

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the capital cost of the Secret Intelligence Service headquarters building that is currently under construction at Vauxhall.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

The cost of the Vauxhall site and office construction is in the region of £150 million. The cost of adaptation, which will be borne out of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office vote, is estimated to be of the order of £90 million.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the reasons why the Secret Intelligence Service is moving from its existing office accommodation to a new building at Vauxhall.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

The new building at Vauxhall will provide SIS with the facilities it needs to undertake its important work.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what alternative sites were considered for the relocation of the Secret Intelligence Service headquarters building.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

As is normal Government practice in projects of this type, a large number of sites were considered.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost per square foot of the office space currently used by the Secret Intelligence Service; and what will be the corresponding cost in the new headquarters building at Vauxhall.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

The contractual rent of the present headquarters of SIS is some £9 per square foot. Since the Government own the freehold of the building at Vauxhall, there is no directly comparable rent. But the value used as the basis for acquisition in 1989 was £29 per square foot.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning security arrangements at the new Secret Intelligence Service headquarters building.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

It has been the policy of successive Governments not to comment on matters of this nature.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the safety of the current storage of corroded radioactive metal canisters

arising from the reprocessing of Magnox fuel at Sellafield; and what discussions he has had with British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., over the future management of this radioactive waste.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

Before 1991, metal cladding from the reprocessing of Magnox spent fuel at Sellafield was placed by British Nuclear Fuels plc under water in storage silos at the site. This intermediate-level waste is subject to continuous surveillance and monitoring to ensure its safe storage pending retrieval and treatment.

As part of the company's ongoing programme to improve its storage and handling of radioactive wastes, BNFL has built new facilities for the safe encapsulation of this material. The Magnox encapsulation plant for solid waste started operation in 1991 and a second facility, which includes the capability for sludges, is expected to come on stream early next year.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 211**

SESSION 1992–93

6th July—16th July 1992

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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